



ANMF (Vic Branch) Policy

Work-related stress prevention

1. Introduction

The Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) (ANMF (Vic Branch)) recognises that some nurses and midwives working in healthcare environments and other industries may be exposed to work-related stress during the course of their work, creating a risk to their health and safety.

It is recognised that not all stress has adverse health and safety impacts, and that there is an optimum stress level at which people work, however it is where this stress 'challenges the ability to cope' that it can create a health and safety risk.

2. Objective

The ANMF (Vic Branch) objective is to support the prevention and management of risks to the health and safety of Victorian nurses and midwives, arising from the exposure to work-related stress during the course of their work.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all ANMF (Vic Branch) members, and all nurses and midwives eligible for ANMF (Vic Branch) membership in Victorian healthcare environments and other industries.

4. Definitions

Stress: The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines stress as the response that people may have when presented with demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and capacity and which challenge their ability to cope.

5. Policy

5.1 Under the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, all employees have a right to perform their work in an environment that is safe and without risks to health from work-related stress.

5.2 Members have a right to a safe and healthy workplace environment and to perform their work without psychological and physical health risks from work-related stress.

5.3 Work-related stress hazards to be addressed include:

5.3.1 Task design eg, fragmented work.

5.3.2 Work load and / or work pace eg, work overload, high work rate or time pressures.

5.3.3 Role in the organisation eg, role conflict or uncertainty.

5.3.4 Work context eg, dealing with difficult patients, residents or visitors.

5.3.5 Work scheduling eg, shift working, long working hours.

5.3.6 Employment status eg, insecure employment.

5.3.7 Physical work environment and equipment eg, lack of space, poorly maintained equipment or there is a lack of suitable equipment available.

5.3.8 Degree of control over work eg, lack of control over scheduling of work.

- 5.3.9 Organisational function and culture eg, poor management of organisational change, poor communication within the workplace.
 - 5.3.10 Management of work eg, poor leadership, inadequate instruction and training.
 - 5.3.11 Relationships at work eg, bullying, interpersonal conflict, lack of support.
- 5.4 ANMF (Vic Branch) will assist to address work-related stress hazards through the Branch's occupational health and safety (OHS) and industrial activities.
 - 5.5 ANMF (Vic Branch) will endeavour to recognise and minimise the causes of work-related stress where possible in Industrial Agreements.
 - 5.6 The ANMF (Vic Branch) will include work-related stress prevention in Branch information, education and training for HSRs, Job Representatives and other members.

6. Key elements

6.1 Employers

The ANMF (Vic Branch) requires employers to prevent and minimise the risk of exposure to work-related stress through:

6.2 Implementing a risk Management Approach

6.2.1 Identifying if work-related stress is a hazard caused by:

- Work demands (ie, if a member's capacity is exceeded by the work they are required to undertake).
- Low levels of control (ie, how much influence a member has in how they meet their task demands and how they perform their work in general).
- Poor support from supervisors and/or co-workers (ie, whether members feel they are given constructive feedback, can talk to their supervisor and peers about work etc).
- Lack of role clarity (ie, if there is confusion around work objectives and key accountabilities, co-workers' expectations and / or the scope and responsibilities of their job).
- Poorly managed relationships (ie, whether conflict remains unresolved or becomes particularly intense).
- Poorly managed change (ie, how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation, including consultation with staff)¹.

6.2.2 Assessing work-related stress hazards (ie, deciding which hazards need to be addressed).

6.2.3 Controlling workplace stress risks through risk control measures which focus on the source of the factors that cause stress or, if that is not reasonably practicable, use measures that reduce the risk.

6.2.4 Risk control measures should address risks associated with the causes, and should consider the hazards identified above. More specifically, employers must provide the following:

Systems of work that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health from work-related stress, such as:

- a) Ensuring members have adequate time to complete their tasks and allow them to have input when determining the timing and pace of their work.
- b) Consulting with members when determining performance targets.
- c) Regularly reviewing workloads to ensure members have sufficient resources to cope.
- d) Ensuring sufficient cover for workers who are on annual or sick leave.

¹ Risk factors for work-related stress, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, 2012

- e) Providing sufficient information to enable members to perform tasks competently, including additional practical assistance when members are doing challenging tasks.
- f) Develop and maintain a working environment where members are consulted and can provide feedback on changes impacting on their role.
- g) Ensuring members are consulted about workplace change and, as a minimum, note that members and ANMF (Vic Branch) have a legal right to be consulted about significant changes under the industrial and occupational health and safety legislation and instruments.
- h) Information, instruction, training and/or supervision to enable members to perform their work in a way that is safe and without risks to health from work-related stress, including:
 1. Communication to raise understanding of work-related stress risks, and associated prevention strategies.
 2. Provision of knowledge and skills in work-related stress prevention for managers and supervisors.

6.2.5 Some specific examples of controls which may be implemented include:

- a) Ensuring adequate nurse/midwife:patient staffing levels.
- b) Ensuring appropriate skill mix across shifts.
- c) Eliminating excessive mental and physical demands.
- d) Developing and implementing a pro-active, consultative change management process for any proposed changes in the workplace.

6.3 Consultation

6.3.1 ANMF (Vic Branch) recognises that prevention of work-related stress must involve consultation between employers and Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs), where present, or all employees.

6.3.2 Consultation must occur when:

- 6.3.2.1 Identifying where work-related stress is a hazard, and assessing the associated risks.
- 6.3.2.2 Deciding how work-related stress is to be controlled, including proposing changes in the workplace.
- 6.3.2.3 Proposing other changes to systems of work in the workplace, where these may have an impact on health and safety, including working procedures.

6.4 Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs)

The ANMF (Vic Branch) encourages and supports involvement of HSRs in prevention of work-related stress through:

- 6.4.1 Consultation and representation with employers.
- 6.4.2 Facility Health and Safety Committees (HSCs) which formulate, review and disseminate plans for prevention of work-related stress.
- 6.4.3 Workplace OHS issue resolution procedures.
- 6.4.4 Issue of a Provisional Improvement Notice (PIN) or a request for a WorkSafe Inspector to attend the workplace if the employer has not acted to resolve the work-related stress issue, following consultation with HSRs.

6.5 ANMF Members

The ANMF (Vic Branch) encourages and supports the involvement of members in the prevention of work-related stress through:

- 6.5.1 Reporting work-related stress issues to HSRs.

6.5.2 Consultation with HSRs on stress prevention measures.

7. ANMF (Vic Branch) commitment

- 7.1 The ANMF (Vic Branch) will support the prevention of stress amongst nurses and midwives through assistance and education of members, HSRs and others.
- 7.2 The ANMF (Vic Branch) will increase the capability of the Organisation – especially of Organisers, HSRs and ANMF Job Representatives – to prevent work-related stress.
- 7.3 ANMF (Vic Branch) will continue to promote action by the OHS regulatory authorities in relation to work-related stress, particularly through development of guidance materials and strategies to promote awareness and prevention of work-related stress.

8. Relevant legislation

- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007

9. Relevant guidance

- ANMF (Vic Branch) Occupational Health and Safety Policy
- ANMF (Vic Branch) Prevention of Occupational Violence and Aggression Policy
- ANMF (Vic Branch) Workplace Bullying and Harassment Policy
- World Health Organisation – Protecting Workers’ Health Series No. 3 - “Work Organisation and Stress”, 2003
- World Health Organisation, Work Organisation and stress, 2004
- A guidebook for employers: Preventing and managing work-related stress, WorkSafe Victoria, 2016
- WorkSafe Victoria, Preventing work-related stress for employees in the private sector, 2009
- WorkSafe Victoria, Preventing work-related stress for employers in the private sector, 2009
- WorkSafe Victoria, Preventing work-related stress - Information for Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) in the public sector, 2008
- WorkSafe Victoria, Preventing work-related stress - Information for employees in the public sector, 2008
- WorkSafe Victoria, Preventing work-related stress - Information for employers in the public sector, 2008
- WorkSafe Victoria, Preventing work-related stress for health and safety representatives (HSRs) in the private sector, 2009
- WorkCover Queensland, Work-related stress, 2017
- Victorian Workplace Mental Wellbeing Collaboration, 2016
- ComCare, Work-related mental stress, 2016
- ComCare, HSE Management Standards on Stress, 2005
- ComCare, Working together; Promoting mental health and wellbeing at work (APS), 2014
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, Psychological Health and Safety – An action guide for employers
- Mental Health Commission of Canada, CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013 - Psychological health and safety in the workplace - Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation, 2013