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Dear employees

I am delighted to announce the launch of the Safe and Well in Education Strategy 2019-2024 (the Strategy) which puts the health, safety and wellbeing of all our employees, whether in the teaching service or public service, at the centre of what we do.

When our employees are engaged and thriving, we can collectively create environments that deliver excellence in teaching and learning for all Victorians. Together, as a department, we are committed to creating learning and working environments where safety and wellbeing is a cornerstone of our success, whether in a school, region or central location. School excellence relies on principals, teachers and education support staff being healthy and safe. Their wellbeing contributes to a positive school culture and maximises teaching and learning outcomes.

The Strategy builds on our existing health, safety and wellbeing supports and plans systemic improvements. The Victorian Government has invested $51 million over the next four years to make these changes through the Employee Wellbeing and Operational Policy Reforms. The input and feedback from you, our employees, and a range of internal and external stakeholders, has shaped our priorities.

The key areas identified in this Strategy represent a focus for our efforts, and will evolve as we make progress. They are informed by leading practice and emerging evidence about the importance of mental health and wellbeing. We are upgrading and simplifying our health and safety management systems, boosting our capacity to provide more expert, hands-on support and enhancing our ability to use our health and safety data more effectively for targeted interventions.

These systemic changes will allow us to have a more evidence-based approach to health, safety and wellbeing that are informed by your needs.

We recognise that your mental health is just as important as your physical health and this Strategy prioritises wellbeing. I expect your wellbeing to be a consistent point of conversation and action in our workplaces. Together, we need to be proactive in seeking help, accessing support, checking in on our colleagues, and reducing the stigma around mental health. We all need some extra support from time to time and I’m pleased we’re enhancing our Employee Assistance Program to cater for more individual and team mental health and wellbeing needs. This is available to both our front line (principals, teachers, education support staff) and corporate staff.

Being safe and supported at work also relies on our organisational culture.

All of us need to play our part and participate in building a culture that prioritises health, safety, and wellbeing. When we are safe and well, we can be our best in helping students thrive and support the communities in which we work.

Your health, safety and wellbeing matters.

I look forward to working together to improve health, safety and wellbeing across the Department.

Jenny Atta
Secretary
INTRODUCTION

The Victorian public education system relies on our employees being their best every day. At the Department of Education and Training, we are committed to ensuring that our employees across Victoria are safe and well across every one of our workplaces.

The Department of Education and Training (Department) is the largest employer in Victoria with approximately 90,000 staff in our workplaces that span schools, central and regional offices. Through our employees, the Department helps deliver the Education State agenda – to give every Victorian the best learning and development experience by building a world class education system. School excellence relies on principals, teachers and education support staff being healthy and safe. Their wellbeing contributes to a positive school culture and maximises teaching and learning outcomes.

Ensuring a safe and healthy work environment in our schools and corporate workplaces is a fundamental expectation for all of our employees. In response, the Department has established health, safety and wellbeing systems and initiatives to help our employees be their best and thrive at work.

In an increasingly complex and evolving environment, we as an employer, need to continually adapt and build on our existing policies and support systems.

The Department is also delivering on the whole of Victorian Government commitment to protect, promote and address both physical and psychological health and wellbeing through the Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter.

In 2018, the Department embarked on a Strategic Review of our employee health, safety and wellbeing to identify ways the Department could improve its approach to employee health, safety and wellbeing.

Through a co-design process, we listened to the experiences of our people and learnt from their reflections and insights to help formulate a systematic way of addressing the health, safety and wellbeing challenges within our large and diverse workforce.

The Strategic Review helped inform the Victorian Government’s investment of an additional $51 million over four years to help create healthier and more supportive workplaces and assist the Department to deliver a positive climate for learning.
Our vision is to create healthy, safe working and learning environments for our people. We will help our people thrive and succeed by embedding health, safety and wellbeing in everything we do.

This vision is key to helping us achieve excellence in teaching and learning and meeting our commitment to make Victoria the Education State. School excellence relies on our principals and school staff being healthy and safe. Their wellbeing contributes to a positive school culture and maximises teaching and learning outcomes. By working smarter as a coordinated system, responsibilities can be distributed fairly across the Department to help build an engaged workforce and reduce workload intensity faced by our school leaders.

With healthy and safe working and learning environments, all employees and students in education will have greater opportunities to succeed. It will help us achieve a positive climate for learning and build professional leadership that supports the implementation of the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO) (Figure 1). This will in turn, positively contribute to the Education State target of happy, healthy and resilient kids.

In order to achieve our vision, the Department is committed to embedding health, safety and wellbeing in everything we do. By embarking on systemic long-term changes to how we work, we can ensure that health, safety and wellbeing impacts are considered at every step and by every function, across the Department.

Investing in improving health and safety at work “...is an excellent way to demonstrate to staff that the leadership team cares about their wellbeing – resulting in fewer injuries, greater job satisfaction, increased motivation and better industrial relations, as well as better student performance”.

In addition to helping the Department meet duty of care to employees, this approach ensures we are recognised as an employer of choice – attracting and supporting the best principals, teachers and staff to achieve success in their respective roles.

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WHY DO WE NEED A STRATEGY?

A more strategic approach is required to bring together various pieces of employee safety and wellbeing work in an ever changing environment.

INCREASING FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

A rise in mental health issues within the population is being noted across the world. In 2017-18, 20.1 per cent of Australians reported having experienced a mental health or behavioural condition, an increase from 17.5 per cent in 2014-15.

Mental health issues can affect employees at any time over the course of their working life and it is estimated that most managers will supervise someone with a mental health problem at some point.

Australian workplaces lose close to $11 billion each year in productivity, absenteeism and workers’ compensation claims due to mental illness. Within our workforce, being the teaching service and public service, mental injury claims have increased by four per cent (per 100 full time employees) over the past five years. Future projections from WorkSafe estimate that mental injury claims in Victoria will increase by at least 34 per cent by 2030 (versus 12 per cent for physical injury).

The Department also interacts with mental health issues in the broader community through daily exchanges with students and parents which can sometimes impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of our frontline teachers, school staff and principals.

The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey 2018 showed that the mental health of students and staff were among the top causes of stress for principals. The survey also reported a national increase in principals experiencing violent or threatening behaviour by students and parents in schools, although this has recently declined in Victoria.

Traditionally, health and safety management systems in the Department have focused on identifying and managing physical health and safety risks, rather than psychological risks.

The Department can improve capability of our employees and leaders to confidently identify and manage psychological risk by increasing awareness and investing in improvements to existing systems, creating psychologically healthy workplaces.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

The Department has a diverse workforce with varying needs and challenges, including:

- **Individual needs** – people across the Department bring diverse skills and perspectives to the workplace because of their gender, age, language, cultural background, disability, sexual orientation, working style, work and life experiences, and other qualities and diversities.

- **Location** – our workforce is dispersed across the state with employees working in rural or remote parts of Victoria with limited access to face-to-face support and services.

- **Size** – the size and scale of our workplaces across schools, central and regional offices varies significantly. This can have resourcing and support implications.

- **Workgroups** – roles and functions within the Department have different demands and challenges placed on them.

- **Type of workplace** – schools, central and regional workplaces across the Department have unique needs. Even across schools, the size, type and learning environment varies, making the needs of each school unique (e.g. needs of staff in specialist schools, are different to those of staff in secondary schools).

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Each of these factors present a unique set of health, safety and wellbeing risks and challenges. While a centralised approach to managing health, safety and wellbeing provides consistency and assurance, it must also support tailored and localised approaches where necessary.

Whole school approaches that consider local communities are valuable and differentiated support for employees remains necessary.

The Department’s Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy for principal-class staff, and the Systems of Care pilot programs for Student Support Services (SSS) staff demonstrate the value of targeted support in our workforce.

**TAILORED SOLUTIONS: ADDRESSING THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF OUR PRINCIPALS**

In 2018, the Department launched a comprehensive health and wellbeing strategy for all school principal-class staff in recognition of their unique roles and health and wellbeing risks. The Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy introduced a suite of six tailored initiatives to help our school leaders thrive:

- **School Policy Templates Portal** – a suite of relevant policy templates to minimise administrative workload for principals
- **Principal Mentor Program** – connects principals with an experienced mentor to reduce isolation and provide operational and psychological support
- **Proactive Wellbeing Supervision** – debriefing sessions with experienced psychologists to facilitate reflective practice
- **Principal Health Checks** – free and confidential access to a detailed health assessment covering physical and mental health
- **Complex Matter Support Team** – access to a lead professional who connects principals with supports and assists with responding to correspondence from parents and advocates. This minimises workload and stress associated with managing and responding to complex cases
- **Early Intervention Program** – confidential access to case management and services including psychological, physical, dietetics, financial and other. This aims to provide proactive access to professional support to prevent health and wellbeing risks from escalating.

As a result of additional funding from Government, these initiatives will all be made available to principals on an ongoing basis.
The ever changing nature of work, shifting social trends, changes in technology and an unpredictable economic environment requires individuals and organisations to adapt and recalibrate rapidly to shifting priorities, in order to succeed. The world of work today is seen as being volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.

The People Matter Survey 2018 results show that the nature of work and work demands are the most significant stressors for both corporate and regional Department employees. Similar concerns have been consistently reported by principals as a key source of stress.

Ongoing change can have a significant impact on employee wellbeing and performance. Research suggests that the impacts of organisational change can include lower levels of job satisfaction, reduced organisational commitment, job insecurity and a higher likelihood to seek alternative employment.

If organisational change is not well managed, it can impact on overall morale and engagement. This may lead to reduced work performance, high levels of absenteeism and the potential for psychosocial injuries that may result in long term and more complex claims.

A focus on promoting positive wellbeing in organisations can help build psychological capital (a core factor consisting of hope, efficacy, optimism, and resilience) amongst employees. Evidence suggests that higher levels of psychological capital can help employees adapt in times of change and strive for peak performance and excellence, despite the challenges and stressors within the environment.

Engagement in work is a key protective factor for mental health. By investing in building the capability for our employees and leaders, the Department can better equip our staff to adapt to ongoing change and transformation.

THE SAFE AND WELL IN EDUCATION STRATEGY

OUR FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION
The Strategy provides a systematic and sustainable approach to enhancing health, safety and wellbeing across the Department. The Strategy represents the start of our five-year journey towards achieving our vision. We will continue to work closely with our leaders and employees across the Department to inform, develop and refine the Strategy as a guiding roadmap into the future.

Figure 3: Strategic Framework for Action

By doing this well, the following objectives will be achieved:

- as an organisation, we can effectively monitor, respond, manage and promote health, safety and wellbeing in our workplaces
- our leaders are capable, confident and supported to effectively lead by example and enable the safety and wellbeing of their staff
- our employees are safe and supported, both mentally and physically, to be fully engaged within the workplace.

The Department is committed to embedding a holistic approach for supporting health, safety and wellbeing that allows us to improve how we:

- **promote** positive wellbeing in our learning and working environments
- **prevent** against known and expected risks to health, safety and wellbeing
- **respond** swiftly and effectively to manage potential issues as they emerge
- support our employees to **recover** from injury and illness and return to work.

There are three enablers that will help us to realise our goal of total health and wellbeing in safe workplaces.

Establishing Effective Systems

Improving health, safety and wellbeing across a large organisation requires effective management systems that are simple, smart and intuitive to use. An effective management system provides clear expectations across different levels, empowering leaders and staff to play active roles in creating and maintaining safe and healthy workplaces.

Good systems encourage consistency and promote good practice. They also streamline the administration involved, encourage better reporting and tracking of trends across the system – allowing the Department, as an employer, to intervene early and act on emerging issues.

Total Health and Wellbeing in Safe Workplaces
The framework requires adopting a holistic focus on physical and psychological health, safety and wellbeing.

A safe and healthy workplace promotes and enhances wellbeing within the workplace. Similarly, a focus on wellbeing can in turn have broad-ranging health benefits and improve the levels of safety.
Supporting Our People

It is imperative that we offer timely and targeted expert health, safety and wellbeing support and advice to our schools and workplaces. We are committed to building on the range of support currently offered, allowing more flexibility and tailored responses.

We will continue to work collaboratively and respond to feedback to ensure that we are offering the right support at the right time to implement safe systems of work.

Building Culture and Capability

Transforming our approach to health, safety and wellbeing offers an opportunity to build the Department’s wellbeing culture. Creating sustainable and positive improvement requires building the capability, skill and confidence of our staff to be effective wellbeing leaders.

Through targeted capability building sessions for employees at all levels, we aim to increase the understanding of everyone to actively contribute to creating a safe and healthy workplace.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In developing a strategic approach to improving employee health, safety and wellbeing, we identified five guiding principles.

1. **Simplification** – we live in an increasingly complicated world, where systems and processes designed to assist us may require more work to maintain them than provide benefit. Through the principle of ‘simplification’, we hope to build health and safety systems and processes that are smart, agile, and work together to assist our people now and into the future.

2. **Trust** – building trust is fundamental to the success of embedding our vision of wellbeing, health and safety in everything we do. This involves demonstrating our commitment through actions, and ensuring we are effectively communicating across the organisation, including through raising issues and concerns.

3. **Respect** – building respect across our organisation by valuing others and accepting their differences is key to creating an environment where our people feel safe and supported to thrive and succeed in their working and learning environments.

4. **Engagement** – increasing engagement is a key aspect of our vision, as it allows us to build a better understanding of health, safety and wellbeing through positive conversations, and empowering and supporting our people.

5. **Accountability** – the principle of accountability will ensure that all employees feel empowered to make a difference in the way we approach health, safety and wellbeing, and will clarify the shared responsibilities we have across the Department.

We are using these principles to guide the implementation of our Strategy and our priorities through the process of co-design and testing.
MAKING LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENTS

Making long-term improvements to health, safety and wellbeing involves a combination of:

- **Building on our existing supports** – the Department already has a range of supports and systems in place to maintain the health and safety of our employees. Through this Strategy, we have an opportunity to optimise their effectiveness.

- **Investing $51 million in new reforms** – the Department has embarked on a series of strategic reforms to improve employee wellbeing through a Victorian Government investment of $51 million over four years and $16 million ongoing. This significant investment will allow us to build on our existing services through targeted reform initiatives that provide increased occupational health and safety (OHS) and workers’ compensation systems and supports, embed the Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy services, and implement broader operational policy reforms.

**PRIORITIES FOR ACTION**

There are five priority areas to drive and focus our activities over the next five years. Each priority area is supported by a number of planned initiatives and reforms that underpin our overarching vision for health, safety and wellbeing in everything we do.

The priority areas complement other initiatives across the Department to ensure a cohesive approach to health, safety and wellbeing.

**Key priorities to focus on:**

- Build a stronger focus on mental health and wellbeing
- Create a shared culture of responsibility and support
- Simplify the management of health and safety compliance
- Provide more expert advice and hands on support
- Increase capacity and capability to prevent and respond to emerging risks.
In 2020, the Department will relaunch this program to promote this service as a proactive support for all our employees that can help them be at their best. The new program will be extended to include counselling support for School Council Employees. The service also offers coaching and guidance for leaders to manage mental health amongst their employees and allow schools and workplaces across the Department to access targeted professional sessions to help support health and wellbeing at work.

**Building Mentally Healthy and Respectful Workplaces Training**

Leaders have a key role to play in creating mentally healthy workplaces and the Department is committed to building the capability of our leaders to do so effectively. As part of implementing the Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter, the Department has commenced the delivery of targeted professional development sessions to equip leaders with the skills and confidence to effectively support the mental health of their staff to enable them to build mentally healthy workplaces.

In 2018, over 80 per cent of Department executives engaged in strategic sessions on mental health and wellbeing, and in 2019 all central and regional office people managers are invited to participate in the Building Mentally Healthy and Respectful Workplaces training. The Department is looking to offer similar development opportunities for school leaders through the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership in future.

**ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER INITIATIVES:**

**MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS IN SCHOOLS**

The Mental Health Practitioners initiative was announced by the Minister for Education in late 2018 to expand mental health and wellbeing support in government schools. The initiative provides $51.2 million over four years and $31 million ongoing. The Victorian Government has also established a Royal Commission into Mental Health, which aligns to this initiative and will have a focus on prevention and early intervention.

One in seven Victorians between the ages of four and 17 are estimated to have a mental health issue, with a greater prevalence in secondary school. Without appropriate support, mental health issues can have far-reaching impacts on a person’s physical health, community participation and socioeconomic outcomes into the future and can significantly impact on students’ learning and development outcomes.

The education system already supports students’ health and wellbeing, but given the scale of the challenge, additional support is needed that leverages schools as a universal platform for service provision and enables students to access a continuum of care within their school environment.

The initiative will provide every government secondary school campus with a suitably qualified, school-based mental health practitioner by 2022 to support the mental health of our students.
Why is this a priority?

Creating sustainable shifts in wellbeing requires everyone, across all levels of the Department to play an active role. Leaders are instrumental in supporting a safety culture and encouraging active participation in workplace practices that promote safety. They have key obligations and responsibilities to effectively manage safety risks under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic). Our leaders have told us that meeting these obligations can be quite daunting and become a key source of their stress. As a Department, we need to provide better clarity on the expected role of leaders at all levels and better support them to meet their obligations. All employees are required to consider the potential health and safety impacts of their work, supported and should be provided with information, instruction and training on how to work safely with one another.

We will do this by

Implementing the Safe and Well in Education Framework

Ensuring that our leaders are clear about their role in delivering safe outcomes and are supported to acquire these responsibilities is fundamental to creating a safety culture. The best safety culture is based on a fair allocation of responsibility. The Department has developed the Safe and Well in Education Framework (the Framework) to clearly describe the role that leaders, at all levels, play in creating safer workplaces. The Framework seeks to ensure that even under the devolved model, school leaders are appropriately supported by senior Department leaders in meeting their safety obligations. The implementation of the Framework will clarify and strengthen accountability of all of our leaders and support them to play an active role in creating a culture of safety.

Building a culture of accountability and responsibility through better reporting and support

What gets measured gets done. The same applies to improving accountability and responsibility in creating and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. The Department is committed to improving our capacity to capture and report on meaningful health and safety data that provides greater visibility of our safety performance. This will allow better data insights and support, and targeting of resources to where they are needed most.

Embedding a stronger local support model to reduce occupational health and safety risks in schools

The Department introduced the regional engagement model to support schools to improve their health and safety through the OHS Management System Audit Program. The audit identifies corrective actions that need to be undertaken to create a safer environment within each school. Through the regional engagement model, OHS and Facilities Support Officers and the OHS Advisory Service work collaboratively with school leaders to help them address their priority corrective actions. The Department will continue to embed this model by leveraging area-based multi-disciplinary teams that work collaboratively to better support principals and school leaders.

Priority: Create a shared culture of responsibility and support

Priority: Simplify the management of health and safety compliance

Why is this a priority?

As our health and safety regulations and requirements have evolved, the process of managing health and safety at a local level has become more complex. Meeting our health, safety and wellbeing obligations under the law has traditionally driven a strong compliance focus across our workplaces. Time consuming compliance aspects, while often important for meeting legal obligations, can detract from the intent of the activity – which is to improve wellbeing outcomes.


This is particularly pronounced for our school leaders and may be seen as detracting their focus on leading school excellence\textsuperscript{18}. Multiple reporting requirements, manual forms and paperwork, and the absence of continuity of data, all contribute towards the administrative burden placed on employees. The Department recognises the need to simplify the management of health and safety processes to make it easier for leaders to focus on achieving meaningful safety outcomes.

**We will do this by**

**Implementing smarter digital systems**

The Department is in the process of establishing smarter, more user-friendly, digital systems to better support the management of health and safety. The system will make it easier to capture and manage safety information by integrating existing multiple health and safety reporting platforms, such as eduSafe and the Incident Reporting Information System (IRIS), and facilitate better records management of documents and information required for the management of a safe workplace or school. In addition, the systems will provide more practical guidance on improving safety and wellbeing and offer simplified OHS policies and procedures targeted to the specific needs of schools.

**Simplifying processes for Return to Work Coordinators**

Managing workers’ compensation claims can be complex and confusing for leaders with less exposure to claims. The way an individual claim is managed can have a significant impact on the successful return to work for an injured employee. The Department has developed a Return to Work Coordinator website that provides step-by-step guidance on managing a claim effectively, with quick links to relevant policies, templates and instructional guides.

**Increasing administrative support for the management of workers’ compensation claims**

There can be considerable administrative burden associated with the management of workers’ compensation claims which can detract from a school leader’s ability to focus on what is really important - working with their injured employees to get them back to work safely. A new team of highly skilled staff with experience in managing school-based workers’ compensation claims, is being formed to provide hands on support to identified schools and make workers’ compensation processes simpler and more efficient.

**DRIVING BROADER CULTURAL REFORM: CHANGING HOW THE DEPARTMENT CREATES POLICIES**

Any change to operational policy can become a source of additional workload and stress for schools and workplaces across the Department. Finding the right information at the right time can often be a challenge. The number of operational areas and online systems and portals (e.g. School Policy Advisory Guide, HR Web, the intranet) can be confusing and time consuming to navigate. Recognising this challenge, the Department has embarked on a significant operational policy reform program to drive a broader cultural shift on how the Department introduces and implements policies. This program will focus on improving accessibility and reliability of information by establishing a ‘single source of truth’ and supporting policy changes with practical implementation tools and supports. This program will also review and reduce the number of policies required, minimising duplication and conflicting information, and minimise stress and workload pressures for principals and for all Department staff.

**Priority: Provide more expert advice and hands on support**

**Why is this a priority?**

Effective management of health, safety and wellbeing requires expert guidance and tailored, hands on support. Different working environments have different health and safety demands that require tailored solutions. The Department is committed to increasing our resourcing to ensure we have more health and safety professionals with expert knowledge available to provide practical hands on support, where needed.

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We will do this by

Developing a risk and needs-based support model

The sheer diversity of our workforce and varied and nature of Department workplaces requires a targeted approach that is based on risk and needs. Analysis of health, safety and wellbeing performance data will provide an evidence-base to establish a risk profile for different workplaces. Building on our data driven insights, we will systematically identify our highest risks and needs, and deliver tailored interventions that direct resources and expert support to where they are most needed. The Department will establish a tiered approach to ensure the right level of support to respond to risk and needs.

Figure 5: Adopting a Risk and Needs Based Tiered Support Model

Providing more hands-on support for schools through additional OHS professionals

The Department’s OHS Advisory Service and regional OHS support officers assist with the implementation of the health and safety management system. The Department offers free access to independent health and safety experts who can provide advice via phone or on-site. The Department is investing in more hands-on expert OHS support for schools in need, to assist with the implementation and ongoing management of OHS obligations. Safety professionals will visit selected schools to help school leaders’ complete key OHS tasks. This includes assistance to smaller schools and new schools for OHS management system implementation and ongoing support, with the potential for expansion of this service to other schools. Additional support will be provided to schools with high priority audit corrective actions and to schools with unclosed hazard and incident reports. New and acting principals will be supported to build their capability and understanding to meet OHS requirements.

Improving access to qualified OHS providers through approved panels of providers

Some OHS services, like tagging and testing of electrical equipment, need to be delivered by specialist providers. Accessing a qualified service provider and ensuring they have up to date insurance and license details and relevant safe work method statements can be difficult and time consuming. The Department will establish centrally managed panels of providers made up of qualified and approved contractors, including those currently used by schools. Schools will be able to opt-in to using these panels or continue to undertake their own arrangements.

It is anticipated that this will improve access to quality-assured providers, reduce workload through the streamlined approach to engaging providers, and provide increased assurance that the provider is qualified and competent to undertake the task safely. This reform will also look at establishing periodic reminders for schools to prompt them to engage contractors for these essential OHS tasks.

Implementing an employee injury management framework to support recovery of injured workers

Data from WorkSafe demonstrates that the longer an employee remains injured and away from work, the greater potential there is for secondary conditions, such as mental injury in response to the primary workplace injury. However, supporting injured workers can be complex and time consuming, requiring leaders to draw on a number of stakeholders such as treating health professionals, support staff within regional and central offices, the Department’s insurance agent, occupation rehabilitation providers and the injured employee. Return to work planning is essential to restoring an injured employee to their pre-injury state and maintaining a positive workplace culture.
The Department is establishing a team of highly skilled injury management specialists that will be made available to schools meeting key criteria. The criteria will ensure the support reaches those who need it most, based on risk and need. The team will liaise directly with schools as early as possible to provide tailored, specialist advice and support to assist with the successful return to work following an injury.

**Offering increased workers’ compensation dispute support**

The Department acknowledges that managing workers’ compensation claims is complex and can be stressful for everyone involved. Even when we do our best to ensure employees are properly cared for, disputes arise and cases progress through to conciliation and legal processes. More expert support can help to better manage disputes and reduce the stress associated with the process. The Department will establish a team of highly skilled workers’ compensation dispute specialists to provide increased support to workplaces and schools where disputes have occurred. This support will be provided directly to schools as early as possible and will be tailored to meet the needs of the case.

**Why is this a priority?**

The Department’s operating environment is ever changing and dynamic. Our everyday interactions with colleagues, students, parents and other external stakeholders are important but can be challenging and unpredictable. Across our schools, there is an increased focus on preventing and improving our response to challenging student and parent behaviours. There is also a need to ensure early intervention and better injury management to facilitate recovery and support for employees who are impacted.

**We do this by**

**Establishing an Employee Wellbeing Response Team**

The Department will establish an Employee Wellbeing Response Team to provide timely support and advice on managing health, safety and wellbeing across our schools and workplaces. The team will provide specialist expertise, advice and support for effective physical and psychological risk management and safety plans. They will also refer leaders to relevant training, supports and services that they need to solve complex safety or wellbeing problems. Where necessary, they will directly support managers to respond to WorkSafe matters. The team will have a strong focus on addressing emerging critical safety risks including systems for preventing and responding to occupational violence and aggression. They will complement existing legal, emergency and complex matter support functions to ensure a coordinated OHS response that effectively liaises with all areas of the Department. The team will also provide proactive support and management immediately post injury through early intervention for injured workers and to minimise time away from work as a result of injuries.
Ensuring safety at work for school staff

Schools are inclusive environments that encourage diversity. Students or others can present with a variety of behaviours that can sometimes pose a risk to the safety of staff and other students at the school. The reasons for student behaviours can be complex and diverse. In addition to student-focused strategies (such as behaviour analysis and support) schools need more information and training on how to minimise the risk of harm to the student themselves and others.

This initiative will ensure that schools have the right systems and processes in place when students or others present with behaviours that are a safety risk. The Department is developing a comprehensive suite of resources, based on the principles of dignity, respect and inclusion that will support schools in implementing strategies for minimising the risks of violence from students and others at school.

The Department will also provide access to a panel of qualified protective intervention training providers, policies, guides, communication strategies and e-learning modules that provide preventative strategies that are aligned with existing behaviour management frameworks (e.g. the School-wide positive behaviour support framework). Strategies will also be aimed at minimising the risk of psychological harm from behaviours that pose a risk to school staff.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER INITIATIVES:

The Make-Safe Program

The Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) provides the Make-Safe Program to all schools. It ensures a fast response to eliminate immediate hazards after a serious incident or event. It can cover damage, destruction or loss to/of buildings and infrastructure resulting from an ‘incident’ (vandalism, burglary etc.) or ‘event’ (storms, fire, flooding etc.) that causes an immediate health and safety concern for staff, students and/or the community. It can also cover the reinstatement of buildings to their original condition in certain circumstances.

The Asbestos Incident Response Program

The VSBA also provides the Asbestos Incident Response Program to all schools. This program provides a 24-hour rapid response to incidents involving asbestos in government schools. The incident response provider will have qualified hygienists and removalists attend site to remove the hazard and isolate the area promptly to ensure the safety of students, staff and the community. The program may reinstate areas that have had asbestos removed back to their original condition.

Both the Make-Safe Program and the Asbestos Incident Response Program can be called on 1300 133 468.

The Essential Safety Measures Program

A third VSBA program that aligns with the Employee Wellbeing Response Team is the Essential Safety Measures (ESM) Program. This program assists schools with monitoring and maintaining their existing fire, life safety and health items installed or constructed in buildings to ensure adequate levels of fire safety and protection from other dangers. They include all traditional building fire services such as sprinklers and mechanical services, and also passive fire safety such as fire doors, fire-rated structures and other infrastructure such as paths of travel to exits. The safety of a building’s occupants relies on having working and compliant ESM.
Continuing to safeguard workplaces through targeted support based on risk

One of the most effective methods for reducing risks is by using engineering controls or changing the work process. Additionally, modern safety approaches call for more centralised controls for higher risks. Following serious incidents, a coordinated response is required to support the Schools Incident Management System, which is implemented by the Security and Emergency Management Division, Regional Services in response to incidents that occur in schools. The Employee Health, Safety and Wellbeing Division will continue to support the resolution of escalated safety matters, by coordinating with relevant areas of the Department to ensure that employee safety and wellbeing is supported and to minimise the risk of psychological harm. The Division will provide more centralised support for complex risks, further alleviating the stress and administrative burden for school leaders. This support will also enable us to learn and improve systems and be better positioned to prevent future serious incidents.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER INITIATIVES: Protective Schools Initiative

In 2018, the Department identified an opportunity to enhance how we as an organisation respond to and manage critical incidents in schools. The Protective Schools Initiative was established to provide a more holistic and consistent approach to managing incidents to ensure better safety outcomes for everyone involved.

The key elements introduced through the initiative include:

- **Schools Incident Management System (SIMS)** – policy and guidelines to minimise the impact of incidents on the health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff, and ensure the continuity of school operations

- **New Incident Support and Operations Centre (ISOC)** – centralised strategic command and control for security and emergency incident related prevention, readiness, response and recovery. The upskilled call takers triage calls for severity and immediate referral. They also provide psychological first aid to distressed principals

- **Robust collection and monitoring of data** – the ISOC records all relevant data at the point of call on Incident Reporting and Information System (IRIS2) and all relevant areas and executives are notified to ensure a joined up support and involvement. The incidents are managed to investigation, review and closure and the system provides visibility and oversight of progress

- **The Security and Emergency Management Division (SEMD)** – provides incident management support, deployable security advisers and capability building to regions/areas

- **Data driven insights** – there is ongoing data and intelligence analysis to identify trends, highlight pockets of need and trigger specialised support

- **Implementation of Report = Support** – to encourage reporting of incidents and consistency in provision of support to schools

- **Protective Schools Taskforce** – an independent taskforce was established to review occupational violence in schools and provide clear recommendations for further intervention and support to ensure safer outcomes for Department staff and student.

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MEASURING OUR IMPACT

The Department has established an ambitious agenda to achieve total health safety and wellbeing in safe workplaces. To achieve this outcome, we need to have a clear framework for tracking our progress and measuring our impact.

The Department will work collaboratively with an independent evaluator as part of our commitment to realise this Strategy. The Strategy evaluation framework will assess the planned activities and initiatives at regular intervals to:

- measure progress and effectiveness of implementation
- assess whether fit-for-purpose targeted interventions are being delivered
- assess whether the investment in the Strategy is resulting in the desired impact
- increase accountability and visibility for achieving results
- make recommendations for future improvement.

USING A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CYCLE

Health and wellbeing outcomes can take longer to be realised and can be difficult to measure as they operate in environments that are constantly changing. The Department has developed a longer-term vision to evaluate our success at an individual, leadership and organisational level to measure the effectiveness of this Strategy and reform initiatives on health and wellbeing of the Department’s workforce.

Underpinning our evaluation framework will be our approach to continuous improvement.

As we commence trialling different solutions and testing their impact, our evaluation data will help us adjust and adapt our approaches to be fit-for-purpose. The Strategy is a living document and we will update our priorities, goals and measures progressively over the five-year period to help us achieve our end goal of total health and wellbeing in safe workplaces.

Figure 6: The FISO continuous improvement cycle
SUPPORTING YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING – WHAT’S IN PLACE NOW?

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

We all require some extra support from time to time. The EAP offers free, short-term counselling through an independent provider. The service is strictly confidential and can be accessed 24/7 for up to four sessions, by all Departmental employees, to discuss any personal or work-related issues. In 2019, the service has been expanded to include access to counselling support for School Council Employees such as Casual Relief Teachers (CRT’s). The service will also be available to immediate family members of employees (over the age of 18).

**Manager Assist**

This is a free, independent and confidential telephone advisory service for principals and managers. This can be to discuss how to support their team’s mental health, through to addressing challenging behaviours within the workplace.

**Workers’ Compensation Advisory Service**

An experienced central office team that provides advice to principals, managers and Return to Work Coordinators. The advice supports injured employees return back to work safely and productively. In 2018, the Advisory Service supported over 500 workers’ compensation claims. The Department has developed a Return to Work Coordinator website that provides step-by-step guidance to managing a claim effectively, with quick links to relevant policies, templates and instructional videos.

**Medical Advisory Service**

For assistance with the management of employees experiencing (psychological and physical) health related difficulties that impact on their ability to perform the duties associated with their employment.

**Conflict Resolution Support Service**

Conflict at work can create an unhealthy culture and environment. The Conflict Resolution Support Service can be accessed to help resolve staff conflicts early and constructively through expert and independent support. The service can be used for a range of matters, including resolving disputes and miscommunications that impact on wellbeing and work performance. This service can provide mediation, conflict coaching and team conflict interventions.

**OHS Advisory Service**

The OHS Advisory Service can be accessed for support and advice on the implementation of the health and safety management system. The Department offers free access to independent health and safety experts who can provide advice via phone or on-site.

**Regional OHS and Facilities Support Officers**

Support officers are based across the state (three per region) to provide direct support to schools with general OHS matters and management of the OHS Management System and OHS audit process. For assistance with general OHS matters, management of the OHS Management System and OHS Audit support, please contact your local regional office to request support.

**Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy Services**

The Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy offers a suite of tailored supports for principals and principal class officers to access. These supports provide both proactive and responsive supports to help principals manage the unique challenges of their role and thrive as school wellbeing leaders. The services available include the School Policy Templates Portal, the Principal Mentor program, the Proactive Wellbeing Supervision program, the Principal Health Checks, the Complex Matter Support team and the Early Intervention Program.
SAFE AND WELL IN EDUCATION: 
PLAY YOUR PART IN CREATING A 
SAFETY CULTURE

What steps can I take as an employee to make my workplace safer?

Health and safety is an issue that affects everyone in the workplace including employees, students, parents, volunteers, contractors and visitors.

We all need to play an active role in creating safe and healthy work environments. The Department’s health and safety management system provides clear guidance and advice on potential workplace risks. The system guides employees and leaders through their health and safety obligations, using practical steps that can be applied to varying local contexts.

Here are key steps you can take to be proactive in making your workplace safe and well.

1. **Know what a safe workplace looks like** – familiarise yourself with the Department’s health and wellbeing procedures and guidelines, introduce yourself to your health and safety representative, complete your safety induction process.

2. **Build your capability** – the Department offers free health, safety and wellbeing e-learning modules that are designed to help you maintain a safe workplace. You can also access coaching, advice, guidance and support through services like the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

3. **If you see something, report it** – the Department relies on your active engagement to maintain visibility of emerging health and safety risks across the state. Make sure to report your risks on the OHS Management System (eduSafe) to address these risks and activate relevant supports.

4. **Have wellbeing conversations in your team** – our team culture and the people we work with have a strong impact on our wellbeing. Make sure to keep wellbeing conversations a part of your regular team meetings. Check in with your colleagues and ask how they’re doing. Simply asking “are you okay?” can make a big difference to someone’s day.

5. **Get support early** – the Department has existing supports that are available for you to access. Be proactive and put your own health and wellbeing first – connect and make use of these services to be at your best.

We need your support and involvement in realising the Safe and Well in Education Strategy.