

Information Sheet

Workplace Health and Safety

Under the Qld *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*, your employer has a general legal duty to provide a safe and healthy work environment. This means your employer must ensure that the health and safety of workers is not adversely affected by their work. Issues and problems at work that remain unresolved can cause stress and illness.

You have the right to be protected from injury, illness and all other mental and physical health risks while at work. This includes measures like the correct physical safety practices, including storage of chemicals and limits on lifting heavy loads, as well as the right to work in an environment free from harassment or bullying. (Refer to the QWWS info sheet on Workplace Harassment Prevention).

Whether you are a member of a union or not you have rights at work around workplace health and safety.

The Australian Council of Trade Union states that...“When you're confronted with a health or safety issue at work, you don't have to deal with it alone. Workers need to have their say when it comes to workplace safety because it is an issue that affects them directly”.

Employees also have the right to be consulted by their employers when there are significant changes occurring, or likely to occur in workplaces including restructure or redundancies.

Psychological stress can be created when issues and problems at work remain unresolved, and many clients report feelings of isolation, depression and helplessness when dealing with ongoing problems in the workplace. Support can assist you in deciding the best course of action for you. Seeking information from your GP, counsellor or other health practitioner is important for your wellbeing. See your GP or health professional as soon as possible if workplace problems are getting on top of you. If your problem is a physical issue from an injury at work it is also important to advise your employer immediately and to seek medical assistance.

Concerns for working women

A recent survey caught a snapshot of issues affecting many callers to the QWWS for work-related health issues. The top 5 issues reported to the QWWS were: stress, depression, breakdown in workplace relationships and bullying, harassment or discrimination at work. Injuries at work also can cause stress in addition to the initial problem if they are not handled appropriately.

These are some of the key things you can do for your wellbeing. They may seem simple but in our experience they can help reduce anxiety and maintain wellness.

1. Connect to people and talk about your situation with those you trust and have supportive relationships with.

2. Engage in some physical activity that YOU enjoy that helps you unwind. Things as simple as walking, yoga, going to the gym, swimming or playing a sport can help relieve mental stress.
3. Take notice of the things around you that are not work related and reflect on what matters to you. <http://www.actmindfully.com.au/mindfulness>.
4. Keep learning – take on something new that interests you to increase your self esteem and confidence; even reading about workplace stress or the issue concerning you can help you to grow and understand your situation better, including your rights in the workplace.
5. Think of your life outside work and take slow, even breaths to help calm and centre your thoughts.
6. Ensure that you know your rights about workplace health and safety and have support in upholding these – union membership can be very important here.

Workers' Compensation

If you are injured at work or become ill as a result of work, you may be entitled to workers' compensation for lost wages, medical and other expenses. You are also covered if you are injured on a journey to or from work.

You should report any injury or accident to your employer as soon as possible and preferably in writing. Do this even if the injury is minor and you don't need time off, as the injury may cause problems later on. Any employee can claim, including casuals, and apprentices and trainees. Generally, independent contractors are not able to make a claim though it is best to get advice about this.

There are time limits that apply to making a claim and an assessment process to go through where you have specific rights and responsibilities. For more information about Workcover in Queensland visit: <http://www.workcoverqld.com.au>.

Other places for information and support include:

Women's info link: provides free and confidential information and referral services about government agencies and community services supporting women. Free call statewide telephone service – 1800 177 577 – Mondays to Fridays 8 am to 6 pm.
<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/women/about-us/womens-infolink>.

Women's Health Queensland: Women's Health provides balanced information independent of health care provider interests for women and health workers.
07) 3839 9962 or 1800 017 676 (toll free outside Brisbane) <http://www.womhealth.org.au>.

For more information about workplace health and safety visit:
<http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/index.htm>.

The Australian Council of Unions has information on their website and can direct you to the union that covers your industry. If you are already a union member it is advisable to let them know what is happening at work if high stress is an issue. <http://www.actu.org>.

