

# MANAGING PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK

Summary prepared for all customer facing organisations (NSW) –please see full amendment here:  
[Work Health and Safety Amendment Regulation 2022](#)



Accidental  
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## COMPLYING WITH THE OBLIGATION TO MANAGE AND CONTROL PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK – FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017 was amended on **1 October 2022** to include specific requirements around managing psychosocial risk in all workplaces. Employers are now required, amongst other things, to:

- Understand what is meant by a Psychosocial Hazard – e.g.: interactions with customers or colleagues who are in vulnerable circumstances, aggressive, abusive or in crisis, exposure to traumatic events or materials, lack of role clarity
- Understand what is meant by a Psychosocial Risk – e.g.: risk of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and burnout arising from the psychosocial hazards associated with the role (e.g.: complaint handler, EDR/IDR professional, fraud teams, specialist teams, customer advocates, call centre teams, customer service teams etc)
- Manage those risks, and
- Implement control measures.

The purpose of control measures is to either eliminate or at least minimise psychosocial risks when avoidance of the hazard is not possible due to the nature of the role.

The Amendment refers to a number of relevant factors to consider when determining the control measures that need to be put into place, including:

- Duration, frequency and severity of exposure to the hazard
- The manner in which hazards may interact or combine
- The design and systems of work, and
- The information, training and instruction given to workers.

Those working in client facing roles are frequently exposed to psychosocial hazards. Many of these hazards will interact, however their impact can be substantially reduced with the correct systems of work, approach, frameworks, policies and processes in place.

It is well recognised that those who work in client facing teams, particularly given the impacts of

Covid-19, spiralling cost of living, natural disasters and increased interest rates, are frequently engaging with customers who are in vulnerable circumstances, angry, abusive, overwhelmed or in crisis. The associated risks of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and burnout are health and safety issues about which the employer needs to be aware and must manage and control.

Combining her experiences as a solicitor and also volunteer crisis supporter on Lifeline's **13 11 14** suicide prevention and crisis intervention line, Cutty Felton of Accidental Counsellor Pty Ltd developed her well-known approach and frameworks which are well placed to meet the obligations of employers to manage and control some of the most common psychosocial risks being experienced by your teams.

Core to her ethical and empathic approach is an understanding of the necessity for, and impact of, maintaining Boundaries. At all times, and especially in the face of potential psychosocial hazard, it is imperative that the three critical boundaries (of the role, of the conversation and as provided by policy/procedure) are maintained, ensuring that safety of both the client and the team member are the overriding priority.

For those psychosocial hazards that cannot be eliminated, skills to reduce their impact are an important aspect of her program.

Robust examination of expectations placed on employees, as well as organisational policies and processes and whether they enhance the safety of (or increase the risk to) the team member, are an additional crucial aspect to be considered.

Cutty welcomes Work Health and Safety Amendment Regulation 2022, recognising as it does that psychosocial hazards and risks are WHS issues to be managed and controlled, rather than simply 'wellbeing' or 'resilience' matters which are often considered to be the ultimate responsibility of the employee, a major barrier to their seeking support when exposed to psychosocial risk in the workplace.



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