Occupational violence incident response
Managing incidents in public health services
Occupational violence is defined as:

Any incident where an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances arising out of, or in the course of, their employment. (Adapted from WorkSafe Victoria Handbook, 2008).

Within this definition of occupational violence:

- ‘threat’ means a statement or behaviour that causes a person to believe that they are in danger of being physically attacked, and may involve an actual or implied threat to safety, health or wellbeing.

- ‘physical attack’ means a direct or indirect application of force by a person to the body of, or clothing or equipment worn by, another person, where that application creates a risk to health and safety.
This resource kit has been developed to promote a statewide, consistent and integrated approach to reporting and responding to occupational violence (OV) in Victorian public healthcare settings. It provides healthcare workers (HCWs) and health managers with a best-practice framework for implementing such an approach and offers guidance and support materials for effectively reporting OV incidents both internally and to the police. Following these procedures will help ensure such incidents are reported and actioned appropriately.

The following principles provide a framework for improving the way health services and police report and respond to assault against HCWs:

- All forms of OV require action under occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation and may need to be reported to the police.
- Best practice response to OV incidents requires cooperative and coordinated action by health service managers, the police and the HCW.
- Early recording and reporting of an OV incident are more likely to result in successful interventions.
- Ongoing liaison between a health service and the local police will enhance relations and contribute to more positive responses and outcomes following an OV incident.
- Strong local health service–police partnerships can ensure ‘key contacts’ are established in each organisation to assist in managing OV incidents, particularly where there are barriers to a complaint being progressed or reported.

**Changing the culture in healthcare settings**

Despite the fact that all forms of OV require action under OHS legislation and that assaults in the workplace should be reported to police, the literature highlights that, in the health sector, OV is highly underreported and a culture exists that accepts violence as ‘part of the job’.

There are a number of factors and perceptions that lead to HCWs not reporting assaults. These include:

- not wanting to escalate the matter
- adverse publicity
- fear of giving the impression of failure
- becoming desensitised to working alongside ‘difficult’ patients or colleagues
- other staff not sharing the perception that there is a threat to safety
- the perception that nothing will be done if incidents are reported to management and/or police
- fear that the person reporting will be seen as the cause of the incident
- others (including management) thinking they don’t have the skills to handle difficult situations
- fear of punishment on the part of the person who wants to make the report, or
- that debriefing and back-up support for workers may not be available.

**Respond • Report • Resolve**

**Occupational violence needs action**
Healthcare workers

HCWs need to take all incidents of OV seriously. HCWs should report all incidents to their manager and ensure the incident is accurately recorded. Whether or not they choose to report the incident to the police immediately, at a later stage or not at all, the HCW should:

- report the incident to their manager
- attempt to ensure any physical evidence is preserved
- complete an incident report that includes brief notes about ‘what happened’ and, if possible, photographs of injuries and a signed Authority to release medical information form
- if intending to report the incident to police, do so as soon as possible after the incident has occurred
- attend the local police station if required
- attend debriefing and counselling as required.

Health service providers/managers

Health service managers/providers are expected to treat all reports of OV as genuine and serious. They should encourage a culture that actively supports an open reporting process and should strongly discourage a culture that accepts violence. When notified of an OV incident, a manager should ensure:

- immediate and ongoing support (emotional, financial and legal) for those affected
- the incident is reported internally and an incident report is completed, as per local protocols and procedures
- the incident is reported to the health and safety representative (HSR)
- if required, the incident is reported to WorkSafe Victoria
- brief notes about the incident are made by both the victim and any witnesses
- any physical evidence is preserved
- that staff are supported in reporting incidents of assault to police, laying charges and pursuing prosecutions
- debriefing and counselling is provided as required

- incidents are analysed using a no-blame approach and utilising the expertise of specialist staff to learn from the incident and to develop processes to mitigate future risks
- records of incidents are maintained, trends are analysed and identified, and that appropriate interventions and feedback to staff are provided.

Police

Victoria Police acknowledges that a strong and effective criminal justice response will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of victims and can have a deterrent effect on further crime. In relation to occupational violence against a healthcare worker, as with other forms of criminal acts, best practice requires the police to respond and take appropriate action when an incident is reported to them.

Police are expected to treat all reports of OV as genuine and serious. When notified of an OV incident, police should:

- treat OV against HCWs as crime
- record the crime on the Victoria Police Criminal Database
- investigate the alleged reported crime
- advise the person reporting the incident of the need to preserve any physical evidence
- identify and interview the alleged offenders where appropriate
- provide the aggrieved HCW with information on victims of crime support agencies and their rights as a victim of crime
- provide victims with regular updates and information on the investigation and the criminal justice process
- pursue criminal action where there is sufficient evidence to do so
- work with management of healthcare services with a view to identifying recidivist offenders, monitoring trends and identifying work environments at risk.
The following actions are recommended when an occupational violence incident (‘threat’ or ‘physical attack’) occurs. These actions are required in the case of a **minor assault** resulting in **injury** such as mild bruising, scratches or lacerations.

**Note:** In the case of a serious threat or an assault resulting in **serious injury** (such as a broken jaw, arm or other body part or severe lacerations), **ring 000 for immediate police attendance.** Everything possible needs to then be done to isolate, secure and maintain the crime scene. Once this has occurred, the investigation is under the direction of the police.

If the HCW requires urgent medical attention, appropriate assessment or treatment, an ambulance or medical response needs to be instigated.

### Action required

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HCW and manager</th>
<th>Explanatory notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HCW</strong> to report OV incident to line <strong>manager</strong>. Line <strong>manager</strong> to report to HSR and WorkSafe Victoria, if required.</td>
<td>If the HCW is not in a state to report the incident to their manager, a colleague/witness/friend/family member should do so. The line manager should inform the HSR of the incident, and WorkSafe Victoria should be informed if required, as per the <strong>OHS Act 2004</strong>. Note: the HCW may be eligible to claim worker’s compensation.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>HCW/line manager/other</strong> to complete OV incident report</td>
<td>The incident needs to be recorded and an OV incident report completed as soon as possible after the incident. The incident report should contain as much detail as possible, including brief notes by the <strong>HCW</strong> and any witnesses about what happened. These notes (contemporaneous notes) are <strong>vital</strong> pieces of information if the <strong>HCW</strong> decides (whether immediately after the incident or at a later stage) to make an official report to the <strong>police</strong>.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Photos taken of the scene and any sustained injuries</td>
<td>Photos can contribute significantly to evidence of an assault and hence, are also vital pieces of information if the <strong>HCW</strong> decides to report the incident to the <strong>police</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(HCW = healthcare worker/victim; OV = occupational violence; HSR = health and safety representative)
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<tr>
<td>Manager to organise post-incident debriefing and counselling for HCW (and for employees otherwise affected by the incident, if required)</td>
<td>Debriefing and/or counselling may be required immediately after the incident. Further debriefing, counselling and ongoing support may be required at a later stage. <strong>Note:</strong> Ongoing support may include physical, emotional, financial and/or legal support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Police</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the police are called to attend the scene of the incident (at the health service), they will need to attend as soon as possible after being notified.</td>
<td>Early reporting of an incident contributes positively to a smooth investigation. An immediate police response is the most ideal. It should be noted however that police attendance is based on severity of incident, availability of resources and competing priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HCW</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>If a HCW makes the decision to report the incident to the police, with the possibility of laying charges, they need to advise the police that they wish to file a report. Once this is done, the police will proceed with filing a report.</td>
<td>Reporting an assault is official at the point when the HCW states to the police that they wish to file a report. The police will require details of the incident including personal statements, any photos that were taken of the scene and/or any sustained injuries and a description of the offender(s) if their name and address is unknown. A completed Authority to release medical information form (see below) will be necessary if injuries were sustained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HCW and police</strong></td>
<td>Authority to release medical information form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCW to complete and sign an Authority to release medical information form with the investigating police officer.</td>
<td>This form gives authority to the police to obtain relevant medical information relating to the OV incident if the employee required medical attention. Delay in completing this form may disadvantage the investigation and the prosecution of the offence may be unable to proceed. The original of the completed form needs to be given to the relevant medical practitioner/hospital and a copy provided to the investigating police officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HCW</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the incident is not reported to the police initially but the HCW makes the decision at a later stage that they wish to file a report, they will need to attend a police station to do so.</td>
<td>Because early reporting of an incident contributes positively to a smooth investigation, the HCW should report the incident as soon possible after the date of the incident. <strong>Note:</strong> It is best to file the report at the police station nearest to where the incident occurred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manager</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The manager should ensure that the HCW is accompanied by a support person (manager, colleague, other) when they attend a police station to file a report.</td>
<td>This is to ensure the HCW is given emotional support and it demonstrates that management is taking the incident seriously.</td>
</tr>
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(HCW = healthcare worker/victim; OV = occupational violence; HSR = health and safety representative)
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(HCW = healthcare worker/victim; OV = occupational violence; HSR = health and safety representative)
Occupational violence incident occurs

Healthcare worker (HCW)/victim reports incident to line manager. Line manager reports incident to health and safety representative (HSR) (and WorkSafe Victoria if required); incident report completed.

HCW provided with information on victims-of-crime support agencies, their rights as a victim of crime, and with information and assistance regarding the process for pursuing charges and judicial processes, as per the Victims’ Charter Act 2006

Is the HCW satisfied with the action taken by the police?

No > Refer to local health service’s police liaison officer, if one exists

or

arrange a meeting with police station officer in charge (OIC), HCW and support person

Is HCW satisfied?

No > HCW may write to the Victoria Police divisional manager (with the support of the health service) to have the matter reassessed/reviewed

Yes > HCW pursues charges with support from police and health service management

Police prosecution authorised. HCW provided with relevant information and advice as per A victim’s guide to support services and the criminal justice system

Yes > all parties satisfied with resolution

No further action

Police prosecution not authorised. If HCW wishes, meeting arranged to discuss reasons for prosecution not proceeding

All parties satisfied with resolution

and/or

no further action required/appropriate/available
The following forms can be used by health services when reporting an occupational violence incident incidentally, and to the police if required. Note: These forms do not replace the need to report the incident on the Victorian Health Incident Management System (VHIMS)/RISKMAN — this must still be done.

**Health services may use these forms as a checklist for reviewing the content of their own forms. Alternatively, they may choose to customise these forms by adding their own logo and other organisation-specific information.**

**Occupational violence incident report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report date:</th>
<th>Report time:</th>
<th>Incident report ID:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Report completed by:  
Date and time of incident:  
Where incident occurred:  
Affected healthcare worker (HCW)/victim  
Family name:  
Other names:  
Contact number for HCW/victim:  
Type of incident: (including ‘threat’ or ‘verbal assault’)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapons involved?</th>
<th>☐ No</th>
<th>☐ Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If yes, type:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs or alcohol involved?</td>
<td>☐ No</td>
<td>☐ Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type and level of injuries:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photos taken:</th>
<th>☐ No</th>
<th>☐ Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Name of offender (if known):  
Contact details of offender (if known*):  
*If name and contact details of offender are not known, provide description (see over)  

HCW/victim’s brief summary of incident  

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**Witness – brief summary of incident (If there are more witnesses, please attach other summaries)**  
Witness 1 - Name and contact number:  
Summary of incident:  

Witness 2 - Name and contact number:  
Summary of incident:  

Witness 3 - Name and contact number:  
Summary of incident:  

Authority to release medical information form signed: ☐ No  ☐ Yes  
(HCW’s consent for the police to obtain relevant medical information relating to incident)
### Description of unnamed offender

**Sex**  
- [ ] Male  
- [ ] Female

**Ethnic appearance:**  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Australian Aboriginal  
- [ ] Caucasian  
- [ ] Indian  
- [ ] Arab  
- [ ] Africa/Middle Eastern  
- [ ] Black  
- [ ] Latin American  
- [ ] Pacific Islander  
- [ ] Maori  
- [ ] Northern European  
- [ ] Other:

**Hair colour**  
- [ ] Black  
- [ ] Brown  
- [ ] Blond  
- [ ] Ginger  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Other:

**Hair length**  
- [ ] Long  
- [ ] Short  
- [ ] Shoulder length  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Other:

**Hair style**  
- [ ] Straight  
- [ ] Wavy  
- [ ] Curly  
- [ ] Spiked  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Other:

**Eye colour**  
- [ ] Green  
- [ ] Hazel  
- [ ] Blue  
- [ ] Brown  
- [ ] Grey  
- [ ] Unknown

**Complexion**  
- [ ] Fair  
- [ ] Olive  
- [ ] Dark  
- [ ] Unknown  

**Build**  
- [ ] Normal  
- [ ] Heavyset  
- [ ] Obese  
- [ ] Thin  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Other:

**Facial hair**  
- [ ] Beard  
- [ ] Moustache  
- [ ] Goatee  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Other:

**Glasses**  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Describe:

**Speech**  
- [ ] Accent  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Describe:

**Teeth**  
- [ ] Natural  
- [ ] Dentures  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Describe:

**Headwear**  
- [ ] Beanie  
- [ ] Cap  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Other:

**Footwear**  
- [ ] Workboots  
- [ ] Thongs  
- [ ] Sneakers  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Other:

**Clothing – upper body**  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Describe:

**Clothing – lower body**  
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Describe:

**Distinguishing features**  
For example, tattoos, scars, involuntary movement, missing body part
- [ ] Unknown  
- [ ] Describe:

**Remarks**

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11
Authority to release medical information
(following an occupational violence incident in the workplace)

By signing the Authority to release medical information form, you are giving Victoria Police consent to obtain relevant medical records, reports and/or statements from your treating medical practitioner or hospital. The purpose of collecting this health information is to assist Victoria Police in the investigation of an offence. By not consenting to the collection of this information, the investigation may be disadvantaged and the prosecution of the offence may be unable to proceed.

I

(FULL NAME OF PERSON - HCW) (DATE OF BIRTH)
of

(ADDRESS)

hereby authorise

(NAME OF HOSPITAL/MEDICAL PRACTITIONER)

to provide medical records, reports and/or statements as required to Victoria Police

(NAME OF INVESTIGATING POLICE MEMBER)
of

(STATION ADDRESS)
on telephone or email

(MEMBER’S CONTACT NUMBER and EMAIL)

relating to my medical examination/s and/or treatment on/or about

(following an occupational violence incident)

(DATE)

Signed

(SIGNATURE OF PERSON (HCW) AUTHORISING RELEASE OF INFORMATION)

Authority obtained and signature witnessed by me at

(LOCATION)
on

(DATE)
at

(TIME)

Signed

(NAME, RANK & REG NO OF WITNESSING MEMBER)

Completed form copied for the HCW and the police and original given back to HCW to pass on to relevant hospital/medical practitioner:

☐ Yes ☐ No
## Actions checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HCW</th>
<th>Manager/HSR</th>
<th>Police</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Seek medical attention, if required.</td>
<td>□ Ensure the HCW received medical attention if required.</td>
<td>□ Obtain a copy of the <em>Authority to release medical information</em> form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Report the OV incident to your manager.</td>
<td>□ Report the OV incident to the HSR and, if required, to WorkSafe Victoria.</td>
<td>□ Take formal statements from the HCW (victim) and any witnesses about the incident and file the report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Complete an OV incident report.</td>
<td>□ Check and ensure that an OV incident report has been completed.</td>
<td>□ Provide the HCW with information on victims-of-crime support agencies and their rights as a victim of crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Advise police you wish to file a report.</td>
<td>□ Organise post-incident debriefing and counselling for staff involved in incident.</td>
<td>□ Provide the HCW with information and assistance regarding the process for pursuing charges and judicial processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Complete an <em>Authority to release medical information</em> form.</td>
<td>□ <em>(If the HCW is required to attend a police station)</em>, organise for a support person to accompany the HCW to the station.</td>
<td>□ Keep the HCW informed of the progress of their case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Keep copies of the OV incident report and the completed <em>Authority to release medical information</em> form.</td>
<td>□ Ensure the HCW is receiving ongoing physical, emotional, financial and/or legal support as required.</td>
<td>□ Inform the HCW if the offender has been charged with the crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Give original copy of release form to health service/medical practitioner that provided examination and/or treatment post incident.</td>
<td>□ Organise for a support person* to accompany the HCW to any court appearances they need to attend.</td>
<td>□ Provide more detail to the HCW about what will happen in court if the case proceeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Give copies of the OV incident form and the release form, and any available photos, to the investigating police officer.</td>
<td>□ Provide the HCW with information on making a worker’s compensation claim.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Receive information about victims of crime support agencies and your rights as a victim of crime from the investigating police officer.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Attend post-incident debriefing and counselling as required.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Check eligibility for a worker’s compensation claim.</td>
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</table>

* A support person may include a manager, colleague, family member, friend, HSR or other.

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Initial: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Initial: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Incident report ID: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
Useful websites

Below are addresses of websites that contain other useful resources and information on prevention and management of occupational violence for both HCWs and managers.

At www.justice.vic.gov.au/victimsofcrime you will find:

The Victims’ charter
Victims’ Charter Act 2006
A victim’s guide to support services and the criminal justice system
Additional related publications

At www.health.vic.gov.au/nursing/promoting/noviolence you will find:

Preventing occupational violence: A policy framework including principles for managing weapons in Victorian health services
Every day’s a challenge: Responding to violence in Victorian health services – DVD
Progress on Occupational Violence Prevention in Victorian Health Services: Including a snapshot of the work arising from the Taskforce on Violence in Nursing
Additional resources including posters, a multilingual card of key messages and the Nurse Safe logo.

At www.worksafe.vic.gov.au you will find:

A handbook for workplaces: Prevention and management of aggression in health services. Information to assist employers and injured workers in meeting their obligations in the claim process.

To receive this document in an accessible format phone 9096 7528.

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