



Preventing workplace bullying position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the responsibilities the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers employers and workers should meet to prevent workplace bullying. It should be read with the ANMF position statements: *Workplace health and safety*; *Preventing workplace stress*; and *Preventing workplace sexual harassment*.

2. Definitions

SafeWork Australia defines **bullying** as repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed at a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety.¹ Bullying can be instigated by a single person or a group and need not be intentional. A single incident of negative behaviour; low level workplace conflict; or reasonable management actions done in a reasonable way are not bullying.

3. Context

Research shows that nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing experience bullying at work.² Bullying is a serious workplace health and safety (WHS) hazard. It affects workers' physical and psychological health and wellbeing and contributes to high staff turnover and personal leave.

All workers have the right to a healthy and safe working environment. This includes a workplace that is free from bullying. In Australia, this right is protected through state, territory and national WHS laws and regulations.³

4. Position

Employer responsibilities

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. Employers have a legal obligation to provide workers with a working environment that is safe and without risk to health. This means they must eliminate and prevent workplace bullying.
2. To fulfil this obligation, employers must collaborate with WHS committees, health and safety representatives (HSRs), staff, unions, and experts to develop and implement a whole-of-organisation strategy to prevent bullying that considers all aspects of organisational development including:⁴
 - leadership and culture
 - organisational knowledge
 - risk management
 - support for staff
 - reporting and responding
 - monitoring and evaluation.

¹ SafeWork Australia. *Guide for preventing and responding to workplace bullying*. Available at: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/hazards/bullying>.

² Assistant in nursing refers to all care workers however titled.

³ *Workplace health and safety* is referred to as *occupational health and safety* in Victoria.

⁴ See the SafeWork Australia publication *Guide for preventing and responding to workplace bullying* for advice. Available at: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/guide-preventing-and-responding-workplace-bullying>.



3. This bullying prevention strategy should include the measures detailed in 4-9 below and be reviewed, evaluated and improved annually.

Leadership and culture

4. The bullying prevention strategy should include:
 - proactive measures to create a workplace culture that practises and values:
 - good management and positive leadership
 - clear and effective communication
 - teamwork and co-operation
 - clear expectations for managers and supervisors around appropriate workplace behaviour and culture including:
 - the clear advice that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated
 - people management performance indicators in managers' job descriptions, contracts and performance appraisals.

Organisational knowledge

5. The bullying prevention strategy should include:
 - training for managers and supervisors in people management and conflict resolution
 - education programs for managers and workers that build awareness of workers' rights and responsibilities in relation to bullying including:
 - how to recognise bullying
 - the workplace policies and procedures for preventing and managing bullying
 - the workplace policies and procedures for reporting bullying, including how to report bullying when the worker's manager or immediate supervisor is allegedly involved
 - appropriate bystander action
 - support mechanisms for victims of bullying
 - whistleblower protections for workers who raise concerns about bullying in good faith.

Risk management

6. The bullying prevention strategy should include:
 - mechanisms for designing safe systems of work that:
 - clearly define jobs and seek regular feedback from workers about their role and responsibilities
 - provide workers with the resources, information and training they need to carry out their tasks safely and effectively
 - review and monitor workloads and staffing levels
 - provide effective communication throughout all workplace change.



Support for staff

7. The bullying prevention strategy should include:
- access to employee assistance programs for employees affected by workplace bullying
 - the capacity to have a support person present such as a HSR, union representative or work colleague at meetings to discuss and investigate a report of bullying
 - clear instructions to all staff to ensure anyone who reports workplace bullying or is accused of it is not victimised.

Reporting and responding

8. The bullying prevention strategy should include:
- written organisational policies and protocols developed in consultation with workers, union representatives, HSRs, and managers that encourage reporting and detail:
 - the required behaviour standards and the consequences for breaches
 - specific procedures for reporting bullying including an independent external process
 - specific procedures for responding to and investigating reports of bullying that ensure confidentiality; provide natural justice to all parties; and keep all parties up to date about the investigation process and outcomes.

Monitoring and evaluation

9. The bullying prevention strategy should include:
- an incident management system that enables timely and confidential reporting; data collection; and analysis
 - regular scheduled discussions at management meetings, staff meetings and WHS committee meetings to review incident reports and findings; analyse staff turnover, exit reports and the use of employee assistance programs.

Worker responsibilities

It is the position of the ANMF that:

10. Workers, including nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing, must:
- comply with all workplace policies, procedures and codes of conduct relating to all aspects of WHS, including workplace bullying
 - take reasonable care of their own health and safety and the health and safety of others who may be affected by their behaviour
 - co-operate with the employer in any reasonable action to provide a safe and secure workplace and meet WHS obligations
 - report any work-related bullying hazards or incidents as per the workplace reporting procedure as soon as possible
 - when in management and supervisory positions:
 - recognise the causes and signs of bullying and follow the workplace procedures to address it
 - ensure their own behaviour always meets the required standards



11. Workers who consider they are being subjected to bullying or who witness bullying should:
- keep a diary of the incidents and the names of any witnesses
 - report the bullying as per the workplace reporting procedure and keep a record of the report
 - seek support, guidance and help from the ANMF as soon as possible.

5. Position statement management

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