Policy settings for healthier and safer workplaces

The AIHS Policy Agenda

July 2019

The Australian Institute of Health and Safety – *thinking forward*

With a 70-year history, and recently known as the Safety Institute of Australia, the Australian Institute of Health and Safety (AIHS), is the national association for the health and safety profession. Our Patron is the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Our Vision is safe and healthy people in productive workplaces and communities.

Our Mission is to proactively shape and improve workplace health and safety now and in the generations to come.

How we pursue our Mission

- We provide a collective voice for the profession and add value to workplaces by supporting and educating the profession to develop and implement world class practice.
- We support developments in health and safety practice by facilitating learning and engagement, providing forums for professional discussion and debate, and networks for peer-to-peer mentoring and learning.
- We support growth in professional capability.
- We seek to continually improve health and safety education and training through the OHS Body of Knowledge and delivery of relevant services.
- We advocate with courage on policy which improves legislation, regulation and standards.
- We promote awareness and build knowledge of health and safety throughout the wider community.
- We build knowledge of, and raise the importance of, the health and safety role at all levels of industries and workplaces from Boards and managers through to workers and the supply chain.

The policy role of the health and safety profession

The health and safety profession has a unique voice. The thousands of people who work across health and safety roles throughout the country have high level expertise and a deep understanding of:

a) The critical importance of health and safety leadership and management in the workplace;
b) The use of an evidence base to eliminate or reduce the risk of fatality, injury, disease and ill-health in the workplace; and
c) The role that healthy and safe organisational practices have to play in sustainability and productivity.

The AIHS establishes policies and positions drawing practical knowledge and evidence from the best available research, the direct experiences of the profession and other workplace health and safety stakeholders, and the investigation of emerging and innovative new ideas.

The AIHS seeks cooperative relationships with Safe Work Australia, jurisdictional policymakers, regulators and other stakeholders, to advance policy issues. As a part of this commitment, we recognise and support the Australian Workplace Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022.

The AIHS' policies are also informed by our **guiding principles and beliefs**, which include the following and are reflected in the positions we hold on health and safety issues:

- All people in Australian workplaces are entitled to a safe and healthy work environment;
- All workplaces should seek to ensure the healthiest and safest possible working environment;
- Australian workplaces deserve the highest quality health and safety advice. Australian health and safety arrangements and practices in workplaces should be the best in the world;
- The *Health* of the workforce is just as important as the *Safety* of the workforce*;*
- Health and Safety includes psychological health and dealing with bullying and harassment;
- Ongoing research is necessary to address existing and emerging hazards and risks;
- Engagement and collaboration with like-minded Australian and international professional bodies has the greatest potential to achieve high quality health and safety outcomes;
- Building healthy and safe workplaces is not just a legal responsibility but an ethical imperative;
- Exemplary health and safety practice is underpinned by sophisticated responses and interventions fostered by organisational leadership, structure, processes, systems and culture;
- Exemplary health and safety practice involves cooperation at all levels of the organisation, including genuine consultation with workers and their representatives;
- All workers have a responsibility for health and safety but accountability is vested in line management, with ultimate accountability and leadership with CEOs and Boards;
- The accountability that all people have for healthy and safe workplaces is aided by educated and trained practitioners and professionals, and it is critically important that organisational management and where appropriate directors, have access to that advice and supporting data;
- Systems and processes are important - but focusing on people is also critical to providing health and safety solutions;
- Exemplary health and safety can improve organisational productivity and sustainability.

Priority Policy Areas

The Institute develops *position statements* on a range of issues under the following priority focus areas.

1. THE HEALTH AND SAFETY PROFESSION

1.1 Practice Framework

Every profession needs a clearly defined framework for practice, and the workplace health and safety sector has lagged in this area. The AIHS supports the adoption of the 2017 Occupational Health and Safety Professional Capability Framework: A Global Framework for Practice, developed by the International Network of Safety & Health Professional Organisations (INSHPO) with substantial input from the Institute.

1.2 The OHS/WHS Knowledge Base

All growing professions need a valid body of knowledge based on evidence. Education, training and Continuing Professional Development based on that knowledge is critically important for a robust and developing profession. The AIHS stewards the *OHS Body of Knowledge* and strongly supports its ongoing review, revision and maintenance. The Institute supports evidence-based practice, as well as fostering discussion and research on new ideas and emerging concepts.

1.3 Education and training for the Profession

The AIHS supports comprehensive formal education for all OHS/WHS professionals and is actively engaged in improving the quality and content of that education and training.

1.4 Certification and Continuing Professional Development

A certification program for the profession of international standard, which includes a structured Continuing Professional Development program and potential mentoring, is essential for the delivery of sound and high-quality advice to Australian business, other organisations and the community, and the AIHS is strongly committed to this.

1.5 Health and Safety practices

As a constantly evolving profession, there are a range of schools of thought and emerging practices that underpin our work. The Institute is committed to promoting both research and critical discussion of new theories and practice, based on evidence.

2. HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY, LEGISLATION, ENFORCEMENT AND STANDARDS

2.1 Health and Safety policy development

The Institute understands the important role of governments and regulatory authorities in the development of policy and practice and seeks to engage and be recognised as having an influential stakeholder role to play.

2.2 Health and Safety law

Legislation reflects the minimum requirements for health and safety management, and establishes a benchmark for compliance. However, it should never be seen as the main reason for providing safe and healthy work environments. It is critical that health and safety law in Australia be consistent, and is articulated appropriately to fit the times.

The Institute supports nationally harmonised and consistently implemented WHS legislation across all Australian jurisdictions, with the level of detail contained in primary legislation (Acts of Parliament), secondary legislation (Regulations), Codes of Practice, and Guidance material having regard to sustainable safety outcomes based on factors such as levels of hazard and risk, the hierarchy of control, fostering innovation, clarity of understanding, and reduction of unnecessary 'red tape' and excessive written material.

2.3 Health and Safety regulation and enforcement

Effective compliance and enforcement is an important component of the suite of measures to produce healthier and safer workplaces. Organisations have the primary responsibility and accountability for meeting the legislative health and safety requirements as applied to their own organisations.

Regulators play a critical role in providing advice on, confirming, monitoring, and investigating compliance, as well as for incident investigation, determination of causes of accidents and incidents, and pursuing processes to establish penalties associated with non-compliance.

2.4 Health and Safety Standards

Setting health and safety related Standards for industry and other organisations - and monitoring progress toward meeting those Standards - is critical. The Institute supported the Australian adoption of *ISO 4001:2018 Occupational health and safety management systems – Requirements with guidance for use.* The health and safety profession through the Institute's College of Fellows has a role to play in the ongoing maintenance and development of Standards. The Institute has advocated for free use of Standards to facilitate health and safety and greater access by smaller organisations.

3. PROGRESSING HEALTH AND SAFETY WITHIN ORGANISATIONS

3.1 Health and safety in sustainable organisational practice

Although every industry has some degree of bureaucratic red tape, health and safety management systems, processes and practice should avoid creating unnecessary complexity and unjustified costs, being as streamlined as possible while maintaining clarity and effectiveness. Streamlined safety processes should contribute to a sustainably profitable and efficient organisation.

3.2 Health and safety performance, productivity, data and indicators

Workplace health and safety is often perceived as a burdensome cost without understanding the safety and productivity benefits that the expenditure can create. Good health and safety management is good for business in many ways, including having significant potential to *increase* productivity. Procrastinating on necessary safety changes can increase the cost and the perception of the burden. The Institute advocates a better understanding of the positive role that good health and safety management plays in creating more productive, profitable and sustainable business and other enterprises.

Business, government and other organisations would greatly benefit from improved data sources, including leading indicators, to measure and benchmark health and safety performance.

3.3 Community engagement and education

The AIHS believes that all key stakeholders in health and safety, including the health and safety profession, employer groups, not-for-profits, unions, regulators and other government agencies have an obligation to do their part to ensure that their own stakeholders and the wider community are educated about workplace health and safety and to encourage active engagement in reducing risk and harm.