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Purpose

This document provides guidance to HSRs on their role, responsibilities, boundaries, and available supports, including responding safely and appropriately to psychosocial hazards. It aims to help HSRs safely and confidently respond when psychosocial concerns are raised, understand the limits of their role, and ensure issues are escalated through established University WHS pathways, while protecting their own health and wellbeing.

Scope

Applies to all HSRs and Deputy HSRs across ANU.

Principles

- Psychological and physical safety first
- Clear HSR role boundaries
- Early recognition and escalation of WHS risks
- HSRs are not counsellors or support providers
- ANU responsibility for managing WHS risks
- Psychosocial risks are managed through ANU systems
- HSR wellbeing must be protected

Key expectations for HSRs

Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) play a vital role in creating a safe, respectful, and healthy workplace. HSRs act as a voice for their work group, help raise concerns, and contribute to practical solutions to improve safety and wellbeing. As a HSR you don't need to have all the answers, your role is to listen, raise issues, and work with the University to address them.

The University supports HSRs to carry out their role with clarity and confidence. The core expectations are to:

- maintain confidentiality within WHS requirements
- act respectfully, impartially, and with care
- prioritise your own safety and wellbeing
- use established WHS reporting and escalation pathways
- seek support early if exposed to distressing or sensitive information

Functions of an HSR

The functions and powers of Health and Safety Representatives are defined under the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#). For further information refer to the [ANU HSR position statement](#) and for the full authoritative description of HSR responsibilities, see Comcare's guidance [here](#).

HSRs have responsibilities that span all types of health and safety risks including:

- consulting with workers about health and safety concerns
- working with the University to monitor and raise concerns about effectiveness of measures implemented to meet WHS obligations
- assisting in identifying hazards and assessing risks
- participating in WHS inspections, reviews, and incident discussions
- escalating unresolved safety issues through established WHS pathways
- promoting a culture of safety, respect, and early reporting

HSRs contribute to identifying hazards and raising WHS concerns across a wide range of risk areas, including:

- ergonomic risks- workstation setup, manual handling, repetitive strain, posture
- slips, trips and falls- floor surfaces, clutter, environmental conditions
- chemical and laboratory hazards- safe storage, handling, emergency procedures
- plant and equipment risks- guarding, maintenance, safe operation
- electrical safety issues- faulty equipment, overloaded outlets, damaged cords
- environmental conditions- noise, lighting, temperature, air quality
- fieldwork and travel risks- remote work, vehicle use, environmental exposure
- emergency preparedness- evacuation, first aid, incident response
- contractor and visitor safety- safe access and site-specific awareness
- psychosocial hazards that may arise from work design, workload, or interpersonal dynamics

Psychosocial hazards: what HSRs need to know

Psychosocial hazards are aspects of work that can cause psychological or emotional harm. When workers raise these issues, HSRs may occasionally hear sensitive or distressing information. Psychosocial risks are managed by the University through established systems and support services, and not by individual HSRs, your role is to help ensure concerns are recognised and addressed through the right channels. HSRs are not expected to manage or resolve these matters themselves. For more information about psychosocial hazards click [here](#).

How psychosocial hazard exposure may affect HSRs

In the course of your work as an HSR, you may experience emotional reactions when supporting colleagues. These responses are a normal and recognising them early helps you draw on the support and boundaries designed to keep you safe. You may notice:

- emotional fatigue or feeling a bit overwhelmed

- stress, worry, or difficulty “switching off” after a challenging conversation
- a sense of responsibility for complex issues
- increased vigilance or reduced sense of safety
- personal memories or past experiences being stirred up

Staying Well and Thriving in the HSR Role

A key part of doing the role effectively is understanding what sits within your responsibilities and what does not. These boundaries protect both the workers you support and your own wellbeing. You are not expected to take on specialist or clinical roles; your value lies in listening, representing, and escalating concerns through the right channels. Actions you take to maintain your own wellbeing reflect responsible, sustainable practice. You can:

- listen, acknowledge concerns, and raise them through the appropriate WHS pathways
- prioritise your wellbeing by seeking support or stepping back when a matter impacts you
- seek additional guidance or debriefing when an issue feels heavy, complex, or emotionally challenging
- access confidential wellbeing support through employee assistance programs or specialist services
- connect with other HSRs for peer support, shared learning, and HSR network sessions
- engage in self-care practices that help you reset and maintain balance

Maintaining these boundaries is critical to ensuring HSRs are not exposed to unnecessary psychosocial risk.

What HSRs Are Not Expected to Do

As an HSR, you are not required to take on tasks that sit outside your training or responsibilities. These activities belong with trained professionals and established University processes. You are not expected to:

- provide counselling, therapy, or crisis intervention
- act as a mediator in emotionally charged or unsafe situations
- investigate allegations or determine outcomes
- manage complex interpersonal disputes on your own
- provide specialised advice (legal, medical, psychological, or organisational)
- act as the primary point of contact for managing complex or sensitive WHS matters

What to do if someone shares distressing information or if you feel affected after a conversation:

- follow the [Psychosocial Disclosure and Escalation Protocol](#) to ensure the concern is managed through the appropriate pathways

- listen briefly and acknowledge their experience
- avoid probing for details
- use established WHS pathways to escalate
- seek support when you need it, including accessing EAP
- debrief with WHS staff or your manager
- set clear boundaries and avoid ongoing involvement once the matter has been escalated
- take a break or step back from the matter

How the University Supports HSRs

- HSRs will be provided with access to training including:
 - understanding psychosocial hazards and risk factors
 - psychological first aid training
 - vicarious trauma awareness sessions
 - trauma-informed communication skills
 - recognising signs of distress in others and themselves
 - safe referral and clear escalation pathways
 - maintaining healthy boundaries
- community of practice sessions for shared learning and peer support
- regular communication and additional support during periods of high complexity
- access to WHS staff for guidance and escalation
- access to EAP and wellbeing resources

Why Become an HSR?

HSRs play an important role in creating a workplace where people feel heard, supported, and respected, and the role offers meaningful opportunities to help strengthen health, safety, and wellbeing at ANU. Beyond supporting your colleagues, the role provides opportunities for personal and professional growth, including:

- leadership and communication skill development
- opportunities to influence positive change
- connection with a supportive HSR community
- training in psychosocial risk, trauma-informed communication, and WHS processes

How this guidance fits with ANU WHSMS

- HSRs are a key part of the University's consultation and participation arrangements under the Work Health Safety Management System (WHSMS).
- HSRs operate within established governance, reporting and risk management frameworks.
- All WHS risks, including psychosocial risks, are managed by the University as the PCBU through these systems and are not the responsibility of individual HSRs.

Resources

[ANU Staff Wellbeing](#)

[WHS Management System Handbook](#)

[Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)

[Comcare-HSRs](#)

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