

Support for Employees Affected by Domestic and Family Violence

Human Resources Policy Statement

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1. Policy Statement

The Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) has zero tolerance towards violence and is strongly committed to providing a healthy and safe working environment for all employees. It is recognised that employees sometimes face difficult situations in their personal life, such as domestic and family violence, that may affect their attendance, performance at work, or safety.

The QAS recognises that domestic and family violence is a workplace issue, irrespective of where it occurs, as the workplace can make a significant difference to employees affected by domestic and family violence by providing appropriate safety and support measures. The workplace can also play an active role in educating employees on respectful relationships and behaviours to assist in the prevention of domestic and family violence.

Any type of violence, including domestic and family violence, is unacceptable in any setting including the workplace. Any QAS employee who commits violence and abuse from the workplace, including by telephone, fax, mail or email, may be subject to disciplinary action, which may include penalties up to an including termination of employment.

All employees have a responsibility to model the public service values and abide by the Code of Conduct for the Queensland Public Service, which includes behaving in a way that promotes respectful relationships, a work environment free from any form of violence or abuse and supporting those who are affected by domestic and family violence.

All employees are encouraged to take appropriate action when an issue of violence occurs or is suspected, including reporting any threats of violence you experience or witness.

Fostering a workplace culture where 'employees affected by domestic and family violence' are supported in the workplace, contributes to a healthy and safe working environment for all.

2. Application

This policy applies to all individuals engaged to perform a role within or on behalf of, the QAS.



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Australia's campaign to stop violence against women



3. Definitions

Section 8 of the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* defines domestic violence as behaviour by a person (the first person) towards another person (the second person) with whom the first person is in a relevant relationship that can be any of the following—

- (a) physically or sexually abusive
- (b) emotionally or psychologically abusive
- (c) economically abusive
- (d) threatening
- (e) coercive
- (f) in any way controls or dominates the second person and causes the second person to fear for the second person's safety or wellbeing or that of someone else.

The term 'employees affected by domestic and family violence' includes:

- those experiencing domestic and family violence or abuse;
- those who commit domestic and family violence or abuse;
- bystanders; and
- those assisting people affected by domestic and family violence.

Domestic and family violence can affect people of all cultures, religions, ages, genders, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds and income levels.

In Queensland, the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* provides the legal instrument to respond to domestic and family violence. Domestic violence and relevant relationship are defined under Division 2 and Division 3 of this Act.

4. Policy

4.1. Confidentiality and Disclosure

The QAS recognises that employees have the right to choose whether, when and to whom they disclose information about being affected by domestic and family violence, including whether or not they wish to make a formal report to police.

An employee may disclose information to their manager and/or supervisor, workplace health and safety representative or someone else in the workplace with whom they feel comfortable.

Information disclosed by an employee in relation to domestic and family violence will be kept confidential except to the extent that disclosure is required or permitted by law.

4.2. Awareness Raising

The QAS will make the online Queensland Government program – *Recognise, Respond, Refer: Domestic Violence and the Workplace* available to all employees. The completion of this module is mandatory for all employees and is available via the QAS Learning Management System.

The program aims to assist employees in understanding domestic and family violence, and the impact of domestic and family violence in the workplace, as well as how to respond to staff and colleagues who may be impacted by domestic and family violence in the workplace.

The QAS will provide additional training to supervisors, managers, executives and specialist staff (e.g. peer support officer, human resources representatives) to support these employees in preventing, recognising, responding, and referring to specialist services in domestic and family violence situations.

4.3. Support Available

There are a number of support options available to assist employees affected by domestic and family violence which are outlined below:

4.3.1. Paid Special Leave and Other Leave Options

The QAS is committed to providing up to 10 days per year paid special leave to assist all employees with matters arising from domestic and family violence.

This may include: attending medical, legal, police or counselling appointments; attending court and other legal proceedings; and organising alternative accommodation and care or education arrangements for any person.

The employee does not have to use other entitlements before accessing paid special leave. Leave can be taken as consecutive days, single days or a fraction of a day. An employee may also access other leave (including sick leave, carer's leave, recreation leave, long service leave, flex time and accrued leave) to attend to matters arising from domestic and family violence.

4.3.2. Work Performance and Attendance

Work performance or attendance may be influenced by factors not connected with work. When discussing concerns about an employee's work performance or attendance the employee's personal circumstances, including whether domestic and family violence is a contributing factor, should be taken into consideration.

It may also be necessary to include additional support and provide reasonable adjustment for a period of time. Regular reviews, a return to work plan and a performance improvement process may still be required.

4.3.3. Flexible Working Arrangements

The QAS will provide employees affected by domestic and family violence with access to flexible working arrangements within operational requirements. Employees are encouraged to discuss their request for flexible working arrangements with their managers in the first instance.

The QAS may also consider:

- workplace safety needs and arrangements to protect the employee and colleagues following a risk assessment, including increased security measures

- supporting employees to include the workplace in any Domestic Violence Order issued by the courts, where appropriate, and providing support and reasonable adjustments in the workplace, including:
 - Job redesign or changes to duties
 - Changes to working hours or patterns of work
 - Alternative suitable employment in other areas, offices, locations
 - Changes to email address and telephone numbers
 - Secure parking.

4.3.4. Counselling Support Services

Support services are available to all employees and their immediate family members. They can be accessed at any time, and offers free, confidential support services through face-to-face, telephone and online counselling.

Staff support services are available to QAS employees through two providers:

- Priority One: 1800 805 980 (available 24 hours day)
- Optum: 1800 604 640 (available 24 hours day)

In addition, there are a range of other external support services available including:

- DV Connect Womensline 1800 811 811
- DV Connect Mensline 1800 600 636
- 1800 RESPECT 1800 737 732
- Policelink 131 444

4.3.5. Documentation

The QAS acknowledges that employees affected by domestic and family violence may not be in a position to provide supporting documents. An employee's access to leave and other support options should not be denied in the absence of supporting documentation.

Any related communications must be managed in a sensitive and non-judgmental manner, and may be sighted and returned to the employee.

4.4. Safety in the Workplace

Of paramount consideration is the safety and wellbeing of all QAS employees in the workplace.

Where an employee discloses they are affected by domestic and family violence, it is recommended the manager/supervisor and the affected employee undertake a safety and risk assessment. The assessment may identify a requirement for a workplace safety strategy to be developed.

A workplace safety strategy should outline the specific workplace safety needs and necessary support and reasonable adjustment arrangements, including:

- any changes in relation to any work patterns, practices or work location

- any precautionary plans to be undertaken pre or post-work (e.g. travel arrangements, secure carpark etc.) to support the safety of the employee
- any workplace changes and/or security measures to protect the employee and their colleagues where necessary
- updated emergency contacts and/or next of kin details.

Safety strategies should be reviewed at pre-determined intervals to ascertain ongoing appropriateness.

Resources specific to undertaking a safety and risk assessment or developing a workplace safety strategy are available on the QAS HR policies and procedures portal page.

4.4.1. Returning to Work

When returning to work after taking any form of leave related to domestic and family violence, employees are encouraged to talk to their manager regarding any ongoing safety concerns. Where the employee and manager have not completed a safety and risk assessment, one should be undertaken upon return to the workplace, and where identified, a workplace safety strategy should be implemented. If a strategy is already in place, the manager and employee should review the current arrangements to make any changes if necessary.

5. Responsibilities

Leaders/managers/supervisors will:

- Model the public service values, including behaving in a way that promotes a work environment free from any form of violence
- Actively participate in domestic and family violence related learning and development activities to effectively communicate and manage any domestic violence arising in the workplace
- Encourage employees to actively participate in domestic and family violence related learning and development activities
- Sensitively communicate with employees affected by domestic and family violence
- Take prompt and appropriate action to address any reports of employees affected by domestic and family violence
- Ensure appropriate levels of support are provided to employees affected by domestic and family violence
- Ensure appropriate management of work performance and monitoring of attendance issues.

Employees will:

- Model the public service values, including behaving in a way that promotes a work environment free from any form of violence
- Actively participate in domestic and family violence related learning and development activities
- Sensitively communicate with colleagues affected by domestic and family violence
- Ensure colleagues are aware of available support services and seek assistance.

6. Related Information

- *Industrial Relations Act 2016*
- *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012*

- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*
- *Public Service Act 2008*
- Code of Conduct for the Queensland Public Service
- Directive relating to domestic and family violence
- Directive relating to special leave

7. Version Control

Version	Description
QAS v1.2 xxx 2017	Amendments made to make the Queensland Government online training program mandatory, and inclusion of additional training for supervisors, managers, executive and specialist staff. Minor amendments have also been made to strengthen the QAS' zero tolerance approach to any type of violence.
QAS v1.1 July 2016	Minor amendment made to update a process change for the safety and risk assessment under section 4.4.
QAS v1.0 November 2015	Policy Statement developed for QAS in line with PSC policy template and in consultation with Queensland Health.