

BREAKING THE SILENCE



PREVENTING GENDERED VIOLENCE IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR



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WELCOME



PAUL HEALEY

SECRETARY, HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES UNION

We're proud that HACSU has been awarded a share of WorkSafe Victoria's \$3 million WorkWell Respect Fund. This funding is a crucial step towards tackling the specific challenges faced by health and community services workers.

In light of the national focus on gender-based violence, our Breaking The Silence Project deepens our commitment to prevention, training, and stronger procedural reforms. This initiative not only supports our dedicated healthcare workers but also drives improved outcomes for employers, patients, and participants.

Our commitment extends to:

- Implementing comprehensive policies to create safer workplaces.
- Enhancing training programs that empower our workers.
- Providing necessary resources to address and prevent work-related gendered violence.
- Developing strategies to retain a competent and resilient workforce by ensuring a supportive and respectful work environment.

Together, we're dedicated to fostering a safer, more inclusive, and sustainable work environment where our health and community sector thrives.



ABOUT **BREAKING THE SILENCE**

The Breaking The Silence Project is a pioneering initiative designed to confront the challenges of gender-based violence and sexual harassment within the disability and mental health sectors. Recognizing the unique vulnerabilities faced by these workers, our project launches a pilot program with two leading employers in the disability and mental health fields.

This innovative program will provide specialized training to approximately 1,000 disability workers and 600 mental health workers. Our aim is to equip these professionals with best-practice responses to gendered violence and sexual harassment, enhancing their ability to create safer workplace environments.

To ensure that our training programs are deeply informed by those on the front lines, we have established an expert workforce steering committee. This committee, consisting of 6 mental health workers and 6 disability workers, plays a crucial role in shaping our initiatives, ensuring that feedback from actual workplace experiences drives the development of our training materials.

Moreover, all our training content and workplace policies undergo academic evaluation by the Australian National University's Global Institute of Women's Leadership and the University of Sydney. This academic scrutiny helps refine our approaches, ensuring they are grounded in the latest research and best practices.

Our findings and progress will be regularly shared with WorkSafe Victoria and the Sexual Harassment Learning Network. This collaboration aims to inform broader policy implementations and foster state and federal commitments to preventing workplace gendered violence and sexual harassment. Through the Breaking The Silence Project, we are dedicated to creating a safer, more respectful work environment for all.

EMPOWERING EMPLOYERS: CREATING SAFE WORKPLACES

With new legislation, employers now have the responsibility to eliminate sexual misconduct.

Since December 2023, New Federal Legislation requires employers to take "reasonable and proportionate" measures to eliminate sexual discrimination, harassment, and victimisation in the workplace as much as possible."

Despite this mandate, we recognise that the health and community sector lack specific tools and a consistent approach; responses to gendered violence, sexual harassment, and occupational violence and aggression (OVA) differ from site to site. Currently, there are no targeted prevention and early intervention measures specifically for healthcare workers, regardless of their Employment Agreement (EA) status.

Our vision for this project is to establish standardized workplace procedures that promote prevention and early intervention in healthcare settings. By focusing on interactions with patients, we aim to significantly reduce incident rates and encourage reporting, addressing the prevalent issue of under-reporting within care environments.

We believe that without the additional support of employers in providing accessible, affordable healthcare, businesses will struggle to sustain their investment in workforce skills and training.

Recruitment and Retention

The training, tracked and consulted by academic partners at the Australian



National University (ANU), is designed to enhance the resilience of our workforce. We are advocating for state and federal government funding to support this initiative.

The health and community services sectors are projected to need an additional 65,000 healthcare workers over the next three years. Without substantial improvements in the health and safety of workers across various sectors—including mental health, disability, aged care, substance abuse, general health, allied health, and emergency services—meeting this demand will be increasingly difficult.

Breaking The Silence's Goal is to create an environment that is not only capable of handling high-stress situations but also safe and attractive, thereby helping to attract and retain more professionals in the health and community workforce.



ACADEMIC PARTNERS



Australian
National
University

THE GLOBAL
INSTITUTE
FOR WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP

The Global Institute of Women's Leadership (GIWL) will develop the academic framework for The Breaking The Silence Project, which focuses on tackling gender-based violence in healthcare settings. Led by Dr. Gosia Mikolajczak, a Research Fellow at GIWL with a background in gender and gender-related policies, the project will commence with an Initial literature review to identify gaps and best practices in current training methodologies.

Providing Feedback and Advice on developing training programs to ensure they are evidence-based and effective.
Evaluating Pilot Training through qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to assess effectiveness and suggest improvements

Offering Ongoing Thought Leadership and producing a final research paper with innovative recommendations for supporting frontline healthcare workers.

Delivering an Evaluation and Research Report to HACSU, influencing future training and policies for WorkSafe Victoria



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

The University of Sydney will provide academic support and advice for all the Project matters relating to reproductive health and well-being in an industrial setting.

This will be conducted by the Professor of Gender and Employment Relations and Head of the Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies at the University of Sydney, Marian Baird.



TRAINING PARTNERS

RESILIENT AND SKILLED WORKERS. SAFER WORKPLACE.

Over the next 18 months, HACSU, in collaboration with Women's Health Victoria and Phoenix Australia, will develop specialised training programs tailored for workers, employers, and government departments in the mental health and disability sectors. These programs aim to address and prevent gender-based violence and sexual assault in the workplace.

The training packages will be available both in-person and online to accommodate workforces in metropolitan and regional areas. These programs will ensure participants are equipped with the knowledge and skills to create safer work environments and effectively support their colleagues.

Key components of the training will include:

- Active Bystander Training: Empowering individuals to safely intervene and support victims of gender-based violence and sexual assault.
- Safe and Supported Workplaces: Implementing strategies to foster a safe and inclusive workplace culture.
- Strategies to Cope with Vicarious Trauma: Providing tools and techniques to manage the emotional impact of supporting victims.
- Supporting Others in Difficult Times: Equipping participants with skills to offer effective support to colleagues experiencing distress.
- These comprehensive training programs will enhance the capacity of workers and employers to prevent and respond to incidents of gender-based violence and sexual assault, contributing to a safer and more supportive workplace environment.



GOVERNANCE MODEL: WORKFORCE STEERING COMMITTEE + WORKING GROUP

A group of mental health and disability workers will form an expert reference group known as the Workforce Steering Committee (WSC). This committee will address feedback on training and procedures from frontline workers, developing toolkits to establish reporting standards, raise awareness, and create targeted responses. Currently, responses to gendered violence, sexual harassment, and occupational violence and aggression (OVA) vary across different sites, with no standardized prevention or early intervention measures in place for healthcare workers, regardless of their employment agreements.

The executive Workwell Working Group (WWG), consisting of employers, HACSU representatives, and academics, will regularly consult and review all proposals. Our governance model ensures that both the WSC and WWG have a say. Our goal is to achieve consensus rather than conflict, aiming to develop a feasible product that effectively addresses workplace gender-based violence.

By implementing an agreed upon workplace procedure to promote prevention and early-intervention measures in healthcare settings, including in relation to patients, we believe that the rates will be dramatically lowered and workers will be more likely to report as we know that under-reporting is rife within the caring settings.

Reporting and Checklists:

Visual Signifier Pilot: Inspired by the Bluehats initiative in the construction sector, which uses visual signifiers to indicate that peers are trained in suicide awareness and are safe to speak with, we propose a similar system for the healthcare and community services industry. The Bluehats program normalises mental health discussions by training workers to recognise signs of stress.

In collaboration with our workforce steering committee, we aim to develop a visual signifier specifically designed for the health and community sectors. This peer-to-peer support network will provide education, training, and support to workers on a site-by-site basis, fostering a culture of safety and openness.

We believe that workplace safety in healthcare can be enhanced to match the rigorous standards of construction sites. Unlike construction workers, healthcare workers cannot simply leave their work environment when it becomes unsafe, making it crucial to implement robust safety and support measures within healthcare settings.



ENGAGING KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SECTOR

Disconnect between Employers/Funding Agents and Departments

HACSU is collaborating with key stakeholders at both state and national levels. All research findings and feedback will be provided to WorkSafe and the Sexual Harassment Learning Network to guide policy implementation.

HACSU knows workers and employers cannot tackle these issues alone. HACSU is committed to engaging with stakeholders and advocating for meaningful policies, not just empty words.

In addition to major service providers, we are briefing peak bodies on the rationale of the project, including the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Victorian Hospital Industry Association, National Disability Services, and Mental Health Victoria.

OUR PARTNERS



Women's Health Victoria is dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of all Victorian women. Women's Health Victoria is one of the three statewide services, which along with nine regional services have been a driving force progressing and shaping Victoria's women's health and equality for four decades.



Phoenix Australia is an expert in trauma-related mental health and wellbeing. For over 25 years, we have been Australia's National Centre of Excellence in Posttraumatic Mental Health and internationally recognised leaders in our field. We are committed to driving forward the mental health agenda both at home and abroad.



The Global Institute for Women's Leadership (GIWL) was chaired and founded by the Hon. Julia Gillard AC - the only woman to have served as Prime Minister of Australia - in 2018. ANU bring together rigorous research, practice and advocacy to better understand and address the causes of workplace gender inequality and the lack of gender diversity in leadership positions across sectors and countries.



Founded in 1920, the first of its kind in Australia, the University of Sydney Business School offers a new multidisciplinary research initiative leveraging several decades of research expertise on women's working lives to establish an action-oriented, practical approach to building a gender equal future of work.