



IMAA

Psychosocial Safety Guiding Principles

Developed by: Human Kind Collective



Psychosocial Safety Introduction

This guide is designed for independent media agencies to protect their business and their people.

The pressures of running a business, finding work-life balance, and adapting to external changes can be challenging. Finding effective ways to look after mental health in your agency is important for keeping things running smoothly. Looking after mental health means investing in yourself and the people working with you to support your clients, move at pace, and remain competitive. Mentally healthy practices must be role modelled from the top but is everyone's responsibility.

Our Aim:

The aim of this guide is to provide independent media agencies with a comprehensive framework to foster a mentally healthy workplace. It is designed to assist agencies in navigating the complex interplay between workplace demands and mental health, ensuring leaders and staff are well-equipped to handle psychosocial risks effectively.

By offering actionable strategies for identifying, assessing, and managing these risks, the guide promotes a proactive approach to mental well-being. This ultimately enhances productivity, fosters a positive work environment, and supports sustainable business practices that prioritise the health and safety of every employee.

Key Take Outs

- All business owners have legal obligations related to workplace health and safety, which includes psychological health.
- There are many hazards and risks in the workplace that can negatively impact mental health.
- By identifying hazards and risks in your workplace, you can put plans in place to manage and minimise them, creating a better work environment for yourself and your team.

Outcomes

After reading this guide, independent media agencies can expect the following outcomes:

1. Enhanced Workplace Well-being: Agencies will be equipped with strategies to improve the mental health of their teams. This includes identifying and managing psychosocial hazards effectively, leading to a healthier, more supportive work environment.
2. Increased Productivity: By prioritizing mental health and reducing stressors, agencies can expect an uptick in productivity. Employees with better mental health are more engaged and efficient, contributing positively to the agency's output.
3. Compliance and Risk Management: The guide will help agencies fulfill their legal obligations related to workplace health and safety concerning psychological health. Understanding and implementing these practices will safeguard the agency against potential risks and liabilities associated with workplace mental health issues.

Created By:

This guide to creating mentally healthy independent media agencies was provided by **Human Kind Collective**, exclusively for the independent sector. CEO Virginia Scully is a licensed Mental Health First Aid Instructor in Australia.



Section 1. Understanding and managing psychosocial hazards.

Work provides purpose and fulfillment but can also lead to stress, particularly in your own businesses. Implementing measures to manage workplace hazards is essential for mental health. Many of us are familiar with physical hazards in the workplace, psychosocial hazards are things in the workplace that can cause psychological harm.

Under work health and safety legislation, all business owners have legal obligations to manage both physical and psychosocial risks in their workplace.

This includes taking steps to identify and manage psychosocial hazards that arises from, or relates to, one of the areas below and may cause;

Psychological harm: The design or management of work a work environment workplace interactions or behaviours.

Psychosocial risk: A psychosocial risk is a risk to the health or safety of a worker or other person arising from a psychosocial hazard.

Examples of potential psychosocial hazards that could occur in independent agencies

Potential Psychosocial Hazard	Example	Impact
High workloads and demands	Winning more clients leads to extended overtime.	Burnout, decreased productivity, increased errors, stress, anxiety, and negative health outcomes.
Lack of role clarity	Account Manager unsure of expectations post -promotion.	Stress, inefficiencies, task duplication, challenging performance evaluation, decreased job satisfaction and engagement.
Job Insecurity	Economic downturn leads to job insecurity.	Decreased morale, productivity, loyalty, presenteeism, risk-averse behavior, and retention challenges.
Insufficient resources	Tight cash flow results in understaffing.	Increased pressure, burnout, compromised work quality, and safety risks.
Insufficient Reward & Recognition	Feedback focuses only on improvements, not successes.	Decline in motivation and engagement, decreased job satisfaction, higher turnover, diminished effort.
Harassment & Workplace Bullying	Individual feels humiliated by repetitive unacceptable behavior.	Toxic environment, psychological harm, absenteeism, reduced productivity, legal/reputational risks.
Repetitive or unchallenging work	Work lacks variety or intellectual stimulation.	Boredom, disengagement, reduced motivation, increased errors, higher turnover.

Examples of potential psychosocial hazards that could occur in independent agencies

Potential Psychosocial Hazard	Example	Impact
Repetitive or unchallenging work	Work lacks variety or intellectual stimulation.	Boredom, disengagement, reduced motivation, increased errors, higher turnover.
Low Autonomy or Control Over Work	Micro-management by supervisor.	Reduced autonomy, job satisfaction, confidence, creativity, initiative, distrust.
Stressful Physical Environment	Poor ergonomics, excessive noise, or extreme temperatures.	Decreased concentration, increased fatigue, potential injuries, reduced productivity, compounded psychological stress.
Lack of Organisational Justice	Favoritism in promotions or resource distribution.	Undermines trust, reduces commitment, creates tensions, potential grievances or legal issues.
Harmful Workplace Interactions	Rudeness or dismissive behavior between colleagues.	Damages team cohesion, reduces collaboration, creates distress, potential escalation to conflicts or bullying.
Poor Support	Limited access to resources or guidance.	Increased stress, reduced problem-solving capacity, feelings of isolation and helplessness.
Low Levels of Autonomy/Control	Inability to decide on task completion or workday management.	Reduces ownership, stifles initiative and creativity, decreases job satisfaction, increases stress.
Exposure to Traumatic Events	Witnessing violence or distressing incidents at work.	Acute stress, PTSD symptoms, anxiety, depression, long-term psychological effects impacting performance and well-being.
Remote/Hybrid Working Challenges	Isolation, difficulty separating work/home life, and communication issues.	Loneliness, burnout from blurred boundaries, miscommunication, reduced team cohesion, inequality between on-site and remote workers.

Legal obligations related to mental health at work

Work, Health and Safety legislation, regulations and Codes of Practice.

These outline responsibilities related to providing a safe working environment. They include obligations to identify and manage hazards that may impact on health (including psychological health) and consultation with workers on matters that may impact health or safety.

See Safe Work Australia (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au) for more details and to find your local jurisdiction.

Workers' Compensation legislation.

These outline responsibilities for supporting workers who experience injuries or illnesses related to the workplace. This includes psychological injuries. Your obligations may include things your business needs to have in place even if no one has needed to make a workers' compensation claim (e.g. having a return to-work policy).

Safe Work Australia (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/workers-compensation) for more details and to find your local jurisdiction.)

Anti-discrimination legislation.

These outline protections people have to ensure they are not discriminated against based on a range of factors, including mental illness. This includes rights related to reasonable adjustments. Visit the Australian Human Rights Commission (www.humanrights.gov.au) for more information.

Privacy legislation.

Some businesses have obligations related to privacy legislation. Understanding privacy is important when you are collecting or managing personal or sensitive information such as people's mental health status. The Office of the Australian Information Commission (www.oaic.gov.au) has more information about privacy for small business.

Workplace relations legislation and agreements.

Small businesses have industrial relations obligations which detail things such as leave, unfair dismissal and consultation processes.

The Fair Work Ombudsman (www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/bestpractice-guides/small-business-and-the-fair-work-act) has resources for small business.

Specific work health and safety requirements and regulators vary across different states.

This means that if you have employees in different states, you may need to be aware of how requirements vary in different jurisdictions.

- To access more information about your jurisdiction, visit Safe Work Australia (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au).
- Business.gov.au also has a handy guide in understanding which work health and safety frameworks apply in your jurisdiction. (www.business.gov.au/risk-management/health-and-safety/work-health-and-safety#whs-requirements-in-your-state-or-territory)



Understanding Discrimination at Work

Managing bullying, harassment and discrimination at work

Bullying, harassment and discrimination can count as psychosocial hazards under work health and safety legislation. There are also additional legal requirements related to bullying, harassment and discrimination that all business owners should be aware of.

Bullying

Unreasonably towards another person, and this behaviour creates a risk to physical or psychological health and safety. Bullying can also occur between groups of people, or between a group and an individual.

Examples of bullying may include repeatedly:

- Behaving aggressively towards someone teasing or playing practical jokes on someone pressuring someone to behave inappropriately excluding someone.
- Imposing unreasonable work demands.

However, taking reasonable steps to manage poor performance or provide directions to workers is not bullying.

Harassment

Treating a person less favourably can also include harassing them. Harassment can include behaviour such as:

- Telling insulting jokes about particular racial groups.
- Sending explicit or sexually suggestive emails or text messages displaying racially offensive or pornographic posters or screen savers making derogatory comments or taunts about a person's disability.
- Asking intrusive questions about someone's personal life, including their sex life.

Even as a once-off incident, these actions still can count as harassment.

Discrimination

Discrimination occurs when a person, or a group of people, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or certain personal characteristics such as:

- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Race
- Disability

Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Some examples of direct discrimination include:

- Not employing the best person for the job because of a disability, paying a woman less than a man to do the same job, not employing a married woman because she may want to start a family.
- Not employing a person from a particular racial group because they will not 'fit in' with their co-workers.

Indirect discrimination can be less obvious. It can happen when organisations put in place conditions that seem to treat everyone equally, but that actually disadvantage some people.

Some examples of indirect discrimination include:

- Requiring a deaf person to attend a meeting without an Auslan interpreter.
- Not offering part-time workers the same opportunities for mentoring, training and promotion as full-time workers, offering only married employees working in remote locations allowances and leave to visit their families (not those who are single or in de facto relationships).
- Not allowing workers to wear hats or other head wear at work, which can affect people from some racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Understanding Discrimination at Work

Sex discrimination

Sex discrimination happens when a person is treated less favourably because of their sex, gender identity, intersex status, sexual orientation, marital or relationship status, family responsibilities, because they are pregnant or might become pregnant or because they are breastfeeding. Some examples of direct sex discrimination include:

- Not employing a woman because she will not fit into a 'traditionally' male workplace.
- Paying a woman less than a man for doing the same job.

Indirect sex discrimination can be less obvious. It can happen when organisations put conditions in place that seem to treat everyone equally, but that actually disadvantage some people.

Some examples of indirect sex discrimination include:

- Not allowing workers to take short breaks at particular times (which may disadvantage women who are breastfeeding).
- Offering only married employees working in remote locations allowances and leave to visit their families (not those who are single or in de facto relationships).

Sexual harassment

Treating a person less favourably can also include harassing them. Sexual harassment can include behaviour such as:

- Staring, leering or unwelcome touching.
- Sending explicit or sexually suggestive emails or text messages displaying pornographic posters or screen savers.
- Asking intrusive questions about someone's personal life, including their sex life.
- Unwanted invitations to go out on dates or requests for sex.
- Unnecessary familiarity, such as deliberately brushing up against a person.

Even a once-off incident can be sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment connected with employment can be considered serious misconduct and can be a valid reason for dismissal.

To find out more, look at the Fair Work Ombudsman Advice:

www.fairwork.gov.au/employmentconditions/bullying-sexual-harassment-and-discrimination-at-work/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace.

Legal obligations related to bullying, harassment and discrimination

Legal obligations related to bullying, harassment and discrimination may fall under many different laws.

Bullying, harassment and discrimination may be considered a psychosocial hazard under work health and safety laws. You must identify and control all psychosocial hazards and risks in your workplace so far as is reasonably practicable.

If a worker experiences a psychological injury as a result of exposure to a hazard while working for your business, you may be liable under workers' compensation legislation.

The 'Respect At Work' bill is now coming into effect - which means workplaces will have a positive duty for preventing sexual harassment

Anti-discrimination laws in your jurisdiction create legal obligations to protect workers from discrimination and harassment based on certain characteristics. Certain activities may be prosecuted under criminal law, for example damage to property, physical assault, sexual assault or intimidation.

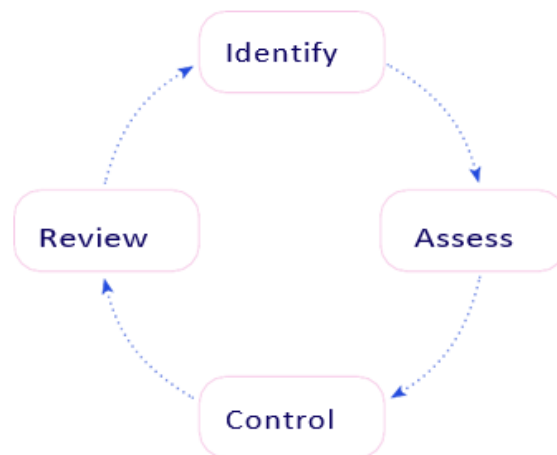
In some circumstances civil action may be taken to claim damages that result from being exposed to these behaviours in the workplace.

This list of relevant legislation demonstrates the importance of protecting people from bullying, harassment or discrimination at work. It also highlights the importance of seeking advice if you believe this is becoming a concern in your workplace.

Section 2. Assessment and Action

Mental health hazards can arise from three types of workplace factors – the way the workplace is organised (e.g. low job control or high time pressures), the physical work environment (e.g. dark or disorganised), and the way work is done (e.g. how time is organised or workplace bullying).

Safe Work Australia describes 4 key steps in managing psychosocial hazards and risks:



Identify:

This should provide you with an understanding of what types of physical and psychosocial hazards are present in your business. Identifying hazards can be done in a variety of ways, including inspecting your workplace, talking and listening to your workers, observing workers' actions and interactions, conducting a survey or providing an anonymous suggestion box.

Assess:

This should provide you with an understanding of potential risks and consequences associated with each of the hazards you identify. The level of risk or potential consequences may vary based on how often someone is exposed to the hazard, the scale of the hazard or other factors such as who is it occurring to or what other hazards are present at the same time.

Control:

This should help you identify ways to eliminate or minimise potential risks. Elimination is the best approach where it is possible. If you cannot eliminate risks, think about ways you can control the potential risk. This may be through changing the work environment or work duties, providing more support or training, putting policies and procedures in place or rotating people to minimise their exposure.

- Eliminate risks to mental health.
- Control the risks that cannot be eliminated.
- Educate staff to ensure control measures are effective.
- Encourage individual behaviours that support mental health.

Review:

It is important to check that the controls you put in place are working as intended. This means checking that policies, procedures and other controls are being followed. It also means checking to see whether these controls appear to be reducing your risk. This process is a continual process. You should always be aware of current and emerging psychosocial hazards, which strategies are in place to control risks and whether these are working.

Assess work design

Work design can reduce health and safety risks and enhance productivity, job fulfilment and wellbeing at work. Work design refers to the tasks and duties completed as part of an employee's role, how they undertake them, and what resources are needed to complete them.

To improve work design for yourself or people who work with you, you may want to consider things such as:

- Defining clear roles and responsibilities.
- Ensuring people have the right skills and training for the role.
- Assessing whether people have the right technology, software, equipment and information to do their job properly.
- Considering whether people have got enough variation or diversity to keep their work interesting.
- Making sure people feel supported in their work and able to influence how they do their work.

Ensure every employee has a clear personalised position description that outlines core responsibilities and behaviours, flex preferences and consider strengths-based profiling to correlate to the role to ensure the employee is capable and supported in the delivery of those responsibilities.

- Create a positive workplace culture: Model behaviours that are respectful and make it known to workers that any behaviour that is bullying, harassment or discrimination will be taken seriously and could result in dismissal. Make all employees aware of this information to avoid singling anyone out.
- Creating workplace policies: You can outline policies about acceptable behaviour that include bullying, harassment and discrimination. These policies can include how to report these behaviours and potential consequences. These policies can be part of induction processes and be reviewed by staff on a regular basis.
- Have clear procedures in place to respond: Ensure you have a procedure in place for what to do if these behaviours do occur. This includes reporting, formal complaints procedures, conflict resolution processes and informal and formal warnings.
- Address complaints early: If an employee informally complains about the behaviour of another employee or contractor, address the issue before it goes further.
- Reduce risk factors: Many factors can lead to strained relationships, bullying and harassment in the workplace. Examples include high job demands, role conflict and ambiguity, lack of training or poor communication.

Reduce risk of discrimination in recruitment

You can also reduce the risk of discrimination by having a clear understanding of the key job criteria and considering who is best to do this based on these criteria. For example:

- When hiring new employees, base your selection criteria and interview questions on key areas of the job, for example, being proficient in Microsoft Office or being able to work in a fast-paced environment. Avoid mentioning personal characteristics – such as school attended, age, sex or race.
- When short listing job applicants, look at how their skills and experience match the criteria for the role.
- Assign tasks to employees based on their skills and demonstrated abilities, not what you assume they can do or would like to do.
- Allow the same opportunities to all employees, for example, training and learning new skills, consideration for promotions or pay rises, or autonomy to lead on certain tasks or projects.

Get support and advice

- Get HR advice: Consult HR to get ahead of risk by creating a plan for your workplace. Refer the Human Kind Framework. HR consultancy can also provide peace of mind by having an expert on call to review situations as they arise.
- Get legal advice: Business owners may be able to get free legal help on issues such as bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination through professional associations, insurers or the Fair Work Commission (www.fwc.gov.au/apply-or-lodge/legal-help-and-representation/legal-advice-workplace-advice-service), including advice on bullying at work.

Client Relationship Management and Mental Health

Client relationships are the lifeblood of independent agencies but can also be a significant source of psychosocial hazards. Consider these approaches:

- **Client onboarding:** Include clear expectations around communication, feedback processes, and response times in your client onboarding materials.
- **Client classification:** Assess clients based on both revenue and resource demands, identifying those that may pose psychosocial hazards despite financial benefits.
- **Leadership buffer:** Agency leaders should act as buffers between challenging clients and team members where necessary, particularly for junior staff.
- **Regular relationship reviews:** Implement quarterly relationship reviews that include not just performance metrics but also team wellbeing considerations.

Implementing mental health initiatives doesn't have to be expensive. Consider these cost-effective approaches:

- **Mental health first aid champions:** Train interested team members as mental health champions
- **Skill sharing:** Encourage team members to share stress management techniques they find effective.
- **Free resources:** Utilise free mental health apps and resources from organizations like Beyond Blue and Heads Up.
- **Flexible working:** Implement flexibility that costs nothing but can significantly improve mental wellbeing.
- **Peer support structures:** Establish buddy systems where team members check in with each other regularly.

Simple Tool for Small Teams: Implement a weekly "traffic light" check-in where team members can indicate their current capacity and stress levels:

- Green: Managing well, capacity for more work
- Yellow: At capacity, but coping
- Red: Overloaded, needs support or resource reallocation

Mental Health First Aid Training

Mental health first aid equips leaders to recognise and respond to mental health challenges within their teams. By fostering a supportive environment, leaders can promote employee well-being, enhance productivity, and reduce stigma around mental health issues. It also helps leaders identify when to seek professional help for their team members, ultimately creating a culture of openness and resilience. Prioritising mental health not only benefits individual employees but also strengthens overall team dynamics and organisational success.

Mental health first aid accreditation involves several key components:

- **Training Course:** Participants undergo a comprehensive training program, usually spanning 2 days. This includes understanding mental health conditions, how to provide initial support, and when to refer individuals to professional help.
- **Course Content:** The curriculum covers topics such as:
 - Recognising signs and symptoms of mental health issues.
 - Crisis intervention strategies.
 - Communication skills for effective support.
 - Action plans for different mental health situations.
- **Assessment:** Participants need to complete assessments or practical demonstrations to show their understanding of the material and ability to apply it in real-life scenarios.
- **Certification:** Upon successful completion of the training and assessments, participants receive a certificate or accreditation, validating their skills as mental health first aiders.

Human Kind Collective are qualified mental health first aid instructors and can facilitate your leaders training.

Tools and Resources:

NASBO

Beyond Blue's NewAccess for Small Business Owners provides a guided self-help mental health coaching program.
beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess-mental-healthcoaching/newaccess-for-smallbusiness-owners

NASBO

Provided by the Department of Health to search free or low cost digital supports for mental health.
headtohealth.gov.au

Beyond Blue

24/7 support for mental health and wellbeing via phone, web chat and online forum.

[1300 22 4636](tel:1300224636)
beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline Australia

24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.

[13 11 14](tel:131114)
lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service

24/7 telephone crisis support for people at risk of suicide, carers and bereaved, as well as online resources and information.

1300 659 467
suicidecallbackservice.org.au

MensLine Australia

24/7 telephone and online support, information and referral service for men.

1300 78 99 78
mensline.org.au/phone-andonline-counselling

Kids Helpline

24/7 telephone counselling for young people under 25 years.

[1800 55 1800](tel:1800551800)
kidshelpline.com.au

headspace Australia

Telephone and web chat for young people aged 12 to 25 years.

[1800 650 890](tel:1800650890)
headspace.org.au

QLife

Telephone and online chat support service for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex (LGBTI) communities.

[1800 184 527](tel:1800184527)
qlife.org.au

Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia offers a broad range of services to individuals, families and communities throughout the country.

[1300 364 277](tel:1300364277)
relationships.org.au

Butterfly Foundation

Support for people affected by eating disorders via telephone, web chat or email.

[1800 334 673](tel:1800334673)
butterfly.org.au

Tools and Resources:

Carers Australia

Carer gateway of practical advice and connection with local carer services.

1800 422 737

carersaustralia.com.au

SANE

Resources, forums and support for people affected by complex mental health issues.

1800 187 263

sane.org

National Debt Helpline

Financial counselling advice for financial hardship.

1800 007 007

ndh.org.au

Counselling Online

24/7 support for anyone affected by alcohol and other drugs.

counsellingonline.org.au

Gambling Help Online

24/7 support for anyone affected by gambling

1800 858 858 24/7

gamblinghelponline.org.au

Wellmob

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

wellmob.org.au

3 YARN

13YARN (Thirteen YARN) connects mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter.

139 276

13YARN13yarn.org.au

Standby

Provides free face-to face and/or telephone support for anyone impacted by suicide

1300 727 247

standbysupport.com.au

Living Works training

Provides a range of online and in person training to help identify people with thoughts of suicide and connect them with lifesaving first aid resources.

livingworks.com.au

Mindspot

Providing assessment and treatments, including therapist support, accessible online.

1800 61 44 34

mindspot.org.au

About Human Kind Collective

Human Kind Collective is an award-winning People and Culture consultancy dedicated to independent media agencies with large hearts.

With deep industry expertise, we craft strategies and ideas that enhance talent management, foster inclusive and mentally healthy workplaces, and build cultures that drive results.

Human Kind Collective will continue to monitor updates impacting psychosocial legislation and provide updates with the latest and best practice approaches for complying with new obligations.

Consulting and training inquiries can be made via;

virginia@humankindcollective.com.au

www.humankindcollective.com.au

0448 442 826

About IMAA:

The IMAA was established in February 2020 as a new, national industry body that represents Australia's independent media agencies. The IMAA promotes the benefits of working with independent media agencies, building awareness and respect for the sector, creating a knowledge-sharing forum and helping build the Australian economy by supporting 100% Australian-owned businesses.

<https://www.theimaa.com.au/>

Disclaimer

This summary is based on the "Psychosocial Safety Guiding Principles" document developed by Human Kind Collective for the Independent Media Agencies Association (IMAA). All content, resources, and recommendations referenced in this document come from the original source material.

The information provided is intended as a general guide only and may be subject to change as legislation, regulations, and best practices evolve. This guide should not replace professional legal, medical, or workplace health and safety advice. Organisations and individuals should consult with qualified professionals regarding specific circumstances or concerns.

The contact information, websites, and resources listed were accurate at the time of publication but may change over time. Users should verify current information before contacting any service or organisation mentioned.

While this document provides guidance on creating psychologically safe workplaces, implementation should be tailored to each organisation's specific needs, size, industry requirements, and jurisdictional obligations. Organisations remain responsible for ensuring compliance with all applicable laws and regulations in their jurisdiction.



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