

ACT Public Sector COVID-19 safety transition plan policy

PURPOSE

1. Work health, safety and wellbeing is a fundamental tenet of ACT Public Sector employment. All ACT Public Sector employees, irrespective of their role, will have their workplaces managed in a way that prioritises work health, safety and wellbeing. This covers all employees from office workers to teachers, health care and emergency workers to field based workers.
2. To maintain proper levels of health and safety during the COVID-19 outbreak, directorates and agencies must regularly assess COVID-19 risks and take action to prevent harm, promote health and wellbeing and provide support if illness or injury does occur. This includes implementing the public health actions of physical distancing, hygiene measures and contact tracing, as well as addressing other risks, especially those related to the mental wellbeing of our employees..
3. To assist directorates/agencies to manage this process and to provide confidence that proper measures are in place across the Service, this policy requires directorates/agencies to develop and implement a COVID-19 safety transition plan (the transition plan).
4. The transition plan should not simply assume a return to pre-COVID-19 working arrangements is either required or desired. The massive and rapid onset of COVID-19 has changed the way we work and our attitudes and approach to management will need to evolve and recognise the successes and learnings from this challenge.

APPLICATION

5. This policy contains a set of whole of government instructions issued by the Head of Service under the Public Sector Management Act 1994 which binds all employees and officers engaged under that Act.
6. This policy commences from 22 June 2020 and should be used for transition planning conducted after that date.

BACKGROUND

7. The *Public Sector Work Health Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2022* (the strategy) sets the direction for the ACT Government's approach to improving work health, safety (WHS) and wellbeing. This policy implements the Strategy by providing additional guidance to assist with the management of the COVID-19 outbreak and the transition into a new pattern of work.
8. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic (an infectious disease outbreak that spreads on a global scale). In March 2020 restrictions were put

in place across Australia and in the ACT to limit the spread of COVID-19. These restrictions are now being gradually eased. The ACT Government's road map provides a staged approach to the ACT community moving out of the restrictions.

9. Changed work, working arrangements and workplaces have been in place for a significant proportion of ACT Government employees since March 2020. All workplaces have implemented physical distancing where practicable, hand and respiratory hygiene measures and COVID-19 contact tracing in order to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in workplaces. In addition, each directorate/agency moved a proportion of their staff to remote working arrangements.

PRINCIPLES

10. Directorates/agencies must develop and implement a transition plan, tailored to the risks of COVID-19 for their business, to ensure the safety of employees and others in ACT Government workplaces. Each of the transition plans will inform their Business Continuity Plan, reflecting that workplaces have changed as a result of COVID-19.
11. A single approach for ACT Government is not practicable given the diversity of service delivery and working environments. Each directorate/agency transition plan will be different and must be tailored to their circumstances but must be consistent with the ACTPS guidance to address risks associated with COVID-19.
12. Directorate/agency transition plans must consider the following:

- i. **Workplaces must be safe**

All workplaces must have measures in place to respond to the pandemic and that are aligned with the social and public health requirements in place for managing COVID-19 in the ACT. Transition plans must address how directorates/agencies will manage ongoing workplace health and safety implications and obligations to their employees in both usual workplaces (including customer facing workplaces) and changed work environments such as working from home. Directorates/agencies must consider their workforce and work arrangements and consider modifying workplace attendance arrangements to ensure physical distancing in the workplace. This may include rostering employees to work from the office or home on different days or alternate weeks or facilitating more flexible start and finish times.

Directorates/agencies must implement the ACTPS advice for their workforce that will promote safe work practices, actively control against the transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace and respond to any suspected or actual cases of COVID-19 in the workplace.

Directorates will need to ensure the totality of the risks associated with the workplace are considered in conjunction with the COVID-19 risks. Risk assessments must include existing identified risks as well as any unintended risks as a result of the control measures to manage the risks associated with exposure to COVID-19, such as occupational violence.

- ii. **A planned approach for the management of services and workforce during COVID-19**

COVID-19 risk management will be relevant for an extended period. Directorates/agencies must closely consider their longer-term business operations with a view to maintaining service delivery and productivity and ensuring that efficient and sustainable controls are in place to manage the safety of employees and others.

To ensure service delivery across ACT Government is maintained, directorates/agencies must consider the requirements to actively identify employees who may be able to be mobilised to deliver critical functions in other directorates/agencies as well as availability for internal mobility.

iii. **Employees must be involved and informed about changed workplace arrangements. (and be mindful of the industrial relations consequences of decisions taken)**

Directorates/ agencies must consult with employees and their representatives about the transition plan, and especially on the planning and management of the work health and safety in relation to COVID-19.

Approaches must also be in place to communicate in an effective and timely way with employees, particularly when there is a change in restrictions or control measures that are in place to protect work health and safety, such as physical distancing.

iv. **Support mental wellbeing of all workers**

COVID-19 has significantly changed the workplace. During periods of change, employees are likely to experience higher levels of anxiety, psychological and social risks (such as social isolation) may have been introduced for some workers. Directorates/agencies will need to consider the specific risks to their employees in this context and prepare strategies for designing work to address the risks in addition to supports for team culture and engagement and maintaining employee resilience and encouraging access to appropriate wellbeing supports.

Acknowledging that workplaces will be different as a result of COVID-19, a balance needs to be struck between working flexibly and independently while ensuring employees feel connected to the workplace.

v. **Support workers who need support**

Directorates/agencies must consider the specific circumstances of their workforce, provide appropriate supports and ensure that employees and their representatives are informed about and understand the support available to them, such as vulnerable workers, those with caring responsibilities, those recovering from illness or injury etc.

vi. **Adopt and promote flexible working arrangements to meet business requirements**

Directorates /agencies must be alert to the ACTPS directions on transitioning with changed restrictions and the likelihood that, in some cases, an increased proportion of staff will work from home over an extended period. Directorates/agencies need to consider how work can be designed and flexibility provided to suit working from home as necessary – for instance, by facilitating different working hours and providing other reasonable flexibilities within the provisions of their enterprise agreement or other industrial instruments. Relevant factors to

be considered in decision making include the ability to meet operational requirements, as well as security, health considerations, information technology and remote working capacity.

Directorates/agencies must also consider modifying workplace attendance arrangements where physical distancing in the workplace cannot be maintained or other risks are identified.

vii. **Workplaces must be ready to respond**

Directorates/agencies must ensure transition plans are flexible to respond and adapt to changes in advice from the Australian Government and ACT Government, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

All workplaces will need to be able to respond in a timely manner to any suspected or actual exposure to COVID-19. Directorates/agencies will need to ensure transition plans consider when and how to react if there is an increase in local community transmission that alters social restrictions and workforce arrangements.

viii. **A new workplace paradigm**

Directorates/agencies must consider the need for changes to industrial arrangements, manager and employee training to support new workplace arrangements. This will particularly be the case if a proportion of the workforce continues to be supported to work from home over an extended period. Consideration should also be given to whether any changed work practices have produced benefits to the service or to employees and how these can be integrated into current and/or future operating environments.

Working arrangements should continue to support employees to work collaboratively and flexibly to achieve deliverables. As part of their plan, Directorates/agencies should consider how collaborative work can be managed where employees are working from home under flexible arrangements as well as ensuring employees maintain connectivity to their workplace, including the use of digital technology.

ix. **Evaluate to inform future workplace operations and arrangements**

Directorates/agencies must consider the impacts of changed work practices and how these can be integrated into their current and/or future operating environments to improve workplaces. An evidence based approach should be adopted.

Directorates/agencies should commit to undertake regular evaluations of the transitional management of employees back into the workplace with consideration of how to measure performance and productivity under the new working arrangements. Where it is identified that adjustments need to be made, these should be done quickly to promote productivity and connectivity to the workplace.

RESPONSIBILITIES

13. Directors general/agency executives must ensure that there is a transition plan developed and implemented to address changed service delivery, work arrangements and/or the transition of employees back to usual work and workplaces, in conjunction with their overall COVID-19 response.

14. Managers must ensure that the transition plan addresses the risks for their business unit and work with employees to implement the transition plan. Managers must ensure that employees are informed and consulted with, trained and understand their responsibilities in ensuring safe workplaces with any changed arrangements during COVID-19 recovery.
15. Employees must adhere to the directions provided to ensure a safe workplace with any changed arrangements during COVID-19 recovery.

RELATED LEGISLATION

16. This policy will be delivered in accordance with:

- [ACT Public Health Directions – COVID-19](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)
- [PSM Act 1994](#)
- [ACTPS Enterprise Agreements](#)

RELATED RESOURCES

17. This policy should be read together with other ACT Public Sector policies, procedures and guidance:

- [COVID-19 Work health, safety and wellbeing information for the ACTPS](#)
- [COVID advice for ACTPS employees](#)
- ACTPS WHS response to COVID guide (To be added)
- COVID WHOG WHS Risk assessment (To be added)