icare™
Insurance and Care NSW

COVID-19 Recovery Employer Toolkit

Part 1 - Supporting employers: defining and transitioning the workforce following a pandemic

May 2020

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Part 1

Supporting employers: defining and transitioning the workforce following a pandemic

Phase one: Pre-Return to the Workplace

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Introduction

At icare we are committed to supporting the NSW workforce (the businesses, communities and people of NSW) to build safe and sustainable workplaces.

In February 2020 the world was forced to adapt as the effects of a global health pandemic, COVID-19, rippled through the economy, impacted physical, mental and social health and changed the future of work.

Any form of recovery or process of reintroduction of the workforce back to a version of 'normal', following a pandemic, needs to be managed with care and foresight to minimise the potential short-term and long-term health consequences.

We know that the process for the NSW workforce will not be:

- straightforward
- a one size fits all approach
- fast – it will be an ongoing process of recovery, as in years

Key findings from a literature review conducted by icare showed that the recovery process will occur in cycles and contain both a combination of identifying risks, and implementing protective strategies. It is important to note that whilst each individual's experience is unique it is expected that most will follow the below four phased recovery process:

- pre-return to the workplace
- immediate
- mid-term
- long term

This document addresses phase one, **pre-return** to the workplace.

The purpose of this document is to support NSW employers to prepare and plan, prior to employees returning to the workplace, and for the implementation and ongoing monitoring of health and safety practices.

Employers are encouraged to use this document to identify their operational needs, which may have been impacted by the effects of COVID-19, when planning to return their employees to the workplace, during or after a pandemic.

It is the readers decision whether to adopt the recommended actions contained in this document.

What the research says

Employees facing changed work arrangements (e.g. returning to work from home or unemployment), will often display heightened emotional states, and may require employer support and guidance to minimise potential negative impacts. Research shows <u>perceived</u> **poor employer support** has the potential to lead to uncertainty, which can in turn erode trust in the employer.

It is recommended that employers make every possible effort to demonstrate the workplace environment is safe to ensure employee safety and reduce employee risk perception. Employers can increase employee perception that the workplace is safe by using the following protective strategies:

GOOD LEADERSHIP SKILLS　　CONSISTENT AND CLEAR COMMUNICATION　　BEST PRACTICE SUPPORT

Good leadership, consistent and clear communication and best practice support is integral to workplace reintegration and employee health and wellbeing. As businesses begin to reopen and employees are reintroduced into the workplace, repeating these three protective strategies during each phase of recovery is recommended.

The following preparedness plan was created to step employers through the process of identifying how their workplace practices may have changed, or need to change, as a result of the effects of COVID-19, and recommends actions employers can take to reduce employees' perception of risk to their health and safety.

Using the employer checklists contained in this toolkit when selecting:

Yes: we encourage you to record what actions you have taken

No: we encourage you to record what actions will be taken and by who

Good Leadership Skills

It is important for leaders to understand the effects COVID-19 and the Australian Government's policies have on their employees. Employees may be experiencing some of the below, due to the **perceived risk** to their health and safety:

Individual	Leaders	Business
• difficulty focussing • feelings of isolation • greater inequality in living standards • feelings of hopelessness • burnout • strained relationships • psychological distress e.g. depression, anxiety, PTSD and suicide ideation • vicarious trauma • stigmatisation • discrimination • increased substance abuse (alcohol, tobacco and marijuana)	• difficulty setting boundaries (leaving workplace and staff) • increased sense of responsibility to staff • guilt e.g. when instructed to stay home or when leaving the workplace • difficulty dealing with emotions, their own and staff, while providing support	• government restrictions - disruption to trade, travel and commerce • reduction in demand • increased online commerce • business closure • smaller labour supply (absenteeism due to illness and workplace avoidance) • disruption to transport • deteriorating employee work performance

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Good leadership skills – Checklist for Employers

Know your facts

Educate yourself by understanding the risks to your employees in preparing them to return to workplace. Other organisations may offer services or support to assist you with this process.

Are there any organisations, e.g. your industry body, that you can contact for support?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

	By who
	Date

Have you visited the Australian Government Department of Health website?

www.health.gov.au
there may be specific health procedures your workplace needs to put in place

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

	By who
	Date

Have you visited the State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA) website?

www.sira.nsw.gov.au
there may be specific workers compensation requirements your workplace needs to put in place

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

	By who
	Date

Have you visited the SafeWork Australia website?

www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au
there may be specific health and safety requirements your workplace needs to put in place

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

	By who
	Date

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Have you identified who will be affected by any changes you make to your workplace?
these people, e.g. suppliers, and their needs may have changed due to the effects of COVID-19

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action: *please list the people (**we will call them your stakeholders**) you need to consult with about any changes to your services or workplace practices*

	By who
	Date

Are there specific risks you have identified for your stakeholders?
e.g. physical distancing procedures

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

	By who
	Date

Have you created a plan to help you manage communicating with your stakeholders? e.g. how you will contact them to work together to mitigate risks?
Business Australia (https://www.businessaustralia.com/) may have resources to assist you

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

	By who
	Date

Have you identified what support you may need when planning to return your employees back to the workplace?
Business Australia (https://www.businessaustralia.com/) may have resources to assist you

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action: *please list what support you need*

	By who
	Date

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Have you contacted the organisations, listed above, that can help support you?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

Have you checked your insurance and any potential impacts COVID-19 has had?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

Getting your workplace ready

It is important that your employees understand how COVID-19 may have affected their role and the workplace. Employers can reduce any uncertainty through role clarity, and support their employees with tools they can use as personal resources.

Have you identified what roles are key to the success of returning your employees to the workplace?
we will refer to these key roles as 'leaders'

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action: *please list the roles or names of your employees*	By who
	Date

Have you organised your 'leaders' into a team? e.g. a working committee
providing one point of contact and a single source of information is important for your employees

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

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Have you identified what roles will be impacted by changed workplace practices or infection control?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

By who

Date

Have you or your 'leaders' provided employees with clarity on their role/s and changed work practices?
prior to your employees returning to the workplace

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

By who

Date

Have you identified the gaps between your employees' perceived workplace risks and the steps you can take to safeguard your employees from these risks? e.g. increased cleaning demonstrates infection control
the process of identifying this 'gap' is known as a 'risk assessment'

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

By who

Date

Have you identified what additional resources your employees will need on returning to the workplace?
a resource can be extra equipment, access to training or support services

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action

By who

Date

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Once you have identified what resources your employees need, have you identified where these resources will come from?

these may come from within your business or be external

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action: *please list the roles or names of your employees*

By who

Date

What existing policies need to be reviewed and amended to incorporate COVID-19 specific changes?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action: *please list your policies here*

By who

Date

Have the policies identified above been amended to incorporate COVID-19 specific changes?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action

By who

Date

Do you need to create new COVID-19 specific policies?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action: *please list them here*

By who

Date

COVID-19 may affect how you manage sick leave. Have you created a COVID-19 sick leave allowance policy?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action: *please list details here*

By who

Date

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COVID-19 may affect how you manage interactions between employees, customers and vendors. Have you created a COVID-19 physical distancing policy?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action: *please list the details here*

	By who
	Date

COVID-19 may affect the hours your employees work. Have you created a COVID-19 flexible working arrangements policy?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action: *please list the details here*

	By who
	Date

Have the employees identified as leaders been provided with basic workplace mental health training?
basic mental health training helps leaders manage employees facing challenges returning to the workplace

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action: *please list the details of the leaders and training completed*

	By who
	Date

Will additional training be provided for employees prior to or on return to the workplace?
due to changed workplace practices employees may require additional support, through training

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action

	By who
	Date

What additional employee training will be provided?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action: *please list the details of the roles and training to be provided*

	By who
	Date

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Workplace health and safety roles may require specialised training. Have you identified what additional training is required for these roles?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

What additional workplace health and safety role specific training will be provided?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action: *please list the details of the roles and training to be provided*	By who
	Date

Prior to returning your employees to the workplace

To ensure your employees perceive the workplace is safe, please check that you have:

Reviewed any COVID-19 specific ways of working e.g. industry or health specific requirements set by the Australian Government

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

Identified how you will roll back COVID-19 ways of working that will no longer continue e.g. working from home

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

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Identified new COVID-19 ways of working that will be retained e.g. flexible working arrangements

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

Had regular contact with your employees in planning for their return to the workplace

☐ Yes ☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

Created or updated your business plan to include specifics on:		
rostering	☐ Yes	☐ No
work task planning	☐ Yes	☐ No
personal protective equipment (PPE) and infection control	☐ Yes	☐ No
regular contact with your employees, e.g. meetings, and when these will occur (frequency)	☐ Yes	☐ No
employees' safety	☐ Yes	☐ No
social support e.g. internal meetings using technology, including video calls (seeing facial expressions can help connection) or external – employee assistance programs	☐ Yes	☐ No
Ways to reward and recognise your employees e.g. recognising employees' efforts to bring the business back to a version of 'normal'	☐ Yes	☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

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Support services prior to employees returning to the workplace

To ensure your employees are supported when returning to the workplace, please check that you have identified:

What support services you will provide (internally)	Yes	No
What support will be provided by external services	Yes	No
What services you can ask for advice	Yes	No
What training you will provide for employees	Yes	No
What training you will provide for executives and leaders:	Yes	No
• psychological training packages	Yes	No
• social training packages	Yes	No
• training in listening skills	Yes	No
• training in recognising trauma in others	Yes	No
• training in understanding trauma and its effects	Yes	No
• training in understanding cumulative stress	Yes	No

Action

By who

Date

Planning how you will communicate with your employees on their return to the workplace

It is important that communication with your employees is open, transparent, engaging and ongoing

Have you created a plan on how you will communicate when you return to the workplace? Does this plan include:	Yes	No
• stepped instructions through resources such as factsheets?	Yes	No
• what methods you will use to communicate?	Yes	No
• mental health considerations to normalise feelings of trauma and needing support?	Yes	No
• how you will communicate with suppliers to assist with continuity of your business/services?	Yes	No
• updating business website or employee intranet with current and relevant information and guidelines or policies	Yes	No
• preventative training, e.g. psychological crisis intervention, for all workers so they have personal resources to manage their stress?	Yes	No
• how you will communicate with your stakeholders?	Yes	No

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CONSISTENT AND
CLEAR
COMMUNICATION

Communication Checklist for Employers

Consistent and clear communication

Consistent and clear information provided to employees regarding workplace safety is necessary to combat employee uncertainty and fear. It is integral to address employees' risk perceptions within the workplace, as risk and fear can significantly impact behaviour and is a driver for underlying issues such as stigmatisation,

discrimination, absenteeism, presenteeism and psychological distress.

Communicate the environment to be safe and demonstrate every possible effort to ensure employee safety and reduce employee risk perception. Increase employees perception that the workplace is safe by ensuring your communications addresses:

access to hygiene facilities e.g. hand sanitiser station, soap, increased office cleaning and personal protective equipment (PPE) with clear instructions	☐ Yes	☐ No
procedures or protocols to identify employees with potential symptoms to prevent cases in the workplace e.g. temperature checks	☐ Yes	☐ No
ways of enforcing physical distancing e.g. floor limits, by role type or staggered re-engagement with the workplace	☐ Yes	☐ No
customers, visitors and vendors with clear instructions regarding procedures, both prior to accessing the premises and when on site	☐ Yes	☐ No

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Communicating policy

Use communication to make safety practices and enforcement visible to reduce employee risk perceptions by ensuring your communication addresses:

Physical distancing

the use of common areas such as seataing arrangements, meeting rooms, lunchroom facilities and access in and out of all premises (e.g. lift limits)	☐ Yes	☐ No
customers, visitors and vendors adherence to social distancing policies	☐ Yes	☐ No
operating hours to accommodate for flexible working hours and staggering staff access to premises at any point in time	☐ Yes	☐ No
employees' readiness to return to the workplace to incorporate specific individual employee needs (i.e. transport)	☐ Yes	☐ No
information regarding support services	☐ Yes	☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

Employee leave

New COVID-19 specific leave for supporting employees:		
• staying home if they are sick	☐ Yes	☐ No
• with children affected by school closures or limited school access	☐ Yes	☐ No
• being tested for COVID-19 or confirmed cases	☐ Yes	☐ No
• who have been sent home due to illness	☐ Yes	☐ No

Action	By who
	Date

Ongoing communication methods

information presented as alerts, factsheets, pamphlets, posters and signage	☐ Yes	☐ No
email or text templates	☐ Yes	☐ No
a dedicated page on your business website	☐ Yes	☐ No
social media posts such as business Facebook pages or Yammer internally for employees	☐ Yes	☐ No
regular staff meetings in person, where appropriate, or video calls	☐ Yes	☐ No

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Best Practice Support

Resources

Health and wellbeing

Australian Government – Head to Health headtohealth.gov.au
Australian Government – Department of Health
www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-progs

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icare's coronavirus (COVID-19) information: www.icare.nsw.gov.au/icare-coronavirus-information

Planning

Business Australia - www.businessaustralia.com
SafeWork Australia – www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au

Translation

Australian Government – Department of Home Affairs
www.homeaffairs.gov.au/covid-19/Pages/covid-19-english.aspx?lang=english

Information in this document is based on the literature review entitled The effects of public health events (epidemics and pandemics) on workforce sustainability. To read the full research report, please visit the icare website: www.icare.nsw.gov.au/news-and-stories/workforce-sustainability-COVID-19-recovery

Contact

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Whilst we encourage you to use this content we ask that you please keep the content as close to the original as possible and cite references where appropriate.

The COVID-19 Recovery Employer Toolkit Part 2 will address:
Phase two: Return to the Workplace

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