

# Psychosocial Health and Safety Forum

Tuesday 10 October 2023  
10:00am – 12:30pm AEDT



For everyone's safety,  
**work safely**



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# Acknowledgement of Country

Acknowledgement of artist  
Healing Hands – Cover artwork by Dion Devow of Darkies Designs

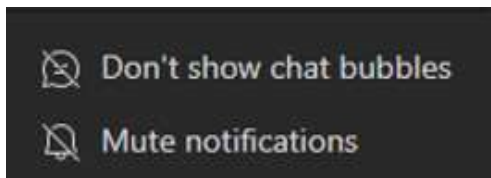






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- To turn off notifications in MS Teams app during the session:
  - **Click 'More', then 'Settings'.**
  - **Select both:**



# Housekeeping





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# 2023 activities



## Transport Network Forum

17 October 2023



## Body stressing, musculoskeletal disorders and Good Work Design

26 October 2023

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**national safe work month**

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**work safely**

**Do it yourself guide**

**What is in this guide?**  
Key steps and considerations to help you plan and deliver a National Safe Work Month activity in your workplace.

**Who can use this guide?**  
Anyone interested in holding a safety activity:  
• Managers or supervisors  
• Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs)  
• WHS and HR practitioners  
• Workers.

**Step 1: Purpose**

**Clarify your purpose**

- Raise awareness of work health and safety (WHS)
- Work through an identified WHS issue
- Forward thinking – future planning for change
- Barriers to work.

**Identify your audience**

- Your team or work group
- WHS representatives, such as HSRs and managers
- Whole organisation
- External stakeholders such as contractors and third party workers.

**Step 2: Prepare**

**Choose a topic or theme**

- Issues relevant to your workplace
- Latest insights from your WHS data
- Case study
- Industry trends or news
- Comcare Safe Work Month landing page has weekly themes with resources for inspiration [comcare.gov.au/nationalsafeworkmonth](https://comcare.gov.au/nationalsafeworkmonth)

**Some examples:**

- Hybrid working (working from home or office)
- Physical hazards such as body stressing
- Psychosocial hazards such as job demands
- Environmental hazards such as heat stress, remote work and seasonal hazards
- Biological hazards such as COVID-19
- Good work design and ideas for improvement

**Step 3: Plan**

**Decide on how to deliver the activity**

- A safety talk of a team or work group meeting
- Agenda item of WHS committee meeting
- Holding a dedicated National Safe Work Month activity in your workplace.

**Other considerations**

- Decide if the activity is held in person, virtual or in a hybrid format
- Consider arranging resource materials, knowledge experts, assistance from colleagues or technology support as required
- Create a run sheet with key information and distribute ahead of activity

For an event checklist and other downloadable resources, visit [safeworkaustralia.gov.au](https://safeworkaustralia.gov.au) and search 'SafeNet'.

**Step 4: Deliver**

**Develop a session outline or agenda**

A sample agenda is listed below. This may help guide you to deliver your activity:

- Opening and introductions
- Purpose and objectives
- Background and context
- Evidence to support (i.e., data or statistics)
- What can be done? Look for evidence based guidance or recommendations available
- Open the discussion to the group – use conversation starters for inspiration
- Highlight actions and agree on next steps.

**Conversation starters**

- How is this relevant to us, our team, or our organisation?
- What challenges do we currently face?
- Is this an emerging or growing issue?
- Are there opportunities or challenges?
- What are we currently doing well as a team or organisation?
- Does anyone want to share what they are doing to address the issue?
- What could work well?
- What would not?
- What could we change or implement?
- Are there any immediate actions to be taken?
- What are our next steps?

**Step 5: Follow-up**

**Set actions and follow up**

- Develop an action plan if required – allocate roles and responsibilities
- Commit to future actions and discussion
- Provide any resources and/or circulate outcomes to group where appropriate
- Consider sharing findings, outcomes and actions broadly
- Reminder to follow up on actions and close the loop.

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# Session overview

- **Discussion on the key challenges across the Australian mental health landscape**  
Greg Vines – Comcare, Georgie Harman – Beyond Blue
- **Comcare regulatory and resource update**  
Justin Napier, Luka Campbell – Comcare
- **Approaches to tackling vicarious trauma and how they can be used for other psychosocial hazards**  
Carmen Schroder – Institute for Safety, Compensation and Recovery Research (ISCRR)
- **Panel Discussion: Translating theory into practice**  
Luka Campbell – Comcare, Connie Galati – Australian Public Service Commission, Carmen Schroder – ISCRR



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# Discussion on the key challenges across the Australian mental health landscape

**Georgie Harman**, CEO, Beyond Blue

**Greg Vines**, CEO, Comcare

**Megan Buick**, General Manager, Strategic Partnerships and Engagement, Comcare



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# Comcare regulatory and resource update

**JUSTIN NAPIER**

General Manager Regulatory Operations Group

**LUKA CAMPBELL**

Director National Regulatory Programs







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# About Comcare

## Our Purpose:

To promote and enable safe and healthy work

### Work health and safety under the WHS Act

Australian Defence Force

Commonwealth public  
authorities covered only  
by the WHS Act

Australian Government  
premium payers

Licensees

ACT Government  
premium payers

Licensees covered only  
by the SRC Act

### Workplace rehabilitation under the SRC Act

We are:

- the regulator for WHS in the Commonwealth jurisdiction
- The workers compensation authority for some Commonwealth entities, licensees and the ACT government.





# Psychosocial regulation

## WHS Act 2011

- Defines 'health' to include physical and psychological health.

## WHS Regulations 2011

- 55A-D came into effect April 2023.
- Defines psychosocial hazard and risk.
- Enlivens regulated risk management requirements including the hierarchy of controls.

## Code of Practice

- Model Code of Practice - How to Manage Psychosocial Risks published by Safe Work NSW.
- Guides duty-holders on how to identify and manage psychosocial risks.

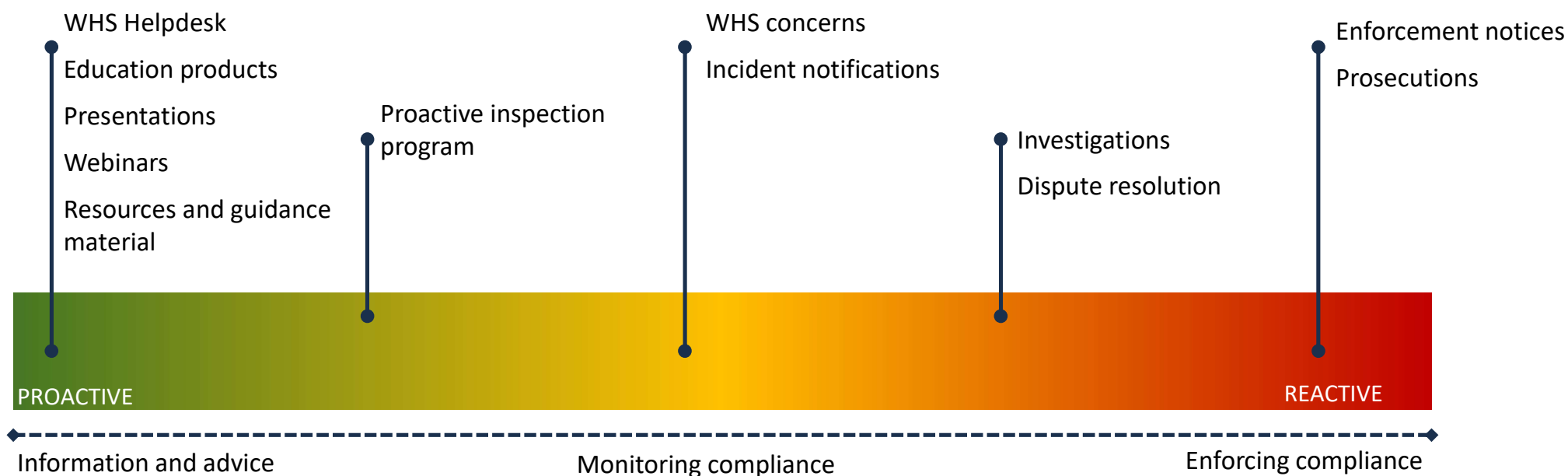
NB: Approved Commonwealth Code of Practice is pending

**Psychosocial hazards** are aspects of work that may cause psychological harm. They may also cause physical harm.



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# Psychosocial regulation: our approach





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# Proactive Psychosocial Inspection Program

## Purpose:

To regulate psychosocial hazard and risk management in the Commonwealth WHS jurisdiction

## Objectives:



Understand the level of compliance across the jurisdiction with management of psychosocial hazards and risks.



Improve compliance by providing tailored information and advice to duty holders.

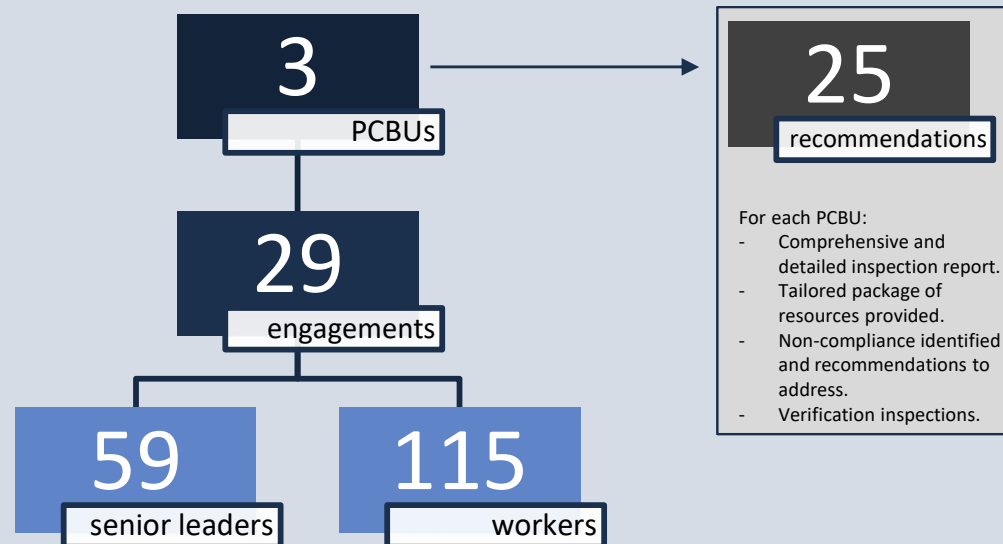


Assist duty holders to manage psychosocial hazards and risks and comply with WHS obligations.



Develop an evidence base to inform priority areas for improvement, training, and resources across the jurisdiction.

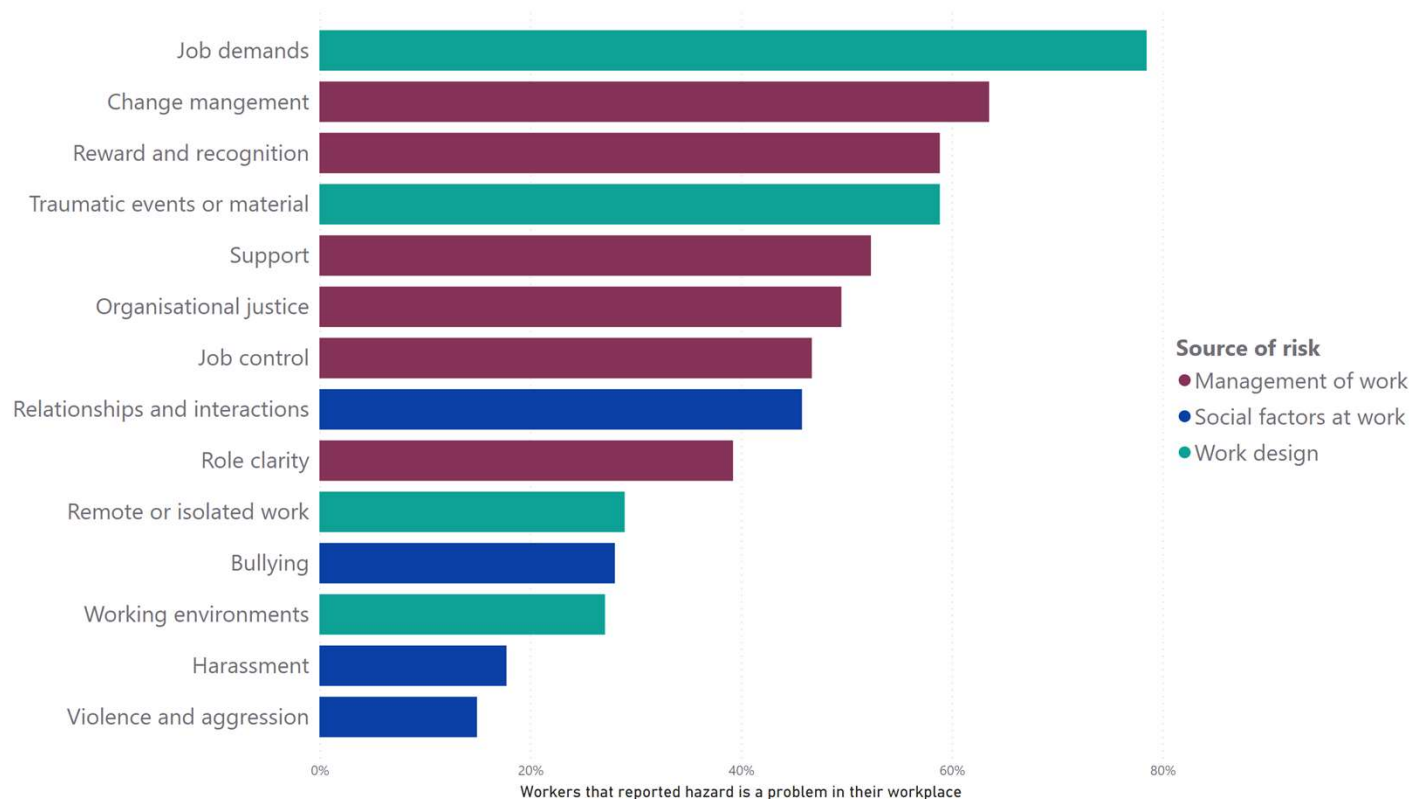
## Activities:





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# What we have learned so far?

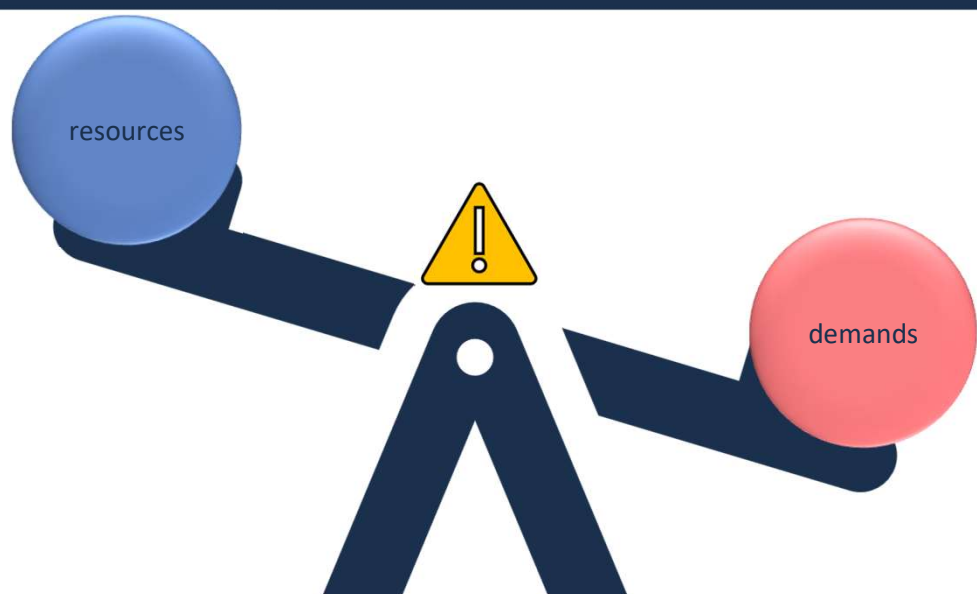


- Hazards relating to the design or management were most frequently reported as a problem
- Cumulative-exposure hazards were more prevalent than event-based hazards
- Job demands were the most prevalent hazard, followed by poor change management, traumatic events and material, and inadequate reward and recognition





# Spotlight on job demands



Job demands are sustained or intense high levels of physical, mental or emotional effort which are unreasonable or chronically exceed workers' skills, or sustained low levels of physical, mental or emotional effort.

high workload

having too little to do

monotonous or repetitive tasks

sustained concentration or vigilance

repeatedly switching tasks

idle periods when high workloads are present

emotionally distressing situations

suppressing emotions or displaying false emotions

long/irregular work hours

insufficient breaks



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# Managing risks from job demands

## Design of work

- Schedule work to avoid intense or sustained workload pressure.
- Plan shifts to allow adequate rest and recover.
- Plan work to avoid large fluctuations in demand.

## Work environment

- Use IT systems that reduce human error.
- Provide quiet spaces for mentally demanding work.
- Optimise the design and layout of the workplace for the tasks being performed.

## Modifying the demands

- Plan workforce to ensure adequate staffing and skill mix.
- Roster sufficient workers to allow breaks.
- Reschedule non-urgent tasks if demand is unexpectedly high.

## Safe systems and procedures

- Have regular conversations about work expectations, workloads, deadlines and instructions.
- Implement systems for escalating problems.
- Where possible, minimise unnecessary approvals to avoid duplication of work.



For more examples, see *Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work Code of Practice*, p 35-7



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# The importance of consultation

- Consultation is a key component of effective psychosocial risk management.
- PCBU's (employers) must consult with workers, so far as reasonably practicable, including when:
  - Identifying psychosocial hazards
  - Deciding how to manage psychosocial risks
  - Proposing changes that may affect psychological safety.





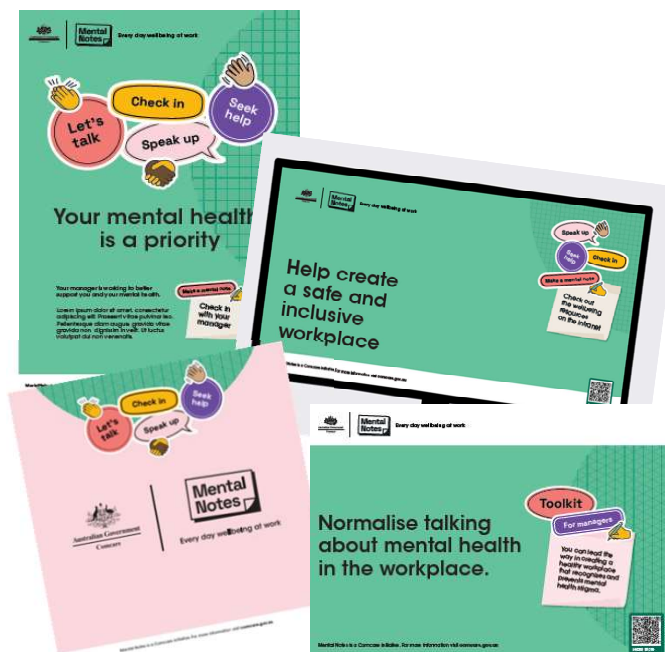
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# Comcare resources

## Good Work Design



## Mental Notes



## Work Demands







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# What WHS leaders can do?

1. **Know** the psychosocial hazards in your workplace, and the controls to guard against them.
2. **Communicate** your commitment to psychological safety, and follow through with visible actions.
3. **Listen and learn** from your colleagues (regardless of rank) and be willing to share successes as well as opportunities for improvement.
4. Ensure **reporting and risk management systems** are robust, trusted and monitored for effectiveness.
5. **Consult** with workers, and empower workers to participate in the risk management process.





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# Approaches to tackling vicarious trauma and how they can be used for other psychosocial hazards

**Carmen Schroder**, Institute for Safety, Compensation and Recovery Research (ISCRR)



# Preventing vicarious trauma and other psychosocial hazards

## Aim of this session

1

What is vicarious trauma?

2

Barriers to preventing psychological hazards

3

Steps to preventing psychosocial hazards

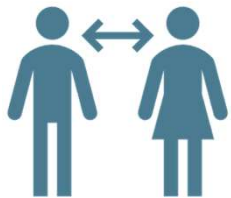


Take a moment...

# What is vicarious trauma?

# What is vicarious trauma?

Vicarious trauma is a *predictable* and *human* response to exposure to *traumatic content*



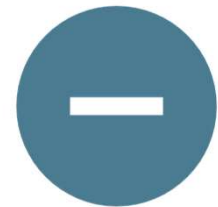
Engaging  
with other  
people's  
trauma



Builds  
up over  
time



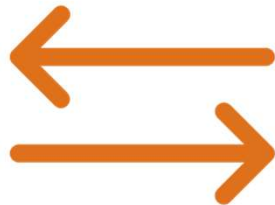
PTSD  
symptoms  
*plus*



Negative  
changes to  
views

# Vicarious trauma and empathy

Empathy is a  
precondition  
for vicarious  
trauma

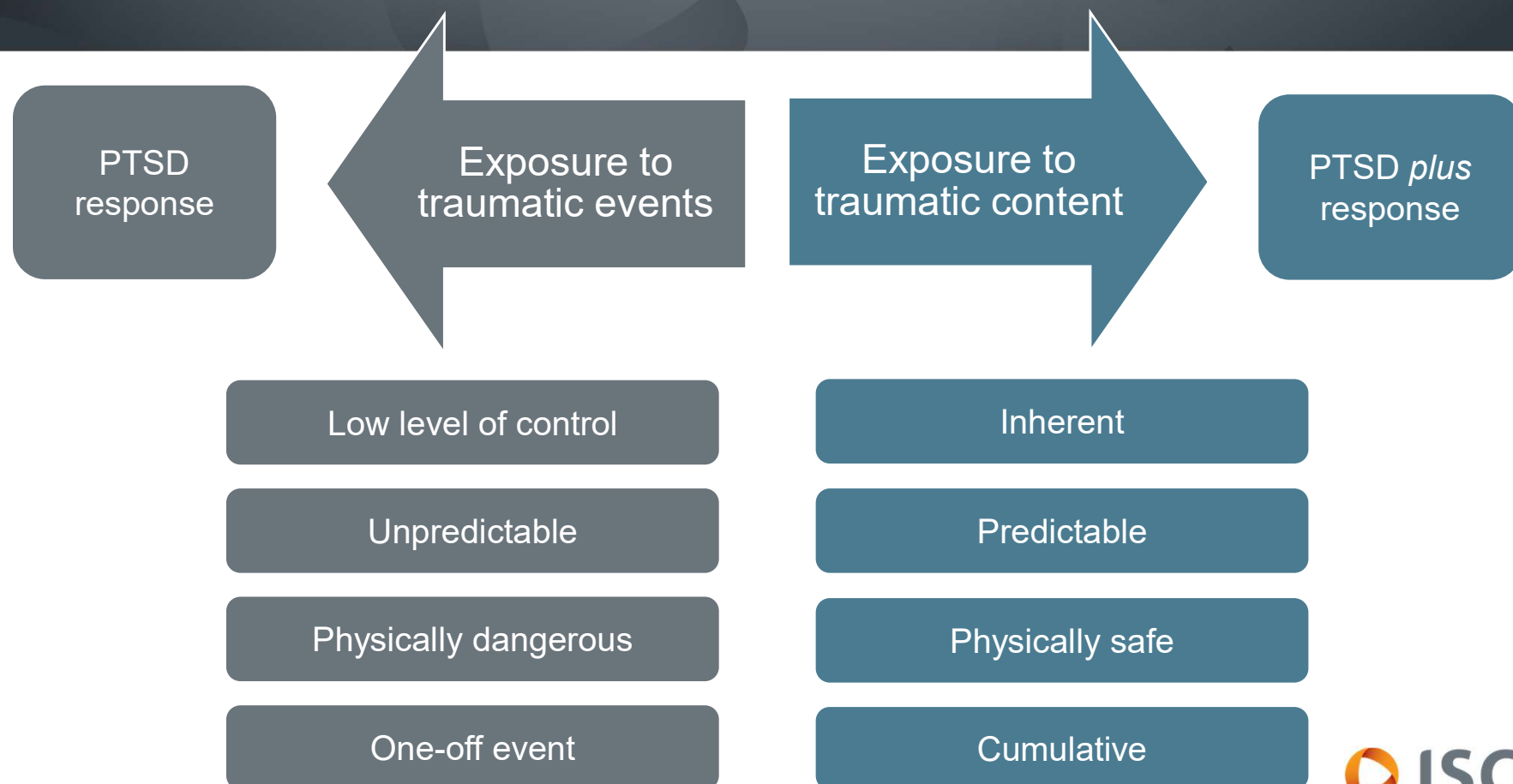


Empathy is  
essential in  
'caring'  
professions

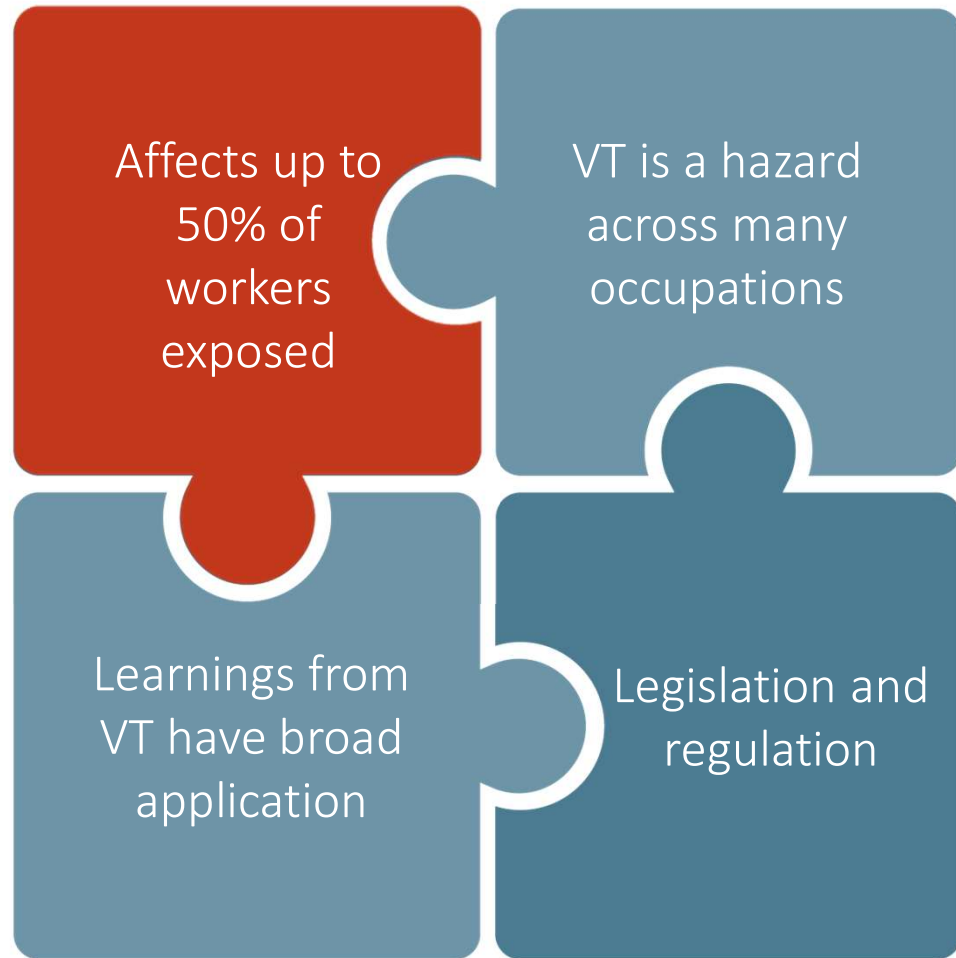


# Why vicarious trauma?

# Direct trauma vs vicarious trauma



# Why vicarious trauma?



# The Preventing Vicarious Trauma pilot

# The research

6 pilot sites

2 government departments

Working groups

Steering committee



Lived experience

Co-design

Action research

Systematic prevention

## What did we find?

High rates of  
exposure to  
traumatic content

The pilot resulted in  
mixed success  
across pilot sites



# Barriers to prevention

# The workplace culture

Fear

Stigma

Inaction

“

It just kind of feels like the only thing that's ever offered is EAP and not that that's not a good service... It feels like it's lip service... Like the care factor's not there.

Housing worker

”

“

You'd be put on a performance plan if you were really having difficulty coping.

Justice  
personnel

”

“

How our supervisors handle these sort of discussions... There's this disconnect between how we're feeling and how we want it addressed because we don't know how that's going to play out.

Justice personnel

”

# Dominant perceptions of vicarious trauma

## Perception

## Intervention

### Clinical



Only psychological 'treatment' and expertise can help

Management referral to EAP

### Individual



An individual problem to be managed by the individual

'Workplace' interventions that promote self-care

### Resilience



Any response to exposure is due to a lack of resilience.

Resilience training; coping is a requirement of the job

### Inherent



Exposure is essential and can not be removed

Workers just need to '*get on with it*'.

# Steps to prevention

# What does prevention look like?



Reframe psychosocial hazards

Understand the context

Implement a tailored prevention plan

## Reframe psychosocial hazards

- ✓ Awareness and education
- ✓ Leadership led
- ✓ Acknowledge psychosocial hazards and label them as hazards
- ✓ Not IF you are affected, but WHEN you are affected

# What does prevention look like?



Reframe psychosocial hazards

Understand the context

Implement a tailored prevention plan

## **Understand the context**

- ✓ What are the hazards?
- ✓ How and when do they occur?
- ✓ Who is affected?
- ✓ What are the current policies?
- ✓ What do the policies target?
- ✓ Surveys and consultation



# What does prevention look like?

Reframe psychosocial hazards

Understand the context

Implement a tailored prevention plan

## Implement a tailored response

- ✓ Informed by the context
- ✓ Consider policies along the prevention spectrum: proactive to reactive
- ✓ Cater for individual preferences
- ✓ Do other psychosocial hazards need to be addressed?



# Example action plan

Priority area	Goals	Actions	Lead	Timeline and notes	Status
Support and debriefing	Embed VT in supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Training for supervisors</li><li>- Wellbeing plans</li></ul>	Lead 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Supervisor group met to discuss needs</li></ul>	In progress

# Example action plan

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	Implement reflective practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Source provider</li> <li>- Source funding</li> <li>- Recruit participants</li> <li>- Implement sessions</li> <li>- Review progress</li> </ul>	Lead 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 session implemented</li> <li>- Evaluation in progress</li> </ul>	Completed

# Example action plan

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Acknowledge hazards	Embed discussion of VT in processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Add VT question to recruitment</li> <li>- Add VT activities to staff meetings</li> <li>- Wellness Wednesdays</li> </ul>	Lead 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Question added to recruitment</li> <li>- Wellness Wednesdays in design</li> </ul>	In progress

## To summarise...

1

Vicarious trauma is predictable, human response to exposure to traumatic content

2

How psychosocial hazards are understood and framed is a barrier to prevention

3

Prevention includes reframing psychosocial hazards, understanding the context, and a tailored response



# Thank you

For more information  
contact

[info@iscrr.com.au](mailto:info@iscrr.com.au)





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# Panel Session: Translating theory into practice

**Connie Galati**, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Australian Public Service Commission (APSC)

**Carmen Schroder**, Institute for Safety, Compensation and Recovery Research (ISCRR)

**Luka Campbell**, Director National Regulatory Programs, Comcare





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# Resources



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## National Safe Work Month 2023

This year for National Safe Work Month, we are focusing on the theme: **For everyone's safety, work safely.**

## For everyone's safety, work safely in your workplace

### Register for our free events

Hear from leaders in work health and safety, and mental health.

### Download Comcare's DIY guide

Tips and resources to support your National Safe Work Month activities

### Working together to manage risks at work

Understand the importance of managing risks when it comes to ensuring safety at work.

### Working together to protect workers' mental health

Guidance, resources and tools for promoting positive mental health in the workplace.

### Working together to support all workers

Information on supporting inclusive workplaces that support all workers, regardless of their backgrounds.

### Working together to ensure a safe and healthy workplace

Principles to help you with creating safe, healthy and productive work.



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# Feedback survey

## Thank you for attending

Please take a moment to complete our short evaluation survey.



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