

Building better engagement in work health and safety

A strategy to support health and safety representatives
and workers in the Queensland public sector



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Acknowledgement of contributors

Building better engagement in work health and safety: A strategy to support health and safety representatives and workers in the Queensland public sector (the strategy) has been developed to improve worker engagement in health and safety in public sector workplaces, and support better health and safety outcomes for all.

The strategy has been developed in consultation with public sector agencies and unions, and we acknowledge the more than 170 sector HSRs, health and safety committee members, managers and supervisors, wellbeing champions, peer support officers and HR practitioners who have also contributed.

The Public Service Commission acknowledges the involvement of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, in ensuring these materials appropriately reflect the regulatory environment.

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Introduction

The Queensland public sector (the sector) is committed to improving the physical and psychological health, safety and wellbeing of our people, and creating healthy and safe workplaces where people can thrive and achieve their best.

We recognise that workplaces have better health and safety outcomes when workers and their representatives have input into the health and safety decisions that affect them.

We are committed to working proactively to address factors in the work environment, to prevent and reduce the risk of psycho-social and physical hazards that can result in work-related injury and illnesses. Together we can build safer and healthier work environments and cultures for everyone.

All agencies have existing legislated requirements to consult with workers who are, or are likely to be, directly impacted by a health and safety matter.

This strategy is underpinned by the requirements set out in the:

- [Work Health and Safety Act 2011 \(WHS Act\)](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination Code of Practice.](#)

The sector's [Be healthy, be safe, be well framework](#) (the framework) outlines the shared vision and leadership commitment to health, safety and wellbeing to lift the sector's maturity and deliver better outcomes.

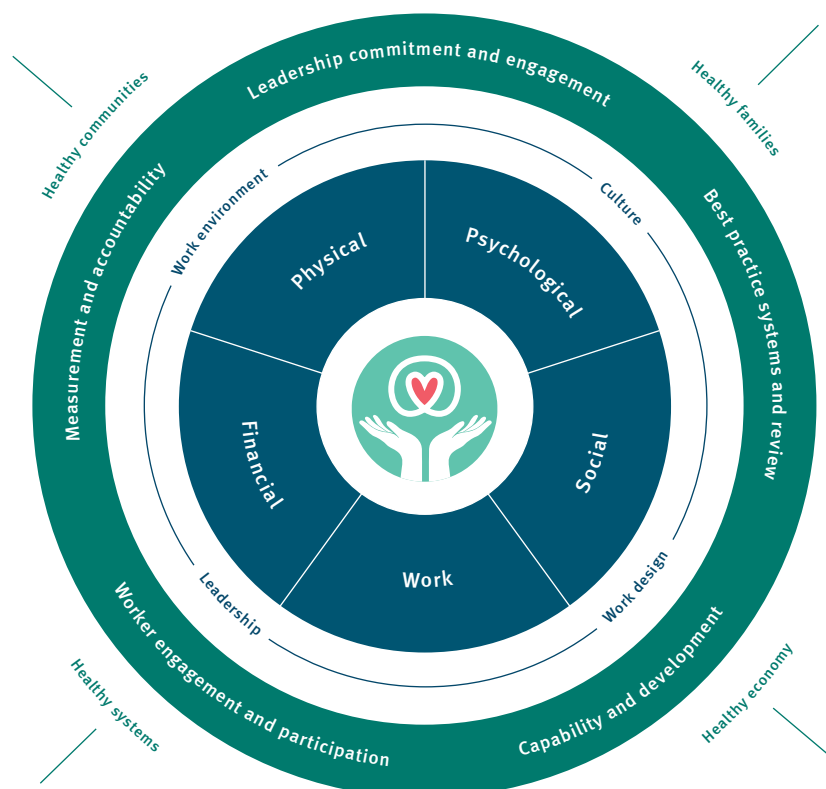
The framework's model (below) depicts the multi-layered and integrated approach required at the individual, organisational and system levels to achieve improved and sustained outcomes.

Worker engagement and participation is a key part of this model.

In this context, worker engagement means involving workers (including volunteers) and their representatives in developing health and safety policies, processes, issues identification and resolutions at work, through consultation, representation and participation.

This strategy aims to drive renewed worker engagement in health and safety, to deliver better health and safety outcomes for the sector.

A key aspect of supporting worker engagement and participation in the health and safety system, is by encouraging the election of health and safety representatives (HSRs). HSRs play a pivotal role in making workplaces safer and improving workplace consultation. Workers have the right to be represented by HSRs.



This strategy outlines four key objectives to drive improved worker engagement in health and safety in agencies across the sector:

1. Workers are encouraged to participate in improving health and safety as elected health and safety representatives.
2. Health and safety representatives are provided with appropriate training and have the support, skills and resources they need to perform their roles effectively.
3. Worker engagement in health and safety is valued and supported at all levels.
4. Worker engagement in health and safety is embedded into everyday work practices

The sector is diverse, and is made up of many types of work, workers and workplaces. The sector's health and safety risk profile is equally diverse.

As worker engagement will not look the same in every workplace, the four objectives provide agencies with the flexibility to tailor actions in the key areas of focus to their business and workforce context, and within the purview of the WHS legislative framework.

Agency practices that promote and encourage worker engagement are critical to building supportive cultures, creating safer and healthier workplaces.



Strategy objectives

Four objectives have been developed to support the sector to move towards good practice in worker engagement in health and safety, with individual agencies having flexibility to implement based on their specific circumstances.

The objectives, and highlighted areas of focus under each objective, seek to improve worker engagement and promote proactive approaches and actions.



1. Workers are encouraged to participate in improving health and safety as elected health and safety representatives.



2. Health and safety representatives are provided with appropriate training and have the support, skills and resources they need to perform their roles effectively.



3. Worker engagement in health and safety is valued and supported at all levels.



4. Worker engagement in health and safety is embedded into everyday work practices

1

Objective: Workers are encouraged to participate in improving health and safety as elected health and safety representatives.

Areas of focus

- Engage with workers to discuss effective representation through work groups across the agency.
- Actively encourage worker participation and as HSRs by advocating for the important role HSRs play in driving improved health and safety outcomes.
- Communicate to workers their right to be represented, and how they can contribute to building a culture of improved health and safety, including by forming work groups and encouraging the election of HSRs.
- Make information about how to participate and who to connect with in the workplace visible and accessible.

2

Objective: Health and safety representatives are provided with appropriate training and have the support, skills and resources they need to perform their roles effectively.

Areas of focus

- Enable HSRs to attend the HSR prescribed training with the training provider of their choice within the first three months of being elected.
- Provide a tailored induction or resources for HSRs to support them to perform their role effectively, within their agency's health and safety committee and the agency's overall health and safety management system.
- Recognise and actively manage workload, rostering arrangements, and responsibilities of people undertaking additional roles in health and safety through positive performance planning and development, and effective workload management, consistent with agency obligations under the WHS Act.
- Explore networking opportunities for HSRs and other key enabling roles to improve information sharing, capability building and connection.

3

Objective: Worker engagement in health and safety is valued and supported at all levels.

Areas of focus

- Through visible leadership commitment and management practices, actively promote the value and benefits of worker engagement in managing health and safety risks and in creating healthy workplace cultures.
- Work constructively with workers and their representatives to promote and negotiate improvements in health and safety practices.
- Build HR and managerial capability to drive improved agency engagement in health and safety issue prevention and dispute resolution.

4

Objective: Worker engagement in health and safety is embedded into everyday work practices.

Areas of focus

- Identify ways in which a culture of health and safety (and worker participation in building that culture) may be embedded, building from legislated requirements to developing health and safety maturity.
- Incorporate proactive approaches to worker engagement in business planning, processes and practices.
- Refresh agency policy, processes and training to ensure alignment with codes of practice.

Why worker engagement in health and safety is important

The WHS Act provides a framework to protect the health, safety and welfare of all workers at work, and of all other people who might be affected by the work of the business or undertaking.

One of the aims of the Act is to ensure effective representation, consultation, co-operation and issue resolution between all persons who hold duties and obligations under the Act, as well as with workers and their representatives, to effectively address health and safety issues in and arising from the workplace.

It also aims to encourage unions and employers to take a constructive role in preventing risks to health and safety, and improving health and safety practices.

This strategy seeks to:

- promote increased worker engagement both through their work groups and health and safety representatives to deliver on legislated requirements
- drive increased commitment to building cultures where everyone works together to achieve better health and safety outcomes.

The benefits of this approach include:

- building organisational trust, agency engagement and improving worker motivation
- enabling issues to be resolved in a practical manner, based on engagement with those impacted
- better, more transparent decision making—informed by workers' experiences—which are more likely to be understood and implemented by workers
- improved health and safety outcomes by involving those who understand the risks, as they are involved in the day-to-day operations.

The sector is committed to working together with workers and unions to improve worker engagement in health and safety, to drive better health and safety outcomes for all.



How agencies can enable worker engagement

Worker engagement in health and safety is underpinned by legislated consultation requirements in the WHS Act (Sections 47-49), regulations and codes of practice.

The way that agencies meet their legislated requirements will vary based on the type of work and workforce context of the agency, including:

- size
- location/s
- nature of the work
- established practices and procedures
- needs and expectations of workers.

Agencies and their workers are best placed to determine what consultation mechanisms and approaches are most appropriate.

Consultation can occur directly with workers, or through representation. There are specific roles set out in the

health and safety legislative and consultation framework including HSRs, health and safety committees and union representatives that enable worker representation in health and safety matters.

This strategy seeks to ensure that agencies promote the relevant consultation options to their workers, including encouraging the election of HSRs if appropriate to the circumstances, and facilitating HSRs when requested. Regardless of the approach, good consultation practices involve workers and/or their representatives, and are designed and embedded into systems, policies and procedures when making decisions about health and safety.

Best outcomes will be achieved when both agencies and workers commit to achieving better health and safety outcomes through increased worker engagement.

Consultation roles and responsibilities

Agencies:

- show visible leadership commitment to involving workers and their representatives in identifying and improving health and safety at work, valuing the expertise and insight they provide
- support workers who are involved in performing formal roles in work health and safety in accordance with the Act, including HSRs
- encourage all workers to participate in improving health and safety outcomes
- support open communication that includes genuine exchange of information and collaboration to reach solutions
- build health and safety capacity and skills across all levels of the workforce

Workers:

- be actively involved in promoting and/or participating in ways to improve health and safety outcomes
- take responsibility for surfacing risks early to enable faster mitigation and management
- be part of decision-making processes to implement effective health and safety decisions within their work groups and agencies
- as HSRs, represent the health and safety interests of employees in a work group and raise and address health and safety issues effectively

The role of health and safety representatives

Workers have legal rights to negotiate work groups and to elect HSRs for their work group, articulated in the WHS Act.

The primary role of a HSR for a work group is to represent the health and safety interests of the work group, raise health and safety issues, investigate complaints, and inquire into health and safety risks with their employer.

HSRs are important roles in the health and safety system and provide a structured way for workers to participate in health and safety and elevate and help resolve issues of concern. HSRs are required to undertake prescribed training to enable them to perform their roles and must be supported by their agencies to attend the prescribed training and perform their roles.

An elected and trained HSR is entitled to perform the following tasks for the work group:

- undertake workplace inspections
- review the circumstances of workplace incidents
- accompany a Workplace Health Safety Queensland (WHSQ) inspector during an inspection
- represent the work group in health and safety matters
- attend an interview about health and safety matters with a worker from the work group (with the consent of the worker)
- request that a health and safety committee be established
- participate in a health and safety committee
- monitor compliance measures
- investigate work health and safety complaints from work group members
- inquire into any risk to the health and safety of workers in the work group
- issue provisional improvement notices and direct a worker to cease unsafe work (where the HSR has completed the approved training).

Health and safety committees facilitate cooperation between agencies and workers in developing and implementing measures to ensure health and safety at work. Where a health and safety committee exists, membership must include a HSR where they consent to being a member.

HSRs also have access to support services through the WHSQ HSR Direct (1300 633 419) and relevant unions that support HSRs in the workplace.

The sector acknowledges and values the important role HSRs play in enabling worker participation and consultation in health and safety matters. We are committed to providing necessary support to HSRs to enable them to perform their functions.



Agencies with HSRs must:

- consult on health and safety matters with any HSRs for the work group
- allow a HSR time off work to attend training, and pay the training fees and other reasonable costs associated with attendance at the training
- provide resources, facilities and assistance to enable the HSR to carry out their functions
- allow a HSR to exercise their entitlements during their ordinary working hours
- keep a current list of all HSRs and deputy HSRs and display a copy at the workplace
- notify WHSQ of their current HSRs by using the Notification of Health and Safety Representative portal.

Agencies should also ensure that:

- workers are aware of their right to negotiate work groups for their agency and to elect a HSR to represent them in health and safety matters for each of the work groups
- workers are encouraged to participate as a HSR to help improve health and safety outcomes
- HSRs in workgroups are connected to their peers across the agency, to enable information sharing and capability building
- HSRs have access to necessary communication channels to support worker consultation on health and safety matters
- managers are aware of the additional responsibilities held by HSRs and support them to effectively manage the workload requirements of their normal role alongside HSR functions.

Additional guidance is available on the [For government website](#) to ensure managers are well placed to support HSRs in their workgroups, and that HR areas are aware of their responsibilities (on behalf of the employer) for consultation with HSRs.



The role of unions

Unions have an important role to play in promoting improvements in health and safety in workplaces.

The WHS Act encourages employers and unions to work constructively together to identify and resolve health and safety issues, and promote practice improvements to achieve healthier and safer working environments.

Workers can choose to have a union delegate or official represent them in health and safety matters, and agencies are required to negotiate with that representative. A representative may also enter a workplace to participate in discussions and resolving issues.

Measurement and monitoring

Agency chief executives have specific legal duties and are accountable for the health and safety of their workers and other persons at their place of businesses or undertakings. Agencies are responsible for implementing tailored actions to deliver on this strategy, and measure impact and success through the monitoring of health and safety outcomes.

Agency implementation of actions to deliver on this strategy will also be monitored by agency consultative and central consultative forums.

Unions can have an additional role in the health and safety representative consultation model including:

- work group negotiation
- assisting a HSR in the workplace (example how to perform inspections, technical advice on a specific hazard or issue and negotiating agreed procedures).
- issue resolution and dispute resolution.

The sector is committed to working collaboratively with public sector unions to drive improved health, safety and wellbeing outcomes for all workers.



The background of the page is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are several large, white, abstract geometric shapes. These shapes include curved lines, partial circles, and angular forms that create a sense of movement and depth. The shapes are layered, with some appearing to be in front of others, creating a three-dimensional effect.

The *Building better engagement in work health and safety* is a strategic imperative (wellbeing) within the *Queensland public sector 10 year human capital outlook* – creating a different workforce future by design.

An initiative of the Public Service Commission in partnership with chief human resource officers.

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