

Work Health and Safety (Office of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner) Strategic Plan 2025-2029

Notifiable instrument NI2025–186

made under the

Work Health and Safety Act 2011, section 2.38 (Strategic Plan)

1 Name of instrument

This instrument is the *Work Health and Safety (Office of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner) Strategic Plan 2025-2029*.

2 Commencement

This instrument commences on the day after notification.

3 Notification

I make the Strategic Plan 2025-2029 as set out in Schedule 1.

4 Revocation

This instrument revokes the *Work Health and Safety (Office of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner) Strategic Plan 2020-2024* [NI2020-680].

Jacqueline Agius
Work Health and Safety Commissioner
22 April 2025

Schedule 1: Strategic Plan 2025-2029

WORKSAFEACT

OFFICE OF THE WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSIONER

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025 - 2029



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Introduction from the Work Health and Safety Commissioner

On 30 April 2020, I was appointed as the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Commissioner to regulate health and safety in Territory workplaces. My focus has always been to reduce fatalities, injuries, illnesses and diseases and to strengthen the safety culture in ACT workplaces. The primary duty to ensure this has always rested with those conducting the business or undertaking (PCBUs) in consultation with their workers. My role, and that of my Office, is to influence duty holders to meet their obligations — and hold them to account when they don't. As the WHS Commissioner, I have seen the capacity and capability of WorkSafe ACT to fulfil its functions grow exponentially, both in our interactions with the community and our internal operations.

Consistent with my approach outlined in WorkSafe ACT's Compliance and Enforcement Policy, I have applied in a firm and consistent approach to compliance monitoring and enforcement. As WorkSafe ACT has matured, we have seen positive changes in the community's knowledge and understanding of WHS rights and responsibilities.

In the national context, our Strategic Plan is harmonised with the *Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023-2033* and sets out WorkSafe ACT's strategic focus areas over the next four years. In recognition of WorkSafe ACT's progress over the past four years, WorkSafe ACT has refined its strategies for the next four years to be:

- Timely and effective compliance and enforcement activities, with a focus on investigations and prosecutions
- Engagement with stakeholders to increase workplace maturity in identifying and managing persistent and emerging work health and safety issues, and
- WorkSafe ACT is an adaptable and effective regulator.



WorkSafe ACT's *Compliance and Enforcement Policy 2025-2029* clearly sets out the approach we will take to compliance and enforcement activities. These activities are strongly evidence-based and informed by data analysis and intelligence, consultation, and engagement with key stakeholders.

Over my time as WHS Commissioner, I have been pleased that the majority of businesses want to meet their obligations and keep their workers safe and healthy. However, I am disappointed to still see pockets of persistent and deliberate non-compliance in our community. To combat this disregard for the safety and health of workers and the broader community, it is imperative that our shift from an educative approach to a prosecution-based model for serious offences and repeat offenders is hastened. To this end, the inspectorate and investigations will be structured around improved responsiveness to incidents and notifications across all Territory workplaces. All our inspectors will have the capacity to deliver regulatory services in any circumstances in any industry.

Alongside this, engagement with our community and stakeholders remains vital to building WHS understanding and maturity in Territory workplaces. We have built strong relationships with our stakeholders to improve knowledge and understanding, and ultimately to ensure we are all working together to make sure ACT workers get home safely every day. Part of achieving these goals rests on ensuring WorkSafe ACT continues to diversify and grow its capability and capacity as a regulator and workplace to support our staff and our community.

In developing this Strategic Plan, I have consulted with government, industry, unions and non-government organisations to ensure our approach is appropriately balanced and achievable. I have also worked with the Minister Skills, Training and Industrial Relations and the ACT WHS Council. While WorkSafe ACT is ultimately responsible for improving workplace safety in the Territory, all our stakeholders have accountability when it comes to achieving better health and safety outcomes for ACT workers.

I am proud of the improvements in safety that WorkSafe ACT has achieved in the last four years and look forward to seeing us continue to deliver against our strategies and priorities by helping to make the ACT a safer place for all of us to live and work.



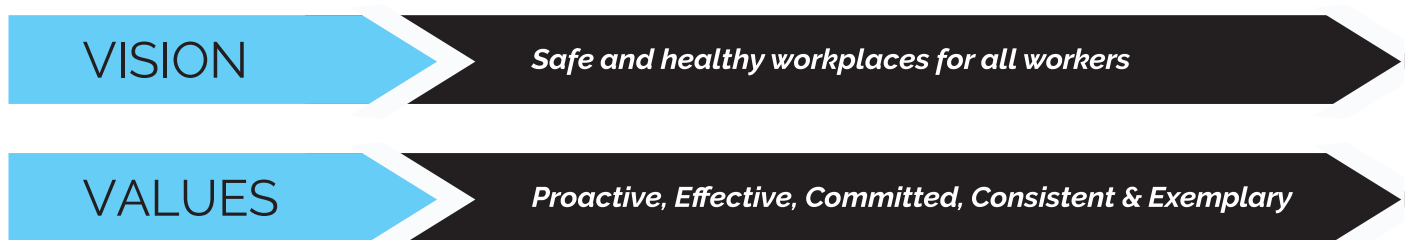
About WorkSafe ACT

WorkSafe ACT is the regulator for the work health and safety, workers' compensation, labour hire licensing, long service leave and related laws in the ACT. As the regulator, we are responsible for ensuring that workplaces are meeting their duties and keeping their workers safe and healthy. WorkSafe ACT became an independent entity on 1 July 2020 and has since laid the foundation of exemplary regulatory services and meeting our responsibility to the community to ensure obligated entities keep workers safe and healthy at work.

Every four years, WorkSafe ACT must develop a Strategic Plan to detail the overarching strategies that will guide and focus our future activities. This Strategic Plan sets out WorkSafe ACT's strategies, objectives and priorities for 2025-2029, building on the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. The plan was developed to be in alignment with the *Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023-2033* (the Australian Strategy).

WorkSafe ACT is shaped by its vision of ensuring safe and healthy workplaces. This vision is underpinned by values that are focused on safeguarding the health and safety of every worker in the Territory, irrespective of their employment status or arrangements. WorkSafe ACT's organisational vision and values are integral to our operations and strategic direction.

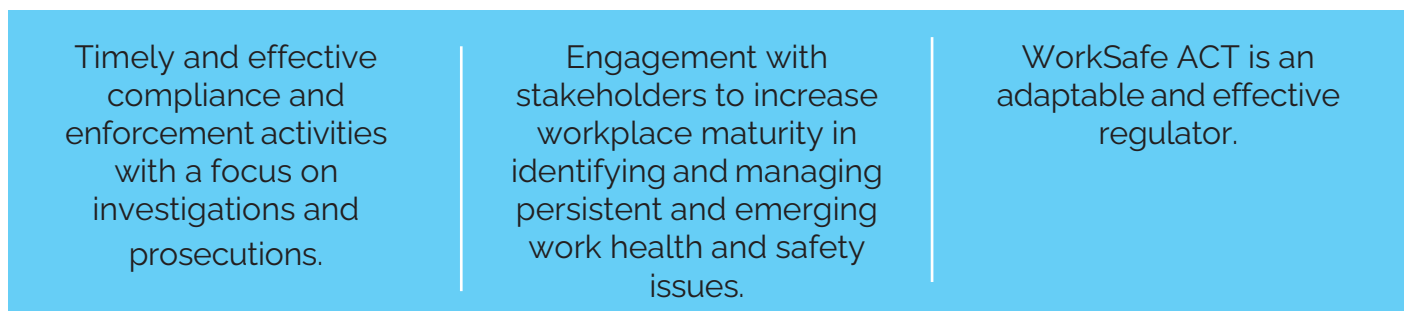
WorkSafe ACT's vision and values are:



Purpose of WorkSafe ACT: Secure the safety of all workers in all workplaces through fair and firm regulatory activities.

WorkSafe ACT has three overarching strategies for the next four years to meet our responsibilities and the expectations of the Minister, the WHS Council and the community.

WorkSafe ACT's Strategies for 2025-2029 are:



The activities WorkSafe ACT will undertake each year to support these strategies are outlined in its Statement of Operational Intent, prepared annually in response to the Minister's Statement of Expectations. These documents are notifiable instruments and are available on the WorkSafe ACT website and the ACT Legislation Register.

Safety in the ACT

While workplace injuries, illnesses and fatalities continue to occur, the overall picture of WHS in Australia is positive and continues to improve from the previous decade. WorkSafe ACT uses data analysis and intelligence gathered from inspections and consultation with stakeholders, industry and unions to identify current and emerging trends. Regulatory priority is given to industries, mechanisms of injury and illness and substances that present the most significant risk to workers.

The Australian Strategy uses data to identify the priority industries where workers face the highest risk of harm. While WorkSafe ACT's priority industries are largely similar, the ACT's workforce has some marked differences from other states and territories. For instance, there is no mining industry in the Territory and agriculture is far more limited here than across the country. Further, the proportion of small to medium sized employers is greater in Canberra than the national average.

While safety and health across all industries is important and will be enforced, the following specific industries have been identified as priorities for WorkSafe ACT's enforcement activities.

- Construction
- Healthcare and social assistance
- Retail trade
- Accommodation and food services
- Public administration and safety
- Education and training
- Manufacturing

The hazards and risks that can lead to a worker being injured can be varied and complicated. Although varying across industries, occupations and workplaces, the following mechanisms are common causes of workplace injury and illness in the ACT:

- body stressing
- slips, trips, and falls
- exposure to hazardous chemicals or dangerous substances
- mental stress, and
- being hit by, or hitting objects.

Some workers may also face increased risks in the workplace compared to their colleagues, depending on their working arrangements and personal characteristics. Factors known to affect a worker's vulnerability in the ACT include, but are not limited to:

- being younger (under 25 years old)
- being older (over 50 years old)
- being an apprentice or unfamiliar with the work
- working alone or isolated from others
- being from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, and
- complicated working arrangements (e.g. labour hire, migrant or visa workers).



Strategy 1: Timely and effective compliance and enforcement activities with a focus on investigations and prosecutions

WorkSafe ACT has a strong regulatory posture and, where warranted, will take immediate action to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of Territory workers. The most serious offences or repeated non-compliance require the strongest regulatory response, which includes prosecution.

As outlined in WorkSafe ACT's Compliance and Enforcement Policy 2025-2029, WorkSafe ACT will ensure that workers are not being exposed to risks of illness or injury. We will hold PCBUs and other duty holders accountable when they breach their obligation to ensure the health and safety of workers and deter future non-compliance.

WorkSafe ACT will conduct compliance and enforcement activities as efficiently as possible. This includes carrying out responsive workplace visits as soon as possible after being made aware of an issue, and planning proactive visits to ensure inspections take place based on data analysis and intelligence. We also ensure the level of actual or potential harm involved in the incident, as well as the experience and past conduct of the duty holder, is considered when carrying out our regulatory activities and making enforcement decisions.

Our objectives:

Secure the highest level of compliance with WHS legislation through targeted enforcement activities. Focusing on specific priority industries ensures fair and firm enforcement. Where breaches are identified, swift action will be taken to enforce compliance and protect workers.

Our priorities:



Education and Training

Educational institutions, such as schools and training facilities, face diverse safety challenges. WorkSafe ACT will focus on duty holders in the education industry to ensure that students and workers are not put at risk of illness or injury from the common hazards and risks they face, such as high job demands, work-related violence and aggression, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and slips, trips, and falls.



Construction (Civil, Residential and Commercial)

The construction industry presents specific challenges due to its dynamic and high-risk nature. WorkSafe ACT's focus is on ensuring duty holders are implementing robust safety protocols to prevent incidents and injuries on construction sites, including falls from heights, scaffolding safety, and plant management.



Healthcare and Social Assistance

The healthcare and social assistance industry, including hospitals, healthcare facilities and community support, all require strict health and safety measures to protect both patients and workers. WorkSafe ACT will ensure duty holders are complying with the legislation to protect workers from hazards and risks common to the industry, including work-related violence and aggression, mental stress, MSDs and exposure to hazardous chemicals and biological substances.



Manufacturing

Manufacturing facilities utilise heavy machinery with complex processes, therefore, require comprehensive safety protocols to prevent incidents and ensure the well-being of workers. WorkSafe ACT will ensure duty holders in manufacturing companies implement machine guarding, chemical safety measures, and ergonomics programs to reduce the risk of MSDs.



Retail and Hospitality

The retail and hospitality sector covers a wide range of businesses, from restaurants, cafes, shops, grocers, to hotels. WorkSafe ACT prioritises compliance and enforcement activities to address common hazards such as slips, trips, and falls, work-related violence and aggression, sexual harassment, and MSDs.



ACT Public Service and Public Sector

The ACT Public Service and Public Sector is the largest single business WorkSafe ACT regulates, with a diverse workforce covering a broad range of responsibilities. WorkSafe ACT will work to increase knowledge and compliance in this sector and address WHS concerns include slips, trips and falls, MSDs, bullying and work-related violence and aggression.

Strategy 2: Engagement with stakeholders to increase workplace maturity in identifying and managing persistent and emerging work health and safety issues.

As the ACT's population continues to increase and the way the community lives and works changes, emerging issues arise that may not have well-known or understood controls to put in place to minimise harm. Some physical and psychosocial risks are also consistently present in workplaces and can cause harm to workers if not properly addressed. Ongoing efforts are required to ensure workplaces are maturing in their management of known WHS issues, as well as evolving to identify and manage emerging risks.

Organisational WHS maturity is based on the level of the health and safety programs, procedures and workflows that are in place. A mature organisation continuously improves its processes and puts safety as part of its everyday business. WorkSafe ACT has identified that many businesses in the ACT are more reactive when it comes to safety, with some safety systems in place that may not be effectively implemented or require improvement. Increasing maturity of WHS practices will help workplaces embrace safety and lead to better outcomes for workers and duty holders alike. This includes consideration of how to best engage with and provide support to PCBUs and workers with additional barriers to WHS maturity, including those from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Our objective:

Foster collaborative relationships with stakeholders to facilitate knowledge sharing and encourage a strong safety culture and climate across all workplaces. Work with industry, unions, health and safety representatives, duty holders, workers, and the broader community to increase the maturity of safety systems.

Our priorities:



Psychosocial hazards

Psychosocial hazards and risks are a persistent challenge in the ACT, with many workplaces not adequately managing work-related psychosocial risks. The growing impact of all psychosocial hazards and risks in the ACT, including work-related violence and aggression, sexual harassment and sexual assault must be addressed. Workplaces are expected to ensure effective controls and systems are implemented to reduce the risk of psychological harm.



Musculoskeletal disorders

Many work-related activities can lead to MSDs. MSDs are conditions affecting the body's musculoskeletal system. They are influenced by physical tasks, psychosocial factors like low job control, and organisational factors like high job demands. MSDs are persistently a major cause of injury in the ACT and WorkSafe ACT is dedicated to supporting improved compliance to reduce MSDs. Workplaces must be aware of the MSD risks in their workplace and how to manage them effectively and consistently.



Health and safety in vulnerable populations

All workers have a right to a safe workplace, including those more vulnerable due to factors such as age, disabilities, personal characteristics, working arrangements, and cultural backgrounds. Vulnerable workers may require more support in the workplace to ensure they are safe. Employers and vulnerable workers should be aware of their WHS and workers' compensation rights to ensure they are safe and healthy in the workplace.



Hazardous substances and chemicals

Exposure to hazardous substances and chemicals can cause significant harm. PCBU's must ensure they meet their duties to protect workers from hazardous chemicals, and any other dangerous substances to which they may be exposed.

Asbestos management remains an ongoing issue in the ACT. The health risks associated with disturbed asbestos, including lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis, necessitate stringent regulation for its handling and removal.

Crystalline silica, when disturbed, creates airborne silica dust. When inhaled, silica dust can lead to diseases like silicosis, lung cancer, kidney disease, and auto-immune diseases, often with a long latency period. It is important that PCBU's understand the relevant legislation and required control measures when working with silica-containing materials.



Small businesses

Small businesses require additional support to manage health and safety risks effectively due to limited resources, expertise, and infrastructure compared to larger organisations. Providing tailored education and guidance can significantly enhance their capacity to ensure safe and healthy workplaces.



Hybrid and modern work arrangements

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a significant transition to hybrid work models, including working from home, and introduced more flexible work arrangements across numerous professions in the ACT. This has brought on newer and less understood hazards and risks that require a collaborative approach to manage.



Climate change

Climate change, with its associated extreme weather events and global warming, disrupts business and introduces new health and safety risks in various industries across the ACT. Ensuring emergency planning is effective will help to minimise the risks of extreme weather. Appropriate control measures will help improve safety outcomes during extreme and unpredictable weather events.



Supply and contractual chains

Supply and contractual chain complexities are an emerging issue in the ACT, with increasing population and infrastructure projects putting pressure on existing work processes. Many of the businesses in the ACT are involved in supply and contractual arrangements, including sole traders, contractors and sub-contractors. It is important that duty holders with shared responsibilities work together to manage risks through effective consultation, cooperation and collaboration.

Stakeholder engagement

WorkSafe ACT's strategic communication and engagement approach is focused on enhancing brand visibility, raising awareness, and achieving key business objectives.

Our goal is to increase stakeholder interactions by providing relevant, timely, and accurate engagement through their preferred channels.

We categorise stakeholders into five groups:

- Workplace group
- Authorising group
- Peer group
- Collaborating group
- Internal

Each group is analysed based on their roles in WHS, interactions with WorkSafe ACT, required key messages, necessary actions and engagement, and preferred communication channels.

Based on this analysis, WorkSafe ACT has developed specific brand territories that define the communication characteristics for each stakeholder group, including preferred channels, activities, tone, and messaging.

Who we work with



Strategy 3: WorkSafe ACT is an adaptable and effective regulator.

WorkSafe ACT became an independent entity in 2020 and has been meeting its statutory obligations to secure itself as an exemplary regulator. WorkSafe ACT's strategic planning and investment in recruitment, training, and cultural transformation have laid a strong foundation for our success. As we continue to mature as an agency and a regulator, we will continue to improve our regulatory capability and capacity, including our ability to be responsive to changes in WHS practices and legislation.

Our objective:

Enhance our adaptability as a regulator to meet the growing safety needs of the community through continuous improvement of our internal capacity and capability.

WorkSafe ACT is also dedicated to managing and auditing risks within the agency. Details of how we achieve this are provided in our Annual Report. WorkSafe ACT is committed to ensuring that the delivery of its services at the strategic, business and operational levels is underpinned by effective risk management practices. The approach to risk management taken by WorkSafe ACT is based on the Australian Risk Management Standard AS ISO 31000:2018 and is consistent with the ACT Government Risk Management Policy 2021.

Our Priorities:



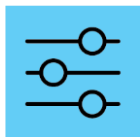
Recruiting and retaining skilled professionals

Targeted recruitment assists in ensuring WorkSafe ACT has the required skill set to meet our regulatory responsibilities. The number of staff WorkSafe ACT has employed has been steadily increasing since 2020 and will continue to grow to meet the community's safety needs. Retention of experienced staff will also be a key focus to share and maintain specialised skills and knowledge across the agency.



Providing ongoing training and professional development

WorkSafe ACT has made significant strides in enhancing the capabilities of inspectors and investigators and addressing skill gaps. WorkSafe ACT has a comprehensive induction and targeted training program to ensure all regulatory staff are competent. Investment in learning and development for all staff will continue to expand the skills of inspectors, investigators and supporting staff. Our dedicated training team will continue to ensure our staff have the tools they need to work safely and effectively.



Streamlining processes through updated systems

Appropriate systems and processes are well established at WorkSafe ACT and subject to programmed review and update as new technology becomes available. Further work on refining, updating and appropriately utilising these systems is fundamental to achieving our goals and improving efficiency. Our dedicated teams continue to improve our systems and develop frameworks and procedures that guide and assure our activities.



Efficiently adapt to changes in legislation, safety practices and workplace environments

To meet the evolving needs of the community and ensure we are meeting our responsibilities as the regulator, WorkSafe ACT will improve organisational capacity to respond to changes in incident notifications, safety practices and legislation. This may require changes to the way we approach our work to ensure we achieve our goals of keeping Territory workplaces safe and healthy. We will work closely with our stakeholders to promote and implement changes as they occur.



Allocation and efficient use of financial resources

Since WorkSafe ACT was established as an independent entity in 2020, the population has grown significantly. Accordingly, the size of the agency has increased in response, with additional budget allowing significant growth. The efficient use of resources is the foundation of our regulatory activities and business operations, by ensuring our staff are effectively and efficiently able to meet the performance targets set out in our accountability indicators. As our agency continues to grow alongside the ACT's increasing labour market, WorkSafe ACT must ensure the continued efficient and effective use of our resources to continue to meet our regulatory and other statutory responsibilities.

Targets

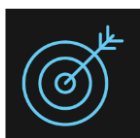
The Australian Strategy sets out national targets to be achieved over the 2023-2033 period. WorkSafe ACT is committed to meeting the national targets, with our performance reported in the Comparative Performance Monitoring Report produced by Safe Work Australia, which is published annually on its website.

The national targets

The national targets for 2023-2033 are:



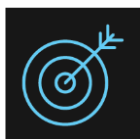
A reduction in the number of worker fatalities due to injury of at least 30%.



A reduction in the frequency rate of claims resulting in one or more weeks off work of at least 20%.



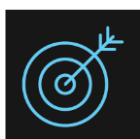
A reduction in the frequency rate of permanent impairment by at least 15%.



A reduction of the overall incidence of work-related injury or illness among workers to below 3.5%.



No new cases of accelerated silicosis by 2033.



A reduction in the frequency rate of work-related respiratory disease by 20%.

Yearly targets

WorkSafe ACT is also responsible for meeting and reporting against accountability indicators. The accountability indicators are used to monitor and measure our performance as a regulator. The accountability indicators are periodically reviewed and updated to ensure they remain contemporary, measurable, and linked to WorkSafe ACT's strategic objectives.

Generally, the accountability indicators relate to our regulatory activities in responding to and preventing workplace injuries and illnesses, including timeframes in responding to incidents, our investigation and prosecution progress, specifics of compliance inspections and our engagement activities.

WorkSafe ACT's accountability indicators are set out in ACT's Annual Budget Statements and reported against in our Annual Reports.



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