



December 2020

WORKFORCE SECTION AND INSIGHT PROGRAMME

Healthcare and social assistance

What we have learned

The healthcare and social assistance (HCSA) industry appears to have a mature safety culture¹ at work in most respects. Compared to other higher risk industries, HCSA employers seem more proactive about health and safety in the workplace, while workers are highly likely to report engaging in health and safety at work. However, psychological and biological hazards are a significant issue for HCSA workers.

Despite this, healthcare and social assistance (HCSA) workers are the least likely of the higher risk industries to report 'staying healthy and safe at work' as being a top priority for themselves. Only 39% rate it highly. The most important priority at work for HCSA workers, resonating with 69%, is 'having a good work/life balance'. Here's what else we now know about safety culture in this sector:

Employer attitudes towards safety

67%	have a 'mature' attitude (care for others/protect me or mine).	Some 93% of HCSA employers state they are fully aware of their health and safety obligations as an employer. However, they vary in the maturity of their safety culture. While two-thirds (67%) proactively work on it, one-third (33%) are passive, reactive operators. And 16% have an 'it's all just common sense' style of engagement.
84%	say they have a strong safety culture where staff look out for one another's health and safety.	
100%	state they understand how to comply with health and safety regulations.	
		A total of 94% of employers report they are confident about always giving their workers health and safety information that is easy to understand.

Worker engagement in safety

58%	always have a say in decisions that affect their health and safety (but employers report this figure at 71%).	Some 81% of New Zealand HCSA workers feel they know how to stay safe at work, with 78% being confident in their knowledge and ability to avoid long-term health problems from work.
44%	are either 'advocates' or 'attainers' when it comes to safety engagement.	
52%	of workers say regular health and safety meetings at occur in their workplace.	Some 24% of HCSA workers actively encourage their fellow workers to act safely on the job.
79%	have the confidence to speak up and say no, if asked to do something risky at work	A large proportion of HCSA workers are in the 'flustered' category (37%). 'Flustered' attributes include self-reported conflicted behaviour, often seeking to take the easy way, and 'getting the job done' can override rules and procedures.
82%	believe their boss would take seriously, and act appropriately on any concern they raised about health and safety at work	Some 10% of HCSA workers say they don't or won't speak up about health and safety issues at work.

¹ Mature safety culture means being active in all facets of health and safety, accepting health and safety legislation, viewing health and safety as an evolving concept, more engaged workers and good two-way communication between workers and employers.

Physical harm or injury (last 12 months)

16%	of workers report experiencing 'serious physical harm or injury' on the job.	One-third of New Zealand HCSA workers say they often or always turn up at work when they are sick, injured or over-tired.
42%	of workers report experiencing 'non-serious physical harm or injury' at work.	Some 16% are less likely to believe that they are at higher risk of serious injury, compared to 18% of all workers.
30%	report suffering work-related skin diseases.	A higher proportion of HCSA workers report suffering work-related skin diseases (for example, rashes, dermatitis, eczema) than any of the other six high-risk industries.

Psychological harm (last 12 months)

66%	of workers report work-related stress has been damaging to their mental wellbeing.	Psychosocial risks appear to be a major issue for New Zealand HCSA workers. A quarter of them report being bullied or harassed at work in the last 12 months. This is among the highest rate of any New Zealand industry. Some 22% report experiencing work-related depression and more than a third (35%) have lived with work-related anxiety in the same time period.
38%	of workers say they experience work-related depression or anxiety.	
25%	of workers report they have been bullied or harassed at work.	

Workplace exposures

66%	of workers say they are exposed to infectious diseases at work.	Around two-thirds of New Zealand's HCSA workers report being exposed to other people's blood or bodily fluids (69%) and to infectious diseases (66%) in the course of their work. One-third of workers (33%) state they come into contact with toxic liquids, gels or powders while working that can be harmful if they come into contact with the skin.
46%	of workers state working nightshifts.	
41%	of workers report being exposed to toxic chemicals or substances at work.	

Safety practices

64%	of workers say hazards, near misses and accidents in the workplace are reported 'always' or 'most of the time'.	Statistically significant differences around safety practices include that 70% of HCSA employers say measures are available to staff to help prevent harm from awkward or repetitive body movement, or long periods of standing or sitting, but only 56% of workers agree this is the case. 78% of employers and 64% of workers report that hazards, near misses and accidents are reported all or most of the time. However, worker and employer views concur over safety practices such as the wearing of personal protective equipment, and the checking, operating and maintaining of machines.
56%	of workers say measures to prevent harm from awkward or repetitive body movements are available to them 'always' or 'most of the time'.	
69%	of workers say they use personal protective equipment 'always' or 'most of the time' when it should be used.	