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| Pledge template explanatory notes |
| Pledge resource suite: part 2 of 3 |

# Background

A pledge encourages individuals, groups or organisations to make a commitment to a common cause, set of beliefs or actions. Pledges can be used to develop a shared understanding, promote organisational change and facilitate improvements in workplace culture. They can send a powerful message about what an organisation stands for and expects of all its people.

Public sector organisations are already required to comply with seven core values – responsiveness, integrity, impartiality, accountability, respect, leadership and human rights – that are set out in the *Public Administration Act 2004* and explained in greater detail in the *Code of conduct for Victorian public sector employees*. Organisations may also have their own statement of values, which must be consistent with the public sector values.[[1]](#footnote-1) Bullying, harassment, discrimination and other inappropriate behaviours are clearly inconsistent with these overarching standards. In order to champion change, your organisation may develop a pledge to increase awareness of the issues and to express your commitment to preventing and responding to inappropriate behaviours.

A pledge can help to build a culture where leaders model the desired standard, and commit to preventing and responding effectively and consistently to inappropriate behaviour. Ideally, staff will feel:

* supported to act in accordance with the pledge
* entitled to expect a particular standard of behaviour from colleagues and senior staff
* included in the organisation-wide efforts to build a positive culture
* empowered to call out conduct that is inconsistent with the pledge.

# The pledge template

The pledge template, available on the [Worker Wellbeing webpage](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework) at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework> supports your health service to design your own pledge and make a public commitment to building a positive workplace culture. The template does not impose standard wording, as every health service is diverse and has different needs, issues, staffing mixes and goals. Instead, the template is a starting point you can adapt for local use by addressing your specific circumstances and issues, and aligning the pledge with your organisational values.

# Using the template

The template provides a suggested structure for an organisational pledge, along with some examples of statements and key words. There are four questions that health services may find useful to consider when developing their pledge: *who*, *what*, *why* and *how*?

| Question | Suggested approach |
| --- | --- |
| Who is making the commitment? | The board of your health service should be a party to the pledge, as it is vital that the commitment to desirable behaviours has the full support of organisational leaders.  However, staff from all levels and areas should also have substantial input into the content of the pledge to ensure that it is inclusive, reflects a variety of views, and that there is broad support for the expectations.  The process of developing the pledge can be a great way to engage staff across the organisation. Staff can contribute their ideas, reflections and experiences, and also contribute to your organisation’s future efforts to meet the commitments. Staff can be engaged in the development of the pledge through focus groups, online surveys, discussions in team meetings, and other ways. |
| What are we committing to? | State the overarching aim for workplace culture in this section of the pledge. Ask:  What does a positive workplace culture mean to us? What does it look like?  What factors contribute to a positive workplace culture – for example, respecting all members of the organisation?  What are our organisation’s values, and how do they work in practice?  What do we want to change or achieve?  What do we want to be the ideal standard for workplace behaviour?  What changes could we make that would lead to a culture of preventing and responding to inappropriate behaviour?  What would empower staff to call out inappropriate behaviour? |
| Why are we making the commitment? | Consider:  What really matters to us, when we think about workplace culture?  What is the reason why change is needed?  Is there a specific issue which the organisation needs to address? Consider, for example, the People Matter Survey results for the organisation, and whether these suggest that action is needed on a particular matter.  Does the reason for the commitment reflect the organisation’s values? |
| How are we going to make this commitment? | In this section, it may be useful to outline the specific behaviours expected of your organisation’s workforce and its leaders, so that staff at all levels feel entitled to expect this standard of behaviour, and feel able to speak out against behaviour that does not match.  First, consider the behaviours leaders need to demonstrate and the actions that they need to take:  What actions should our leaders take to prevent inappropriate behaviour?  What sorts of behaviour should our leaders be modelling?  What support do we need from our leaders so that staff feel able to speak out?  How do we expect our leaders to respond to inappropriate behaviour?  How can leaders raise awareness of the issues within the organisation?  Next, think about the behaviours staff across the organisation should demonstrate:  What can we do to prevent inappropriate behaviour?  What should we do when responding to inappropriate behaviour?  How can we support each other and work together to create the best workplace culture possible? |

# Acting on the pledge

For the pledge to be meaningful, it must lead to and be supported by practical action. Your organisation should consider how best to publicise your commitment, communicate expectations, and take action to achieve the aims set out in the pledge.

## Develop an action plan

Once your organisation has developed its pledge, you can develop a formal action plan to set out how you will act on the pledge. This is a helpful way of ensuring that the pledge becomes more than just words, and that there are tangible actions and supporting activities that work towards the workplace culture aim stated in the pledge. By committing to a timeframe, having measurable ways to assess performance, publicising the action plan and then reviewing the actions, organisations become accountable to their staff.

Organisations may find it useful to refer to the [Guide to implementing the framework for promoting a positive workplace culture: preventing bullying, harassment and discrimination](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework> when developing an action plan. The guide suggests practical steps that health services can take to improve workplace culture and address inappropriate behaviour, and proposes indicators that can be used to measure performance.

An action plan template, available on the [Worker Wellbeing webpage](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework> is provided to assist organisations. As with the pledge, representatives from all levels of your organisation should be involved in its development. For example, this activity could be undertaken by a group that includes staff representatives, such as the organisation’s People and Culture Committee. Organisations may wish to consider the following matters when completing the action plan.

| Template column | Suggested approach |
| --- | --- |
| Action | Use the expectations and behaviours outlined in the ‘how’ section of the pledge. It may be appropriate to group common themes into a single action.  Ensure that both leadership and workforce-wide expectations are included in the action plan, so that staff at all levels are accountable to each other. |
| Description of activity | Describe at least one specific activity for each action listed in the first column. These activities may align with other work your organisation is carrying out to improve workplace culture.  Some suggested activities are set out in the action plan template.  Make sure the activities are specific and measurable, so your organisation can assess easily when actions have been completed.  You may find it helpful to refer to the [Guide to implementing the framework for promoting a positive workplace culture: preventing bullying, harassment and discrimination](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework> for ideas. |
| Responsible | State who is responsible for each activity. |
| Timeframe | Set a timeframe, frequency or planned due date for each activity. |
| Measures | Describe how your organisation will measure the impact of each activity and whether it has been successful.  Consider using information collected in the People Matter Survey or staff culture survey to measure improvements. |

Finally, the action plan should not be a static document. It should be reviewed regularly, and should be updated as your organisation’s plans and activities evolve to ensure that it remains current and appropriate.

## Publicise the pledge and action plan

The pledge and action plan should be complemented by a communication strategy to ensure organisation-wide recognition and understanding. Organisations could consider raising awareness of the pledge, expected behaviours, planned activities and progress against the action plan via:

* a launch or staff event
* organisational forums and staff meetings
* information on the staff intranet, workplace posters or brochures
* content included in staff induction and training programs
* organisation-wide activities, such as awards
* staff champions, who actively promote and model the behaviour described in the pledge, engage constructively with colleagues about the issues, and are a recognised point of contact for the People and Culture Committee and for colleagues seeking information or support
  + other creative awareness-raising suggestions from staff and the organisation’s communications team.

## Review the pledge and action plan

The pledge and action plan should be formally reviewed by the organisation each year in order to assess their effectiveness and the progress of any actions. Performance data should be gathered and considered as part of the review, and it may also be helpful to conduct a focus group or survey of staff perceptions.

As with the initial development of the pledge and action plan, the People and Culture Committee should be involved, and staff from all levels and areas of the organisation should have the opportunity to provide input. You could consider the following questions:

* Is each element of the pledge still appropriate?
* Are any changes needed to the expected behaviours outlined in the pledge?
* Has your organisation’s commitment contributed to a culture of respect, and of preventing and responding to inappropriate behaviour?
* Have the activities described in the action plan been successful?
* Should the activities or measures outlined in the action plan be updated or revised, and should any targets be redefined?
* What scope is there for further improvement? Would a new or different activity help your organisation meet the goals of the pledge?
  + Are staff aware of the pledge and action plan, or does the communication strategy need to be reconsidered?

# Resources

* Department of Health and Human Services 2016, [*Our pathway to change: eliminating bullying and harassment in healthcare*](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/strategy)<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/strategy>.
* Department of Health and Human Services 2019, [*Framework for promoting a positive workplace culture – preventing bullying, harassment and discrimination: Victorian health services*](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework)<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework>.
* Department of Health and Human Services 2019, [*Guide to implementing the framework for promoting a positive workplace culture: preventing bullying, harassment and discrimination*](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/health-workforce/worker-health-wellbeing/bullying-harrassment/framework>.
* Victorian Public Sector Commission 2015, [*Code of conduct for Victorian public sector employees*](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/html-resources/code-of-conduct-for-victorian-public-sector-employees/)<https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/html-resources/code-of-conduct-for-victorian-public-sector-employees>.

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1. *Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic), s. 7(2). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)