



# Assessment and control of psychosocial hazards in the workplace

## OHS information for employers and workers

This resource provides information to help employers and workers recognize, assess and control psychosocial hazards in the workplace.

### KEY INFORMATION

- Psychosocial hazards must be included in the hazard assessment process.
- Worker training should include identification and control of psychosocial hazards.
- Focus on prevention by fostering a respectful workplace.
- The CSA National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace provides guidance for promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at the workplace.
- Mental health hotline: 1-877-303-2642 (Alberta Health Services)

### Hazard assessment

The hazard assessment process involves identifying existing and potential hazards for every job and every task at a work site.

#### Psychosocial hazards

Psychosocial hazards are elements of the work environment, management practices or organizational practices that pose a risk to mental health and well-being.

Common psychosocial hazards include exposure to harassment, violence or traumatic events. Long term exposure to less severe psychological hazards, such as increasing job demands or role ambiguity, can potentially impact psychological health.

Factors that can affect a worker's psychological health include:

#### Work organizational factors

- Shift work and hours of work.
- Job security.
- Workload and pace.
- Interpersonal relationships.

- Organizational change.
- Technological change.

#### Environmental factors

- Indoor air quality.
- Lighting.
- Noise.

#### Personal factors

- Work-life conflict.
- Poor physical health.
- Changing stages of family life.
- Pre-existing depression, anxiety, substance abuse and other mental illness.

#### The effects of psychosocial hazards in the workplace

Exposure to psychosocial hazards can negatively impact a worker's physical and mental health. People sometimes develop negative coping behaviours to deal with psychosocial hazards, such as alcohol or drug abuse, which can create further psychological distress or possibly lead to addictions.

The conditions and behaviours that result from poor psychological health can impact the employer directly and indirectly through:

- Absenteeism rates.
- Benefits costs.
- Turnover rates.
- Incident and injury rates.
- Disability management claims/rates (workers' compensation, short-term disability, long-term disability).

### Controlling psychosocial hazards

After a hazard is identified, it must be eliminated. If a hazard cannot be eliminated, it must be controlled. The following are some suggested control measures to address psychosocial hazards at the workplace.

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### Develop a policy on psychosocial hazards

Employers can show their commitment to workplace psychological health by developing policies and procedures to prevent or control psychosocial hazards.

A good psychosocial hazard policy is clear, supportive and encourages reporting and investigation of incidents. The policy should include:

- Employer's commitment to recognize and address workplace psychosocial hazards.
- A statement that any acts of harassment are unacceptable.
- A definition for workplace psychosocial hazards.
- A requirement for a psychosocial hazard assessment.
- Training for workers and managers on recognition and reporting of psychosocial hazards.
- Support for workers affected by workplace related psychosocial hazards.
- Confidentiality for those experiencing or reporting incidents.

### Provide worker training

Worker training is a critical component of any safety program. Training should include:

- Recognition of workplace-related psychosocial hazards.
- General knowledge about the types of psychosocial hazards and associated health effects.
- Review of the employer's psychosocial hazard policies and procedures.
- Appropriate response to workplace-related psychosocial hazards.

### Procedures for reporting, investigation and documenting workplace-related psychosocial incidents

All incidents that result or could result in psychological injury should be reported and investigated. Due to the personal nature of these types of events, they may go unreported for fear of reprisal or blame. Unless incidents are investigated, they are likely to be repeated.

Establish reporting processes that respect the individual's right to privacy and does not put the person reporting the incident in jeopardy.

### Focus on prevention

Successful strategies to control work-related psychosocial hazards involve three levels of prevention.

**Level 1** prevention aims to prevent psychological injuries or harm, for example:

- Assigning reasonable work quantities.
- Creating psychologically safe work environment and conditions.
- Assigning work that aligns with the workers' skills.

**Level 2** prevention looks to reduce or modify impact, examples include:

- Education and skills development like developing communication strategies.
- Management of personal perceptions of stress.
- Provision and promotion of wellness programs.
- Managing the personal work environment to remove stressors, such as ambient noise, air quality concerns and ergonomic issues, when possible.

**Level 3** prevention looks to reduce the impact of psychological injuries or harm, for example by providing:

- Accessibility to employee assistance programs and counselling.
- Workplace accommodations, return to work planning, modified duties.
- Peer support networks to remove social isolation.

### National Standard for Psychological Safety in the Workplace

The [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) provides a framework and guidance for developing an effective psychological health and safety program. The standard identifies 13 workplace factors that impact psychological health. In assessing and developing controls for psychosocial hazards, employers should consider how each of the following factors support psychological health and safety:

- Psychological support.
- Organizational culture.
- Clear leadership and expectations.
- Civility and respect.
- Psychological job demands.
- Growth and development.
- Recognition and reward.
- Involvement and influence.
- Workload management.
- Engagement.
- Work/life balance.
- Psychological protection.
- Protection of physical safety.

Watch the [Psychological health and safety for the workplace](#) video series to learn more about the 13 psychosocial workplace risk factors identified in the CSA National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

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**MENTAL HEALTH HELPLINE**  
Alberta Health services  
1-877-303-2642

## Contact us

### OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690
- Edmonton and surrounding area
- 780-415-8690
- Deaf or hard of hearing (TTY)
- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

### Notify OHS of health and safety concerns

[alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx](https://alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx)

Call the OHS Contact Centre if you have concerns that involve immediate danger to a person on a work site.

### Report a workplace incident to OHS

[alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incidents.aspx](https://alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incidents.aspx)

### Website

[alberta.ca/ohs](https://alberta.ca/ohs)

## Get copies of the OHS Act, Regulation and Code

### Alberta Queen's Printer

[qp.gov.ab.ca](https://qp.gov.ab.ca)

### OHS

[alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx](https://alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx)

## For more information

CSA Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

[csagroup.org/article/cancca-z1003-13-bnq-9700-803-2013-r2018](https://csagroup.org/article/cancca-z1003-13-bnq-9700-803-2013-r2018)

Hazard assessment and control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers (BP018)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018)

Mental health continuum model (Mental health commission of Canada)

[theworkingmind.ca/sites/default/files/resources/r2mr\\_poster\\_en.pdf](https://theworkingmind.ca/sites/default/files/resources/r2mr_poster_en.pdf)

Mental Health Commission of Canada/National Standard

[mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/what-we-do/workplace/national-standard](https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/what-we-do/workplace/national-standard)

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