



**Policy**

# Early Intervention Policy

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# 1 Purpose and authority

The Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS) is committed to supporting safe, respectful, and healthy working environments for staff employed under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* (MOP(S) Act). This includes reducing the risk of workplace injury and illness through an integrated approach which includes hazard identification, risk management and early intervention and support for ill or injured employees.

This policy provides guidance to parliamentarians and MOP(S) Act employees on the early intervention supports that are generally available if an employee sustains a work-related physical or psychological illness or injury.

# 2 Key principles

- Employees are supported to continue work or return to work as soon as reasonably practicable through the provision of early intervention measures.
- Managers play a critical role in identifying and responding to warning signs and reports of a physical or psychological illness or injury for their staff.
- Participating in early intervention is voluntary and employees may withdraw from early intervention support at any time.
- Early intervention does not impact an employee's ability to lodge a workers' compensation claim and can occur in parallel while a claim is being determined.

# 3 Expectations and Responsibilities

## 3.1 Mutual

- Take reasonable care to manage their own health and safety.
- Report early warning signs of physical or psychological illness or injury by submitting an incident report.
- Familiarise themselves with this policy and related guidance material.

## 3.2 Parliamentarians and authorised persons

- Create a workplace culture and workplace practices that aim to prevent injury, minimise workplace hazards and demonstrate a commitment to supporting employees through early intervention, rehabilitation and return to work processes.
- At the earliest sign of physical or psychological injury or illness, facilitate discussions with the employee to determine appropriate support (refer section 11).
- Facilitate the provision of reasonable workplace adjustments and suitable duties where required.
- Maintain the privacy of the employee in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*.

### 3.3 Employees

- Advise their employer of any absences from work due to an injury or illness and provide medical certificates or other documentary evidence when requested.
- Record all absences in accordance with the [Enterprise Agreement](#) and the [Leave and public holidays guideline](#).
- Notify their employer (as required by law) if an injury or illness affects their ability to do their job, or if it may cause health and safety issues for others. In meeting this obligation an employee may exercise choice as to whether they disclose their condition. Additional information can be found at [Attachment A](#) and in the [Australian Human Rights Commission's publication 'Identifying as a person with a disability in the workplace'](#).
- Collaborate with their employer, the PWSS and other stakeholders to develop and agree to early intervention support that assists them to undertake their duties without risk to their health and safety or the health and safety of others.

### 3.4 Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS)

- Assist employees recover and/or return to work as soon as possible following a physical or psychological injury or illness through the provision of early intervention.
- Provide advice and guidance to the employee and parliamentarian on early intervention, recovery and related human resource matters.
- Engage with other stakeholders to ensure that there is a coordinated and unified approach to an employee's recovery and/or return to work.
- Facilitate health assessments and/or the engagement of a workplace rehabilitation provider or diagnostic services where appropriate.
- Facilitate the reimbursement of expenses incurred by the employee as part of an approved early intervention process.

## 4 What is early intervention?

Early intervention is action taken to minimise the impact and duration of emerging symptoms of physical or psychological ill health and/or an actual physical or psychological injury or illness. It aims to achieve this through the provision of early and appropriate clinical and self-management treatment and support to assist employees in managing their symptoms, injury or illness.

Early intervention can also reduce the risk of a chronic or secondary condition developing. The earlier an employee is identified as experiencing potential signs of physical or psychological ill health or injury, the sooner steps can be taken to help them.

### 4.1 Benefits

Evidence shows that employees are more likely to stay at, or return to, work where potential risks to their health and safety have been identified, their individual needs assessed, and treatment and/or rehabilitation services commenced as soon as possible. Early intervention programs have been found to have a positive effect for both employees and employers, including:

- improving recovery outcomes

- strengthening their capacity to remain at work
- minimising the length of time taken away from work, recognising that work is beneficial for people's health and wellbeing and that being off work for long periods of time can have serious side effects
- reducing the likelihood of further absence due to sickness
- providing reasonable workplace adjustments to enable employees to work safely and productively, including enabling prospective employees with disability to perform the inherent requirements of their roles.
- promoting a productive and supportive work environment
- demonstrating commitment to and support of employees
- increasing the likelihood of staff returning to or remaining at work
- reducing indirect costs such as lost productivity, recruitment, and training costs for replacement staff.

## 5 Identifying early warning signs

Recognising early warning signs will help to identify employees who may be at risk of physical or psychological injury or illness and who may benefit from early intervention support and assistance.

There are behaviours and signs that employing parliamentarians and/or managers can look out for which may indicate an employee or colleague has, or may be at the risk of developing, a physical or psychological injury or illness.

Behaviours may include:

- unusual or erratic behaviour
- lapses in memory
- consuming more caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes or sedatives
- changes in ability, or inability to concentrate or make decisions
- withdrawal from colleagues or not participating in work activities
- unplanned or increased number of absences from work
- conflict with team members and/or manager
- loss of confidence
- not completing work tasks.

Physical symptoms could include:

- symptoms of physical injury or illness, such as pain, difficulty doing physical tasks, reduced range of movement
- tiredness
- headaches
- difficulty sleeping

- sudden unexplained weight loss or gain
- looking dishevelled or significant and concerning changes in appearance
- gastrointestinal illness
- rashes.

Further indicators that an employee may require early intervention support include:

- a request from the employee's medical practitioner
- the issue being raised by another employee
- ergonomic assessment findings
- reporting of a hazard and/or incident
- advice of physical or psychological illness or injury that has the potential to impact an employee's ability to undertake normal duties
- an unscheduled absence of more than three (3) days.

## 6 Accessing early intervention support

### 6.1 Eligibility

Access to early intervention is only available for injuries or illness sustained while at work. Non-work-related injuries or illnesses are excluded from this policy. It may be appropriate for non-work-related injuries or illnesses to be supported through the Workplace Adjustment Policy.

For pre-existing conditions, access to early intervention services is available in cases where the pre-existing condition is aggravated in the course of employment.

### 6.2 Accessing Support

For early intervention support, contact the PWSS WHS team by phone 1800 747 977 (option 3) or email [whs@pwss.gov.au](mailto:whs@pwss.gov.au). The team will work with the employee and, as appropriate, their manager, to identify the types of interventions or support which will be of most assistance.

In some instances, the WHS team may ask the employee to obtain medical evidence from a registered medical practitioner outlining potential supports or workplace adjustments that will support them in the workplace with their illness or injury.

Where appropriate and depending on the nature of the injury or illness, the WHS team may then refer the employee to one or more of the support services outlined in Section 7. The WHS team will continue to support the employee as needed.

## 7 Early intervention support services

The PWSS supports early intervention assistance for employees, which includes providing tailored interventions and support where appropriate. Examples of these interventions and support are included below but as appropriate, the PWSS will consider the scope of early intervention services to facilitate access to a broader set of services.

The type of support will depend on the nature of the condition and is considered on a case-by-case basis. The scope of early intervention services includes but is not limited to:

- referral to a registered medical or allied health professional
- referral to an independent medical examiner for specialist testing
- recommendations for reasonable workplace adjustments
- ergonomic or workplace assessment
- referral to a workplace rehabilitation provider to undertake an initial needs assessment, provide return to work support, and other relevant services as appropriate
- approval of additional EAP counselling sessions if recommended by the EAP provider
- access to Before Blue, an early intervention mental health program which provides tools and support to manage stress, build resilience, and enhance overall mental wellbeing
- a team diagnostic, mediation, or conflict resolution service
- assistance with relevant medical costs and approval of miscellaneous leave.

## 8 Reimbursement of expenses

PWSS may approve reimbursement for early intervention expenses under the [Commonwealth Members of Parliament Staff Enterprise Agreement 2024-27](#). Discretionary payments for medical expenses may be considered if the evidence provided supports the recommendation of the treatment and is from a registered medical practitioner. Endorsement from the employee's parliamentarian or authorised officer may also be required.

## 9 Leave

Employees should not remain at, or return to, work when they are unwell or have a medical certificate outlining that they are not fit for duty. Both managers and employees have a duty to ensure that illness or injury does not present a risk to the employee or others in the workplace.

To support early intervention, a MOP(S) Act employee can access leave entitlements in accordance with the [Enterprise Agreement](#) and the [Leave and public holidays guideline](#).

Where the parliamentarian considers there are other circumstances where it may be appropriate to approve paid miscellaneous leave for example, to support early intervention, the approval is subject to both the employing parliamentarian and the PWSS. An application for miscellaneous leave must state the reason for the leave and appropriate supporting evidence.

## 10 Useful resources

[Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988](#)

[Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)

[Members of Parliament \(Staff\) Act 1984](#)

[Disability and Discrimination Act 1992](#)

[Privacy Act 1988](#)

Workplace Adjustment Policy (under development)

## 11 Support

In an Emergency
<p>If you or anyone in your workplace is in immediate danger, please <a href="#">call 000</a> for police or ambulance assistance.</p> <p>To arrange emergency services in Australian Parliament House (APH), call APH Security on 02 6277 7117. Security will ring 000 and meet the first responders on arrival.</p>
Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS)
<p>The PWSS is available to provide a range of human resource and work health and safety support and guidance to Parliamentarians and MOP(S) Act employees. We also provide wellbeing support, conflict resolution and early intervention to all employees.</p> <p>The PWSS can be contacted via phone 24/7 on <a href="tel:1800747977">1800 747 977</a>, by SMS on 0487 112 755, or by email at <a href="mailto:support@PWSS.gov.au">support@PWSS.gov.au</a>. The PWSS is located at M2.105 Australian Parliament House and is staffed from 8:30 am to 7:00 pm (AEDT/AEST) Monday to Wednesday during sitting weeks, and 9:00 am to 5:00 pm (AEDT/AEST) on all other business days. Visit <a href="https://pwss.gov.au">https://pwss.gov.au</a> for more information.</p>
Employee Assistance Provider (EAP)
<p>MOP(S) Act employees and their families can access EAP services for work or personal issues, by calling 1300 360 364 or visit <a href="https://one.telushealth.com">one.telushealth.com</a>   <b>Username:</b> pwss   <b>Password:</b> Wellbeing</p>
Before Blue Program
<p>MOP(S) Act employees can access an early intervention mental health program which provides tools and support to manage stress, build resilience, and enhance overall mental wellbeing. The service can be accessed without a GP referral or mental health treatment plan. You can access the program by calling <a href="tel:0398106100">03 9810 6100</a> or submitting an <a href="#">enquiry</a>.</p>

## 12 Definitions

Term	Definition
Authorised persons	A person authorised by a parliamentarian to exercise duties on their behalf.
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
Employee	Staff employed under the <i>Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 (Cth)</i> . MOP(S) Act employees are employed by Parliamentarians on behalf of the Commonwealth.
Employer	The parliamentarian or office-holder who, on behalf of the Commonwealth, employed the person.

Term	Definition
Inherent requirement	<p>The <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</i> does not define ‘inherent requirements’ but it can be broadly understood as something essential to the position.</p> <p>Section 21A(2) of the Act provides that in assessing whether a person is able to carry out the inherent requirements of a particular role or job, the following criteria are to be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the person’s past training, qualifications and experience relevant to the particular employment</li><li>• the person’s performance as an employee</li><li>• any other factor that it is reasonable to take into account.</li></ul>
Parliamentarian	This term refers to Members of the House of Representatives and Senators.
PWSS	Parliamentary Workplace Support Service
WHS Act	<i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i>
Workplace	A place where work is carried out by persons employed under the MOP(S) Act and includes any place where an employee goes, or is likely to be, while at work.

## 13 Mechanism and timeline for policy review

This document will be reviewed every two years or earlier when a business requirement is identified.

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## Attachment A – Guidance for employees in deciding whether to disclose a disability

The decision to identify as a person with disability can be difficult. Information about your disability is private and the decision to tell others is up to you.

In most circumstances, you do not have an obligation to share information about your disability with your employer or potential employer. However, if you are applying for a job and your disability means that you are unable to carry out the **inherent requirements**<sup>1</sup> of the job without reasonable adjustments being made to accommodate your disability, then you are required to tell the employer.

### Why you might not want to disclose a disability

- Your disability may not affect you at work and you can do your job as well as others.
- You may not need support or adjustments to do the job.
- You may be worried about what will happen if the workplace knows about your disability e.g. potential discrimination, harassment or reduced career opportunities.
- Your disability may only be for a short time or only occur occasionally.

### Why you may want to share information about your disability

- It enables the workplace to make reasonable adjustments and changes to support you.
- The work you do changes and is more difficult to do due to your disability.
- Your workplace is moving to a new location which is not accessible.
- Your disability has changed, or you have acquired a disability.

If you are feeling anxious about sharing information about your disability or would like additional support, you can contact the PWSS or ask a colleague or friend to attend the meeting with you.

If you have been with your employer for some time and telling them about your disability will be new information for them, it may be helpful to explain why you are sharing this with them now and not previously e.g. your disability has recently changed, and it is only now that it is affecting your work.

Pick a time and place where you feel most at ease to have this conversation e.g. you might like to arrange a casual catch-up meeting with your manager over a coffee. Ensure the time also suits your manager and that they will be able to focus on the discussion.

### Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments or workplace adjustments are changes to the work environment, systems or processes which allow people with a disability to work safely, productively and on the same basis as others without a disability. Examples include but are not limited to:

- flexible working hours or working from home
- changes to some of the tasks so that you can do them better
- training e.g. one-to-one assistance on how to use online tools or platforms

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<sup>1</sup> Inherent requirements of a role are the essential duties required to fulfil the position. Inherent requirements must be determined in the circumstances of each job and may include: the ability to perform the functions that are a necessary part of the job; productivity and quality requirements; the ability to work effectively in the team or other type of work organisation concerned; and the ability to work safely.

- adaptive technology and/or specialised equipment
- alterations to premises or work areas e.g. widening doorways, visual/auditory emergency warnings.

**Sharing information about your psychosocial disability or mental health condition**

Explore this [pros and cons](#) tool to help you decide whether you would like to share information about your mental health with your employer.