

A work health and safety approach to preventing workplace sexual harassment



Let's debunk some myths:

Myth 1

Sexual harassment at work is uncommon.

Incorrect. Approximately 1 in 3 Australians (33%)¹ have been sexually harassed at work. Workplace sexual harassment can occur in every industry, across all occupations and all levels.

Myth 2

Sexual harassment is only repeated behaviour.

Not always. Sexual harassment can be a single incident. It might include unwelcome physical contact, sexually suggestive comments or jokes or sexual assault.

Myth 3

Sexual harassment only involves physical contact.

Incorrect. Sexual harassment can include any form of unwelcome sexual conduct such as intrusive personal questions, repeated requests to go out on dates, repeated advances on-line.

Myth 4

I am not responsible if there is an issue between my workers.

Not true. Under work health and safety (WHS) laws as a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), you are required to protect your workers from risks to their health and safety. This includes taking steps to eliminate or minimise the risk of sexual harassment so far as reasonably practicable, regardless of whether there has been an incident between your workers.

Leadership and culture

- Lead by example and demonstrate respectful behaviours.
- Ensure fair and transparent training, recruitment and promotion opportunities that value gender equality, diversity, and respectful behaviours.
- Take continuous positive action to meet your WHS obligations, to prevent sexual harassment recurrence and protect workers.

Education and consultation

- Have open and regular engagement with workers on sexual harassment risks and expected workplace behaviours.
- Provide regular information, training, and support to workers on preventing and responding to sexual harassment.
- Communicate your policies on preventing sexual harassment to all workers (including leaders, supervisors, and contractors), and communicate them to workers, visitors, and customers.

Workplace design and environment

- Assess environmental risks regularly (e.g., remote, isolated, night shift, or client and or home visit work).
- Understand the importance of lighting, safe exit and location to emergency assistance when planning the site and spacial design considerations.
- Consider restricting public access to areas where staff work alone or at night.
- Ensure worker accomodation is secure, both for the worker while they are occupying it and their possessions while they are temporarily away.

Safe systems and reporting

- Provide clear and confidential (informal and formal) reporting options, address barriers to reporting and offer support to anyone who makes a report.
- Investigate all reports of sexual harassment and ensure timely responses.
- Ensure reporting systems are person-centred, with appropriate trauma-informed responses that address any inappropriate behaviours immediately.
- Design systems to eliminate or minimise risks of sexual harassment (e.g., systems to prevent and manage the misuse of alcohol, introduce processes to block and manage online harassment, in consultation with workers).

Under WHS laws, businesses are required to protect their workers from health and safety risks. Sexual harassment is a workplace hazard, which is preventable. Using a risk management approach, here are several steps you can take:



The role of WorkSafe WA

- Provide information on WHS laws and how to comply.
- Conduct workplace inspections proactively or following concerns or notifications.
- Take enforcement action where needed – see our [Compliance and enforcement policy](#).

This document has been adapted from SafeWork NSW's A work health and safety (WHS) approach to preventing workplace sexual harassment.

¹ [Australian Human Rights Commission 2022 annual report](#)