Bullying and Harassment in the Health Sector

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- **Purpose** - assurance to Parliament on the accountability and performance of the Victorian public sector

- **Mandate** - Financial and Performance Audit

- **Performance Audit:**
  - effectiveness, efficiency and economy
  - compliance with relevant legislation
  - audit topics ‘in the public interest’
  - informed by detailed environmental scanning, stakeholder consultation, correspondence
Setting the scene

Workplace bullying –

Repeated and unreasonable behaviour that is directed towards a worker or a group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety.
Audit Focus

Audit scope:
- To examine the effectiveness of the health sector in preventing and responding to inappropriate behaviour including bullying and harassment

Agencies examined:

<table>
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<th>Employers</th>
<th>Sector leaders</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Four health services</td>
<td>• Department of Health &amp; Human Services (DHHS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ambulance Victoria</td>
<td>• WorkSafe</td>
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<td>• Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC)</td>
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Bullying has serious individual, organisational and patient safety impacts.

Occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation places duties on employers to eliminate or minimise health and safety risks in the workplace.

Three large Australian studies indicate concerning prevalence

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<th>Health workers who report experiencing bullying at work</th>
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<td>26% all health workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>38% surgeons</td>
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<tr>
<td>54% trainee surgeons</td>
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<tr>
<td>40% nurses</td>
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Addressing workplace bullying an OHS risk management approach

1. Understanding the hazard
   - Organisational factors informed by good data

2. Effective controls (org and indiv levels)
   - Positive culture
   - Good management
   - Policies /Procedures
   - Training

3. Monitoring /Reviewing
   - Effectiveness / Continuous improvement
Key findings - Poor workplace culture

- **Insufficient priority** - individual rather than organisation focussed
- **Poor understanding** – causes, prevalence and impact
- **Poor accountability** for inappropriate behaviour of senior staff
- **Poor reporting** due to widespread fear of potential repercussions.

Indications point to a poor culture where bullying and harassment are either accepted or poorly dealt with.
Key findings - Ineffective prevention

Policies and procedures are inadequate, not understood or complied with by staff, or consistently enforced.

Training is inadequate - ad hoc, superficial and not mandatory.

Ineffective prevention leads to escalation of poor behaviour and further undermines workplace culture.
Early intervention by line managers is inadequate, trust in this process is low and line manager capability is limited.

Formal complaints processes are deficient –
- incomplete documentation,
- inconsistent investigation practices,
- limited assessment of organisational triggers.

Inadequate organisational response means that there is limited consequences for inappropriate behaviour resulting in low trust and poor culture.
Guidance provided by DHHS, WorkSafe and VPSC to the health sector is inadequate.

Collaboration and sharing of data and knowledge is poor between key sector wide agencies.

Stronger sector-wide leadership is needed to support improved and consistent management of this risk across the health sector.
Key messages

Indications point to a poor workplace culture where bullying and harassment is either accepted or poorly dealt with.

Ineffective prevention and limited consequences for inappropriate behaviour leads to escalation of poor behaviour, and low trust and poor workplace culture.

Greater leadership and sustained commitment is required from health sector leaders to build a positive workplace culture and consistently enforce it.
## Recommendations

**That health sector agencies:**

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<td>1</td>
<td>improve governance, and demonstrate active oversight, leadership and improvement in the management of this risk</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>implement a comprehensive approach which is supported by improved training and capability across the agency</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>ensure an effective and trusted early and formal response system is in place</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Sector wide leaders support consistent better practice in addressing this risk across the health sector</td>
<td>✓</td>
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Promising progress

✓ Recommendations accepted by audited agencies with some commencing implementation during the audit.

✓ New government plan – with cross agency collaboration:
  • An independent anti-bullying flying
  • Support for bullying prevention as an occupational health and safety risk
  • Performance monitoring to hold health services to account
  • Sector wide participation in the People Matters Survey to identify bullying hot spots

✓ Commitment to address the poor culture of the medical profession:
  • Royal College of Surgeons action plan – *Building respect, Improving patient safety*
  • Australian Medical Association – Setting the standard
Further Information

The Full report can be found at www.audit.vic.gov.au/reports__publications

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