



Australian Government

Comcare



## PEOPLE MATTERS WITH MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT CHANGES

### FACTS

When APS agencies were asked about their experiences of change:

- > two out of three APS employees reported they had been affected by major workplace change in the last 12 months
- > only 41 per cent of APS employees agreed their senior leaders lead and manage organisational change effectively
- > only 42 per cent of employees reported they were consulted about change.

*(Australian Public Service Commission State of the Service Report 2011–12)*

### WHY IT MATTERS

Organisational and workplace change is a fact of working life and can bring about positive changes for organisations and employees such as increased productivity, clarity of role and increased work satisfaction.

Change can be challenging, and if not managed well, can affect morale and employee engagement. Consequences may include reduced work performance, increased absenteeism and the potential for psychological or other injuries which may result in workers' compensation claims.

High performing agencies need to be flexible, adaptable and able to respond quickly to changes in government direction or in their operating environment—for example, machinery of government (MOG) changes.

## HOW IT'S DONE

**Prevention is the key to creating a safe and healthy workplace for employees affected by change.** This can be achieved by systematically addressing the risks associated with organisational change (physical and psychosocial) that may lead to injury, prior to and after employees have commenced work in the changed circumstances or environment.

**Early intervention is the key to supporting employees who are not coping with change.** Responding early can often prevent the employee from becoming ill, taking long-term sick leave or needing to submit a workers' compensation claim. The following actions are important:

- > provide managers with information so they can recognise early warning signs of employee distress and low morale—including: unplanned absences, increased conflict, withdrawal and deteriorating work performance
- > ensure employees are aware of support and assistance that is available to them, such as Employee Assistance Programs
- > ensure managers know how to access and utilise support and assistance that human resources areas may provide
- > use organisational health data to proactively identify and respond to hot spots.

**Rehabilitation**—ensure arrangements are in place to support employees returning to work or who are off work due to injury or illness. When an employee is not at work due to a work-related injury or illness they may feel isolated and detached from the workplace. It is particularly important to include these employees in communication of change and provide the necessary support to facilitate a return to work.

**Consultation is a legal requirement under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act) and an essential part of managing health and safety.** Section 47 of the WHS Act requires a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) to consult, so far as is reasonably practicable, with workers who carry out work for the business or undertaking and who are (or are likely to be) directly affected by a health and safety matter.

Refer to the *Commonwealth Work Health and Safety Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination Code of Practice* to assist you to meet the requirements for consultation, cooperation and coordination under the WHS Act and Regulations.

During MOG changes, consultation should be focused on how the changes are going to be implemented and there should be ongoing communication and consultation with workers about their transition to new work arrangements.

### People Matters Checklist

- Consult with workers about the changes
- Communicate with workers about changes that are being considered or are taking place. Remember to keep workers who are away from work (including workers on workers' compensation claims) informed of what is happening
- Provide employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for the proposed change
- Assess and manage risks to the physical and mental health of employees as a result of the change
- Recognise when employees are struggling to adapt to change and intervene early
- Manage the rate of change
- Ensure employees have access to relevant supports during times of change, for example Employee Assistance Providers

This factsheet was sourced from '*Working Together: Supporting mental health and wellbeing at work*' and '*Looking after your employees during times of change*', available on the Comcare website.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Available through the Comcare website:

- > *Working together: Promoting mental health and wellbeing at work*
- > *Looking after your employees during times of change*
- > *Guide to Machinery of Government Changes*

Available through the Australian Public Service Commission website:

- > *Implementing Machinery of Government Changes*