

SafeWork NSW

Healthy Work

Principles Paper

November 2022



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You can complete the survey, share an idea or story, join a discussion forum, or any combination of these.



Introduction

In NSW, duty holders have legal obligations under Work Health & Safety legislation to ensure the health and safety of workers. Recent amendments to the Regulations have introduced specific obligations to consider the psychological health of employees in the design and systems of work, as well as the work environment.

Traditionally, occupational health and safety has been mainly focused on identifying risks to health from work and putting in place measures to ensure that workers are protected and safe whilst at work. This risk management approach is a fundamental foundation of **regulation** and **compliance** and has contributed to significant reductions in serious physical injuries and illnesses over time. However, the evidence to support the effectiveness of an integrated approach to health, safety and wellbeing has grown. With our experience and improved understanding of the relationship between physical and psychological health on work-related injury and illness, NSW has an opportunity to drive further improvements through a broader focus on safe and **healthy** work.

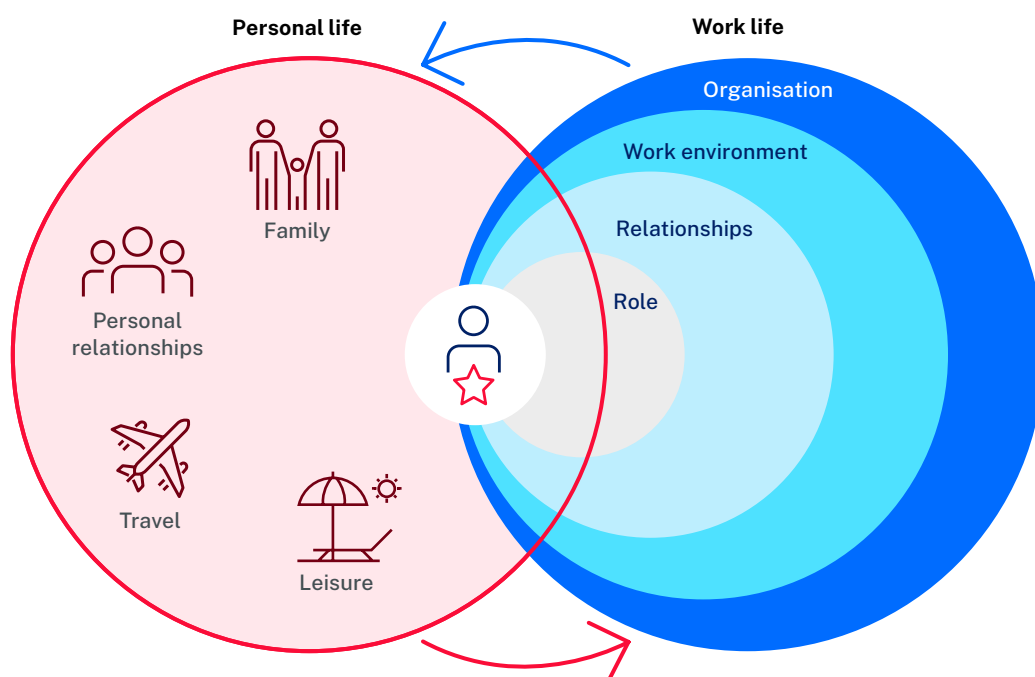


Healthy Work is when work is designed and managed in a way that does not cause harm, and has positive benefits to the physical and psychological health, safety, and wellbeing of workers.

Healthy work

Work and health are inseparable. The worker is a whole person – they bring their whole self to work, and the influence of their home life and community environment. Our experience with COVID-19 has changed where and when work is done - blurring the line between work and home for many workers. How they interact and interface with the job is directly affected by their health and wellbeing. If there are issues at home or in another part of a worker's life, this will affect their work performance and their risk of workplace harm. Employers who understand that workers lives can be complex, will better be able to anticipate risks to safety or the business.

At work, factors such as pay and conditions, relationships with colleagues and managers, the working environment and the way in which work is designed and organised (NIOSH) influence the health and wellbeing of workers, their families and their communities. It is now known that employers who create healthy work have workers who are happier, healthier, safer, valued, included, rewarded, trusted, and achieve more.



How healthy you feel at work is effected by your personal life and your working life and vice versa. Just as many elements of your personal life contribute to your sense of wellbeing, many elements of your life at work also play a role.

In light of the evidence and our growing understanding, our aspiration is to work with all of our stakeholders towards a new vision:

Work is designed to be HEALTHY and safe in NSW

Safework NSW will work with NSW businesses to realise this vision over the coming years. The following principles are for discussion and development. They will inform our new healthy work strategy:



Principle One: Healthy work is good for business

There is growing evidence that employers who actively promote health and wellbeing to their workers experience many direct benefits for their business including enhanced productivity, retention, reputation and safety.



Principle Two: Leadership is fundamental to creating healthy work

To bring about the most effective change, organisational **leadership and commitment** are essential. In larger organisations, this requires collaboration between health and safety professionals, HR and senior leadership. In smaller organisations, leadership is fundamental in achieving success: 'talking the talk' does not work – 'walking the walk' is essential.



Principle Three: Creation of healthy work relies on worker participation

The people who know best how to make work healthier are those doing it. Healthy work is best created in **consultation** and **partnership** with workers.



Principle Four: Design work to be healthy

To create healthy work, our aspirations need to grow. Instead of a focus on specific jobs or tasks, our aim should be creation of work that is '**safe, stimulating, satisfying and enjoyable**' for all. Well-designed healthy work 'optimises health and safety, human performance, job satisfaction, and business success'.



Principle Five: Healthy work can positively influence lives

Evidence suggests that healthy work has a positive influence on the lives of workers and their communities. Education and support to live more healthily can be taken home and used to improve the health of family members and communities. Employers who demonstrate care for the health and wellbeing of their workers enjoy **greater engagement** from their employees, and more **loyalty**. It is believed that workers respond to the efforts by their leaders by taking more action to improve their own health.



Principle Six: A strategic coordinated approach is required to achieve healthy work

An integrated approach combines safety and injury prevention with health and wellbeing to enhance worker health and prevent workplace injuries and illnesses. It needs a strategic and planned approach in the context of the current business goals and needs of the workers (as articulated by them) that **co-ordinates effort for worker health and wellbeing** across the organisation, especially WHS, workplace health promotion, people and culture. Efficiencies can be expected from the co-ordination, as well as a return on investment.



Principle Seven: Healthy work is built on a foundation of safety

If a workplace has neglected workplace hazards and flawed safety systems, attempts to broaden the dialogue to health and wellbeing is unlikely to be successful.

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