



The Psychosocial Hierarchy of Controls

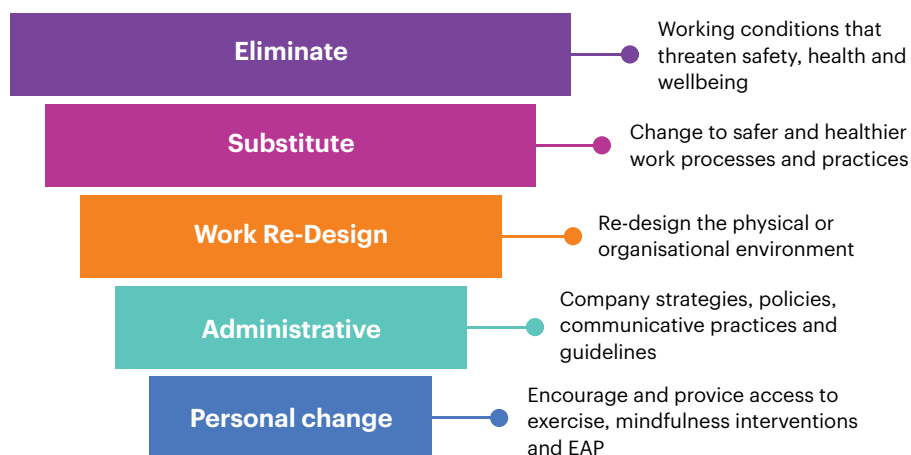
Framework revised to address psychosocial risks in the workplace

What is the change?

Denmark's National Research Centre for the Working Environment has revised the classic safety hierarchy of controls model to specifically address psychosocial risks in the workplace.

The world first paper was published in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine titled "The Psychosocial hierarchy of Controls: Effectively Reducing Psychosocial Hazards at Work" by Kjærgaard et al (2024).

This revised framework offers an effective approach to managing psychosocial hazards, such as bullying, unclear demands, and excessive workload, by recommending a combination of strategies at different levels of the newly designed hierarchy.



Why does it matter?

Psychosocial hazards in the workplace can lead to serious health issues such as mental disorders, cardiovascular diseases, and musculoskeletal injuries.

In 2024, workplace mental health conditions accounted for 10.5% of all serious workers compensation claims, resulting in a median of 37 weeks of lost time and a median of \$65,400 compensation paid.

Mental health conditions are one of the costliest forms of workplace injury, with most claims resulting in 4 times the claims cost of a physical injury.

The revised hierarchy of controls provides a structured approach for reducing psychosocial risks in a recognisable format, providing employers with an opportunity to systematically eliminate or reduce the risk of costly mental health claims in their businesses, which in turn can provide a marked decrease in workers' compensation insurance premiums.

This can be achieved by implementing a range of interventions from different levels of the hierarchy.

How does this help to comply with legislation?

Under state workplace health and safety laws, employers are required to proactively manage psychosocial hazards - such as job demands, level of support, bullying and sexual harassment – just as they would physical hazards. Failing to identify, assess, control and monitor these risks can lead to a breach of duty under the legislation, with individual officers facing fines of up to \$2.3 million. In cases where a mental injury leads to an industrial manslaughter charge, an individual officer could face imprisonment for up to 20 years.

The revised Hierarchy of Controls (HOC) model offers a clear approach to intervention, focusing on primary controls within the organisations' control. Primary controls can be complimented by individual measures, personal change and wellness initiatives, helping to reduce confusion when addressing complex psychosocial hazards and risks in the workplace and providing an avenue to compliance with employer duties under health and safety laws.

How can Willis help you to incorporate this into your work practices?

To integrate this revised hierarchy into your work practices, the business must understand its psychosocial risk profile; where the hazards are, and which employees are most at-risk. A psychosocial risk assessment will focus on these areas and assist with identifying areas of focus. This can be done by incorporating the HOC by helping you to:

1. Eliminate psychosocial risks: Look at your workplace to remove or reduce stressors like excessive workload or harassment.
2. Substitute harmful practices: Replace rigid work schedules with flexible hours or introduce job rotation to minimise monotony and stress.
3. Redesign the work environment: Make physical or organisational changes to improve wellbeing, such as providing ergonomic assessments and alterations, creating collaborative spaces, or promoting a supportive, inclusive culture with full commitment from the leadership team.
4. Implement administrative controls: Develop strategies, policies, and clear communication channels to promote mental health, such as anonymous reporting avenues, enforcing a psychosocial safety policy or training human resources personal in mental health first aid.
5. Encourage personal change: Provide individual support, such as awareness training, mindfulness programs, and psychological interventions (EAP), while ensuring these are complementary to broader organisational strategies.

By focusing on these varied levels of intervention, Willis can assist you to effectively address psychosocial risks, fostering a healthier and more productive work environment and meeting your WHS obligations under relevant state legislation.

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Contact Willis, a WTW business

To learn more or discuss how Willis can help you to incorporate the revised HOC into the work practices of your organisation, please contact Willis Workplace Risk via:

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