

Health and Community Services Industry Sector Standing Committee

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The Health and Community Services Industry Sector Standing Committee (the Committee) met on 7 November 2024. The Chair, Mr James Gilbert, welcomed Committee members and guests to the third meeting.

The Committee discussed an informative presentation by the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor, Mr Simon Nicholson, about industrial manslaughter provisions. Members gained an appreciation of the complexity of the work undertaken by the Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor and thanked Mr Nicholson for the opportunity to discuss their concerns about the application of industrial manslaughter provisions in a health care setting. The Committee will seek further clarity from the Regulator regarding implementation of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland's Regulatory Strategy where a clinical basis may be the driver or cause of a workplace death.

The Committee provided feedback to the WHS Board on enhancing compliance through improved regulator information, including suggestions to embrace new technologies and utilise more creative ways of engaging with stakeholders, such as exploring more contemporary website design; and providing additional case studies and information in short form, (such as one to two minute vignettes), that can be quickly viewed and shared.

Members also discussed the increasing prevalence of occupational violence and sexual harassment experienced by workers in the healthcare, social assistance, and education sectors. Members noted trends, including: the rising number of people with dementia impacting the provision of care at hospitals and residential care facilities, the rising incidences of verbal and physical abuse of local government workers, and the rising issue of occupational violence in the classroom. Members highlighted the positive impact of initiatives such as the Ambassador Program in some Queensland Health facilities and training of front-line staff in situational awareness and de-escalation techniques. Members also noted the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance signage in cases where the aggressor is cognitively unable to rationalise their behaviour.

Members noted that Safe Work Australia is undertaking public consultation on the development of a model fatigue Code of Practice and an industry code of practice for the health care and social assistance industry.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Thursday 20 March 2025.