

Occupational violence toolkit background

The rate of occupational violence (OV) occurring across healthcare workplaces is a concern for healthcare systems across the world and locally for ACT Health. Preventative measures such as early identification and reporting of potential risks may reduce the incidence of OV. However, reporting OV incidents varies across healthcare systems and is typically underreported. Specifically, when the OV occurs as a non-physical event (commonly described as 'challenging behaviour' or 'behaviour of concern').

To improve OV reporting, a 'whole of system' culture change needs to occur. Healthcare workers (workers) (employees, staff, volunteers, wards persons, students) and healthcare consumers (consumers) (patients, clients, carers, visitors) need to understand that OV in any form is unacceptable and the behaviours must (and will) be reported and addressed.

Recognition, prevention, and response to OV is an ongoing process that must be embraced by everyone within a healthcare service. This will ensure the safety of workers and consumers within a healthcare workplace. Consumers also have a part to play and require information and support to ensure they do not contribute to OV incidents.

Healthcare workers safety

As per work health and safety policies addressing OV all workers need to identify behaviours or actions that constitute or lead to OV, and be supported to minimise, respond to, and report, any OV incident that threatens their health or safety or that of their colleagues. In accordance with the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011 \(the WHS Act\)](#), all employers and managers of workers engaged by the ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD), Canberra Health Services (CHS) or Calvary Public Hospital Bruce (CPHB) must take all reasonably practicable steps to protect the health and safety of workers. This includes the elimination or minimisation of risks related to work practices, where health and safety is defined as both physical and psychological.

Safe Workplace

Leadership is required to ensure a safe and healthy workplace free of OV where workers and consumers are mutually respectful. Effective implementation of policies and practices must create an environment where everyone is treated fairly without fear of discrimination related to age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability, or other characteristics. Workers need to have avenues to withdraw from an unsafe situation, or before a situation becomes unsafe. They also need clear, supported processes to report concerns, hazards, or incidents in the workplace.

A safe workplace will see:

Healthcare workers:

- feel safer and be free from physical and psychological harm
- receive immediate and ongoing support from managers, peers and the healthcare service if confronted with violence
- report OV incidents and near misses using the healthcare services incident reporting system
- feel safer and be more supported to report OV incidents to ACT Policing
- participate in, or complete, OV training
- follow the healthcare services OV procedures
- participate in consultation relating to WHS matters in the workplace.

Managers:

- facilitate or provide information, training and education programs relating to OV to their workers or peers
- provide immediate and ongoing support to workers who report OV, including when workers report OV to ACT Policing
- share de-identified information and timely feedback on reported risks, hazards, incidents and near misses. This includes investigations in the workplace, including the outcomes and recommendations.

Healthcare services:

- ensure the workplace has control measures in place to protect from risk and adverse outcomes
- facilitate and support managers and workers in reporting criminal offences to ACT Policing
- make available healthcare service policies and procedures relating to OV, including reporting
- undertake regular review of policies and procedures for effectiveness on the management and response of OV related incidents.

This toolkit is inclusive of all Nursing and Midwifery managers in hospitals and healthcare settings across the following ACT public healthcare services:

- ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD)
- Canberra Health Services

Calvary Public Hospital Bruce (CPHB)

More information about roles and responsibilities around recognising, responding to and preventing OV can be found in the **Responsibilities when responding to an incident of OV Factsheet**.

ACT Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people. ACT Health respects their continuing culture and connections to the land and the unique contributions they make to the life of this area. ACT Health also acknowledges and welcomes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are part of the community we serve.

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