

MEDIA RELEASE

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## **New WGEA results highlight areas for employer action to prevent, and respond to, work-related sexual harassment**

New results released today by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) provide a first look into the initiatives employers are putting into place since the introduction of the positive duty to provide a safe workplace for all employees.

More than 7,000 medium and large employers, covering more than 5 million Australian employees, reported new information to WGEA about prevention and response to sexual harassment in 2024.

This implements Recommendation 42 of the Respect@Work Report, which indicated that a policy-based approach should be considered a 'minimum' and 'reactive' benchmark, and that further data was needed to understand the actions and progress in workplaces.

WGEA's new results reveal many employers have implemented pathways to respond to work-related sexual harassment or sex discrimination, but that there's more work to be done. An area for focus includes ensuring company leaders understand, and promote, expectations of a safe, respectful and inclusive workplace.

While nearly 99% of employers have a formal policy on work-related sexual harassment and discrimination, WGEA's new data shows more than 1 in 4 employers (28%) are not monitoring how prevalent it is.

WGEA CEO Mary Wooldridge said employer's new positive duty (introduced at the end of 2022) means taking effective action should begin, but not end, with high quality workplace policy.

"While we are seeing comprehensive policy coverage, this is only a critical first step. Long-term culture change within organisations also requires employees and company leaders to know the policy, understand what's in it and the part they play in its implementation," Ms Wooldridge said.

"One of the insights from the Respect@Work Report is that proactive engagement by leadership is critical for long-term change. WGEA's new results show that most CEOs are highly engaged in reviewing, signing off on and then communicating these policies (85%), however just over half (55%) of their Boards are similarly involved."

WGEA's new results also offer an insight into how these policies are being implemented.

While there are comprehensive processes to disclose sexual harassment to HR or designated staff (98%), anonymous disclosure processes are less available (68%). The ability to protect a reporter's identity with anonymous disclosure is important, given widespread underreporting of these serious issues.

Nearly 9 in 10 employers (88%) reported offering training to their workforce, but they are most likely to provide training to all groups at induction and/or annually.

"While employers are training employees with the knowledge and understanding to respond to complaints, employers also now have a responsibility to stop sexual harassment before it starts," Ms Wooldridge said.



“Our results indicate CEOs and Boards can play more of a role in proactively enabling a safe and respectful culture by communicating the employer’s expectations more regularly to all employees.

“Overall, we are seeing positive progress in relation to the prevention and responses to sexual harassment but there’s more to be done. Future WGEA reporting will be able to monitor progress on this.

“WGEA’s new results expand employers’ understanding of where they are doing well and helps to inform their plans for action to create safer, more inclusive and more respectful workplace environments for all employees.”

Later this month WGEA will release a comprehensive analysis of the private sector’s performance on workplace gender equality in our *Australia’s Gender Equality Scorecard – 2024*. We will also publish results for the nation, by industry and by employer in the [Data Explorer on our website](#).

## Media contact

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**About the Agency:** The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) is an Australian Government statutory agency charged with promoting and improving gender equality in Australian workplaces. Read more at [www.wgea.gov.au](http://www.wgea.gov.au)

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## More results

Employers are most likely to have a process to disclose, investigate and manage incidents (95%), 9 in 10 employers are also prioritising prevention measures like having a statement on ‘positive duty’ to provide a safe workplace for all employees (91%) or leadership accountabilities and responsibilities (87%).

Nearly half of employers (49%) have articulated processes relating to the use of non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements.

WGEA’s new results indicate opportunities for future action to address gaps in employer approaches:

**Leadership:** The Respect@Work inquiry found that leaders play a crucial role in creating safe and respectful workplaces and influencing organisational culture.

- 85% of employers had their sexual harassment and discrimination policy reviewed by the CEO and 55% had it reviewed by the Board
- just 25% of CEOs communicated the organisation’s expectations with new staff at induction and just 9% ahead of big events, like Christmas parties.

**Risk management:** Respect@Work recommended adopting a risk management process similar to the work health and safety approach – that is, identifying a potential safety hazard and then assessing and identifying controls for the hazard.

- 87% of employers reported incorporating some kind of sexual harassment prevention activities in risk management processes
- more than two thirds (68%) of employers identify workplace and industry-specific risks of sexual harassment.



**Knowledge:** Workplace education and training supports employers and employees to understand, prevent and respond to workplace sexual harassment.

- nearly 9 in 10 employers (88%) reported offering training to their workforce. They are most likely to provide training to all groups at induction and/or annually
- training programs were most likely to cover the respectful workplace conduct and behaviours expected of workers and leaders (99% of employers who offered training included this), with fewer covering drivers and contributing factors of sexual harassment (70%), bystander training (62%) and the diverse experiences and needs of different people (45%).

**Measuring:** Where safe and practicable to do so, employers should collect and use prevalence information to better understand experiences of sexual harassment in their workplace, as well as across industries, and to identify areas requiring action.

- while 72% of employers indicated that they collect data, of these, 64% record the number of formal complaints made in a year. Less than 1 in 3 record the gender of the complainant/aggrieved or victim (31%) or of the person who perpetrated the abuse (30%).

