Safety for All

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National Disability Services

Session Outline

1. Addressing Occupational Violence in the Victorian Disability Sector

- Background to project
- Data and evidence gathering
  - Broad review of literature
  - Widespread consultation with people in the service sector
- What we learnt

2. Systems analysis of Work-Related Violence (WRV) in Disability Residential Accommodation

- 2023-24 WorkSafe funded project by Queensland University of Technology in partnership with NDS

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Addressing Occupational Violence in the Victorian Disability Sector

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Occupational Violence (OV):

(also know as work-related violence or WRV)

Occurs when a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work.

Abuse, threats or assault from a confused, disoriented or cognitive impaired person are an occupational violence issue and need to be reported accordingly.

Project focus: Keeping everybody safe

Aiming to build sector capability through the promoting the information, that was informed by current evidence, that supported the alignment of high-quality service provision with the mitigation of risks of Occupational Violence

ABS: February 2023 Work related injuries

Community and personal services workers

- 10.3% of all of the employees, 18.7% of all injuries reported

Industry wide

- most prevalent are manual handling related injuries
- closely followed by hitting or being hit and stress/mental health is also in the Top 5
- Stress/mental health injuries caused the longest periods off work (44 days average)

HACSU Victoria Survey 2020_2021

1,279 survey responses, indicated that in the past 12 months:

- 53% experienced physical violence and 67% experienced psychological harm

People experiencing OV tended to experience it multiple times

- Only 12% reported an isolated incident
- 52% reported between 2-10 incidents
- 5% of respondents reported experiencing OV multiple times per day

Co-existing duties of care

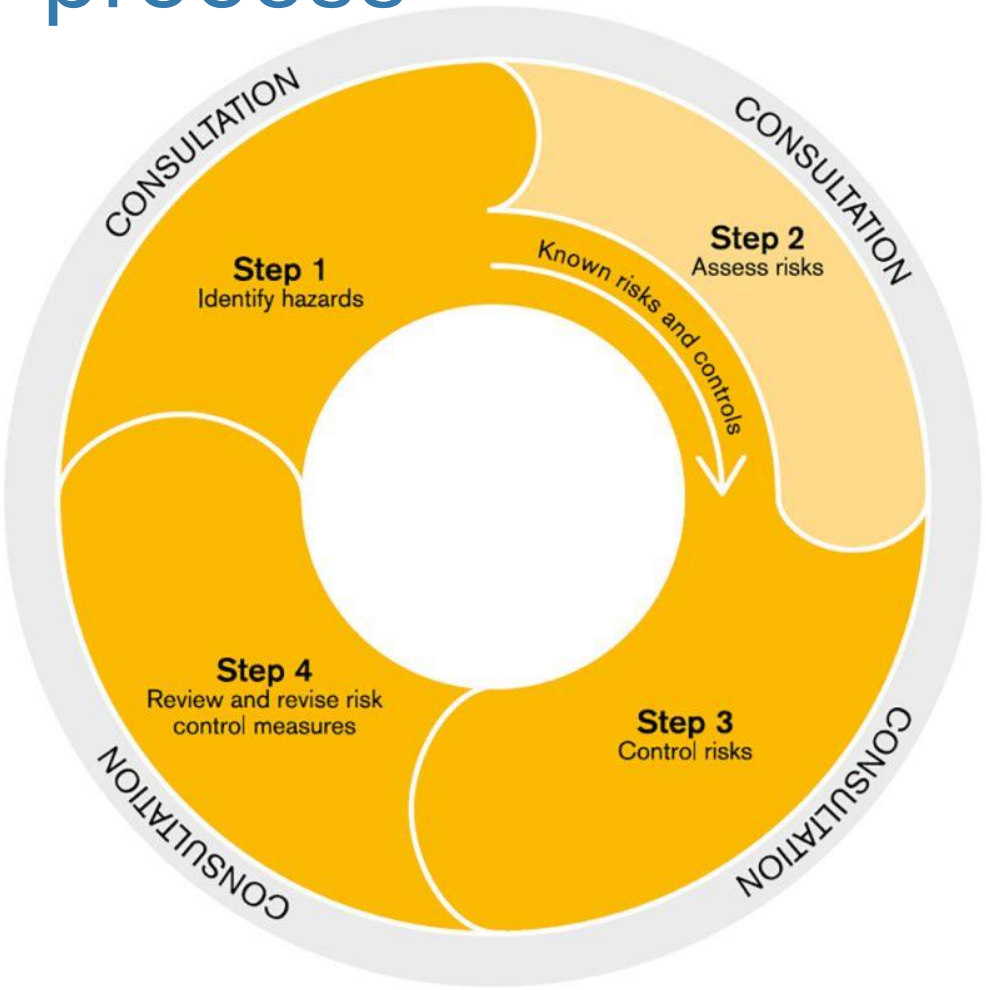
1. To provide services in line with obligations in the NDIS Code of Conduct. This includes **upholding human rights**, providing **high quality** supports in a **safe and competent manner** and taking all reasonable steps to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, exploitation, neglect, and abuse

2. To provide and maintain a **safe and healthy working environment** for their employees, so far as reasonably practicable. This includes the physical and psychological environments.

5 principles for leading a workplace that promotes safety are:

- commit to safety
- get involved
- encourage participation
- make WHS part of your business
- review your performance.

The risk management process



Leadership and culture | Safe Work Australia
The risk management process | WorkSafe Victoria

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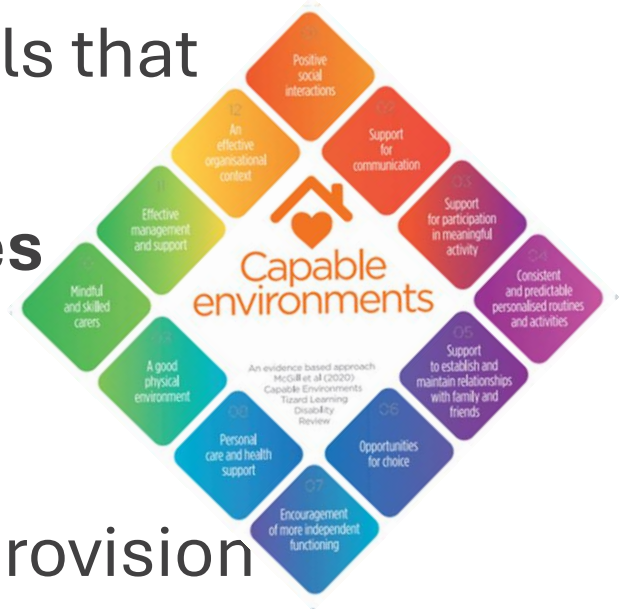
Critical elements in addressing occupational violence

- The importance of the leadership from the executive levels that support the development of **capable environments**
- Embedding use of **positive behaviour support principles** across the services
- The use of **person-centred active support**
- Incorporating a **trauma informed approach** to support provision
- Understanding and using **inclusive communication** approaches
- **Building skills** to ensure people with disability can have a meaningful life and are part of their community
- Supporting **good health and wellbeing**



NDS Website: Addressing Occupational Violence in the Victorian Disability Sector

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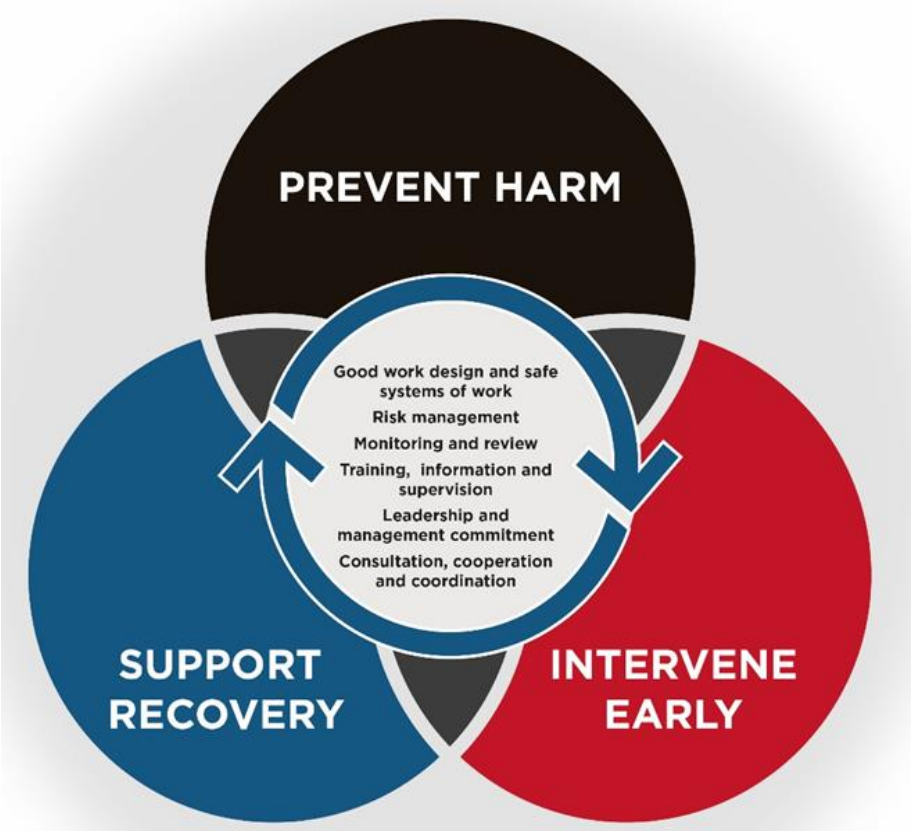
Systematic approach to psychological health and safety



- Good work design & safe systems of work
- Risk management
- Monitoring and review
- Training, information and supervision
- Leadership and management commitment
- Consultations, cooperation & coordination

Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work | Safe Work Australia

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Safety for All: building sector capability

The quality of life of people we support, and the wellbeing of workers is vital in the disability sector, if we want to ensure the quality of supports provided and the promotion of choice and control and upholding of human rights.

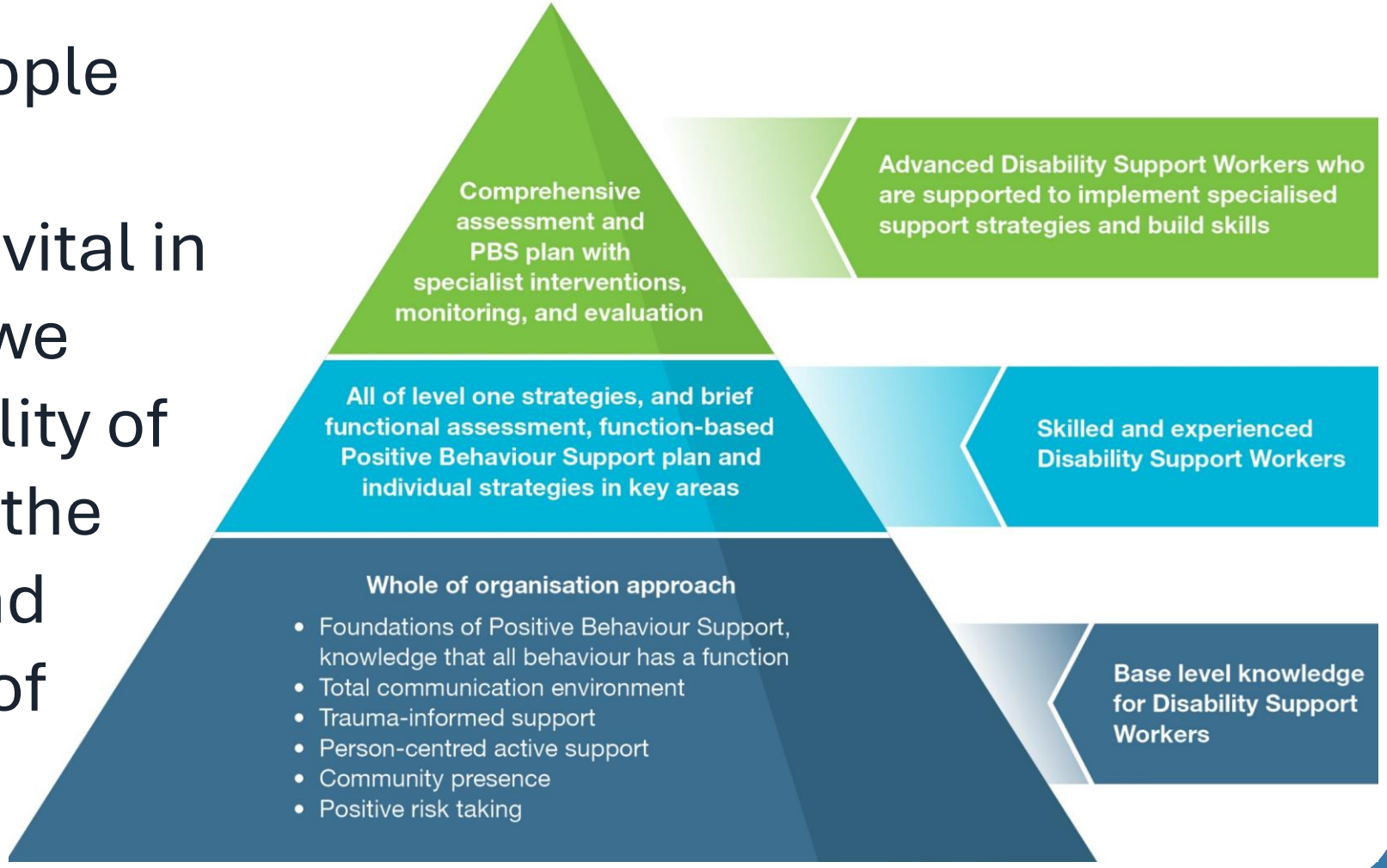

Image adapted from: Five ways to use positive behaviour support strategies in your classroom | Monash Education and Positive Behaviour Support Framework | PBS Alliance UK.

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Systems Thinking Analysis of Work-Related Violence (WRV) in the disability accommodation sector

- [WRV Infographic Final]
- [WRV Survey and Systems Mapping Report]

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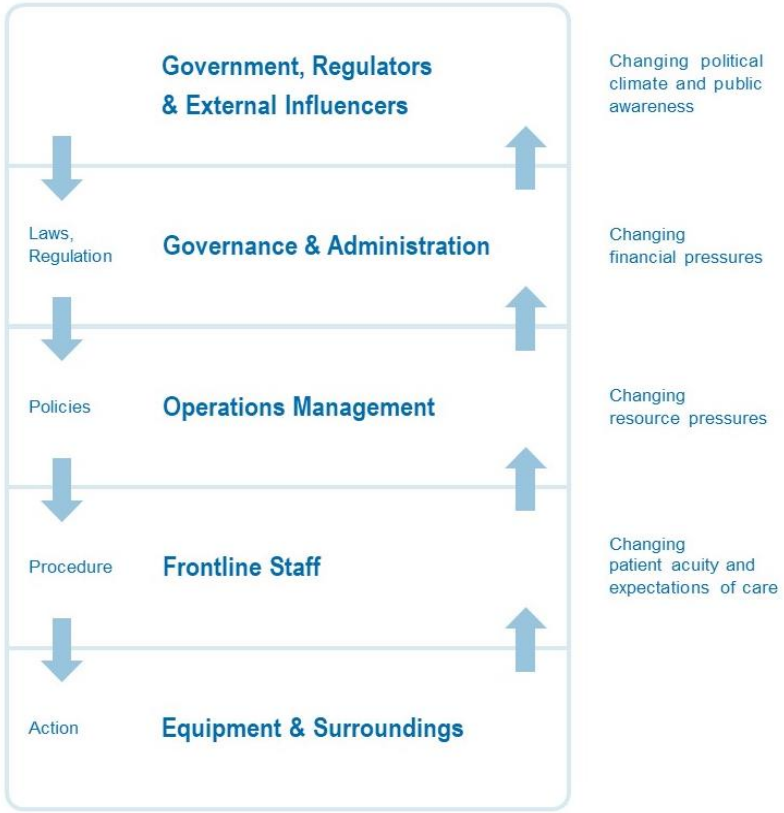
Systems Thinking Analysis of WRV in the disability accommodation sector

Rasmussen's Systems-thinking, risk management framework was used to frame the investigation.

The researchers followed five guiding principles:

- Shared responsibility for safety
- Multiple, interacting factors
- Communication
- Pressures in the system
- Erosion of risk controls.



Rasmussen, J. (1997). Risk management in a dynamic society: a modelling problem. Safety Science, 27(2), 183-213. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0925-7535(97)00052-0

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Systems Thinking Analysis of WRV in the Disability Accommodation Sector

Project aims:

- Understand the prevalence of WRV
- Identify existing interventions used to prevent/ reduce WRV
- Identify factors contributing to WRV in the sector.
- Identify strategies to prevent or reduce WRV in the sector.

Method:

- Literature review (QUT, 2023)
- Large cross-sectional survey of residential support workers in Australia
- Semi-structured interviews with 31 stakeholders
- Workshops with key stakeholders.
- Use of systems analysis framework, Rasmussen's (1997) to guide the understanding of WRV incidents

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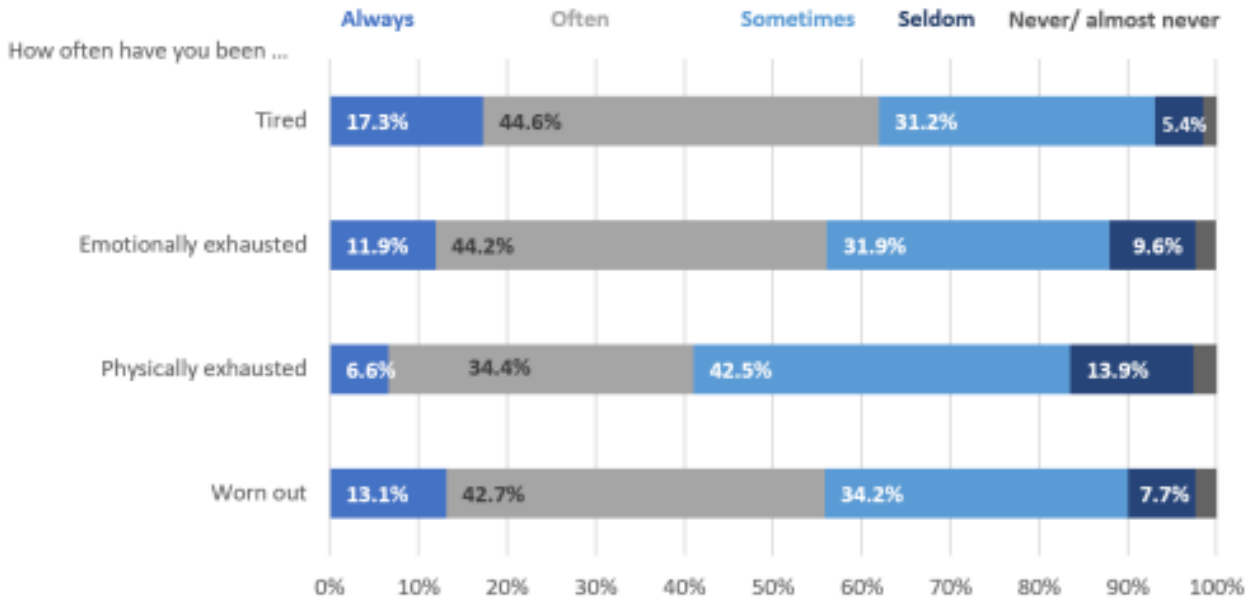
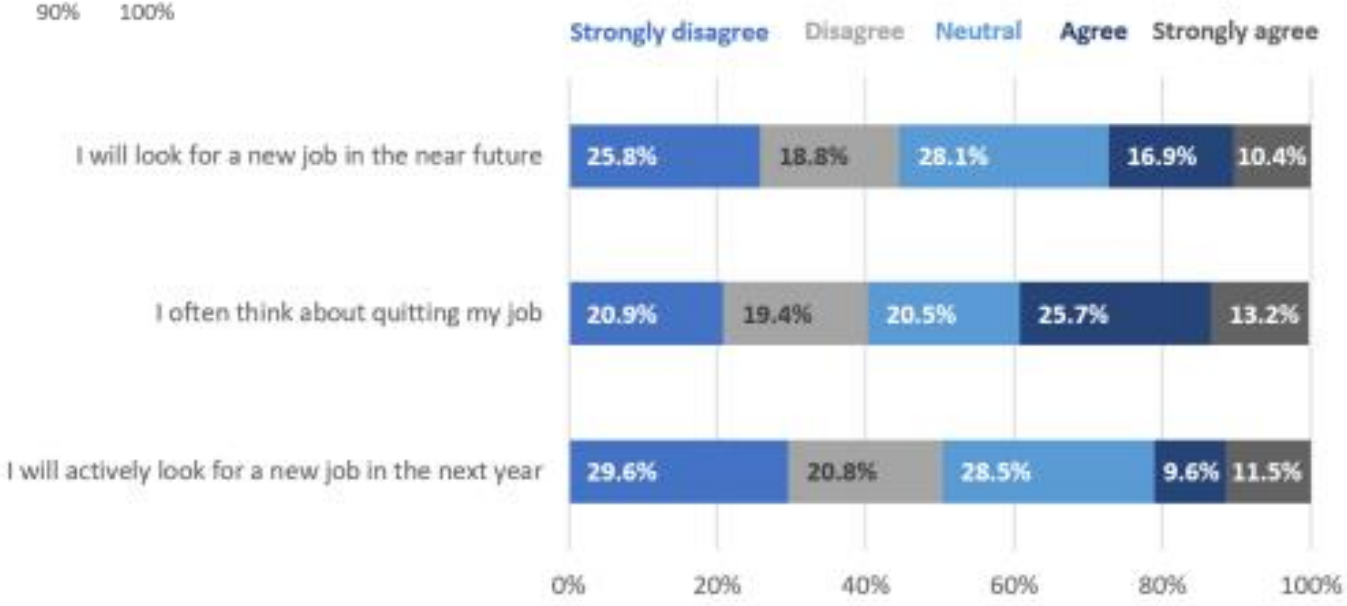
Percentage of survey participants exposed to WRV with varying frequency in the past 12 months

WRV frequency in the past 12 months	Percentage of participants
None	16.1%
1	6.9%
2 to 10	28.7%
10 to 20	11.1%
20 to 50	4.2%
Every week	21.1%
Every day	7.7%
Multiple times per day	4.2%



Burnout

Turnover intentions



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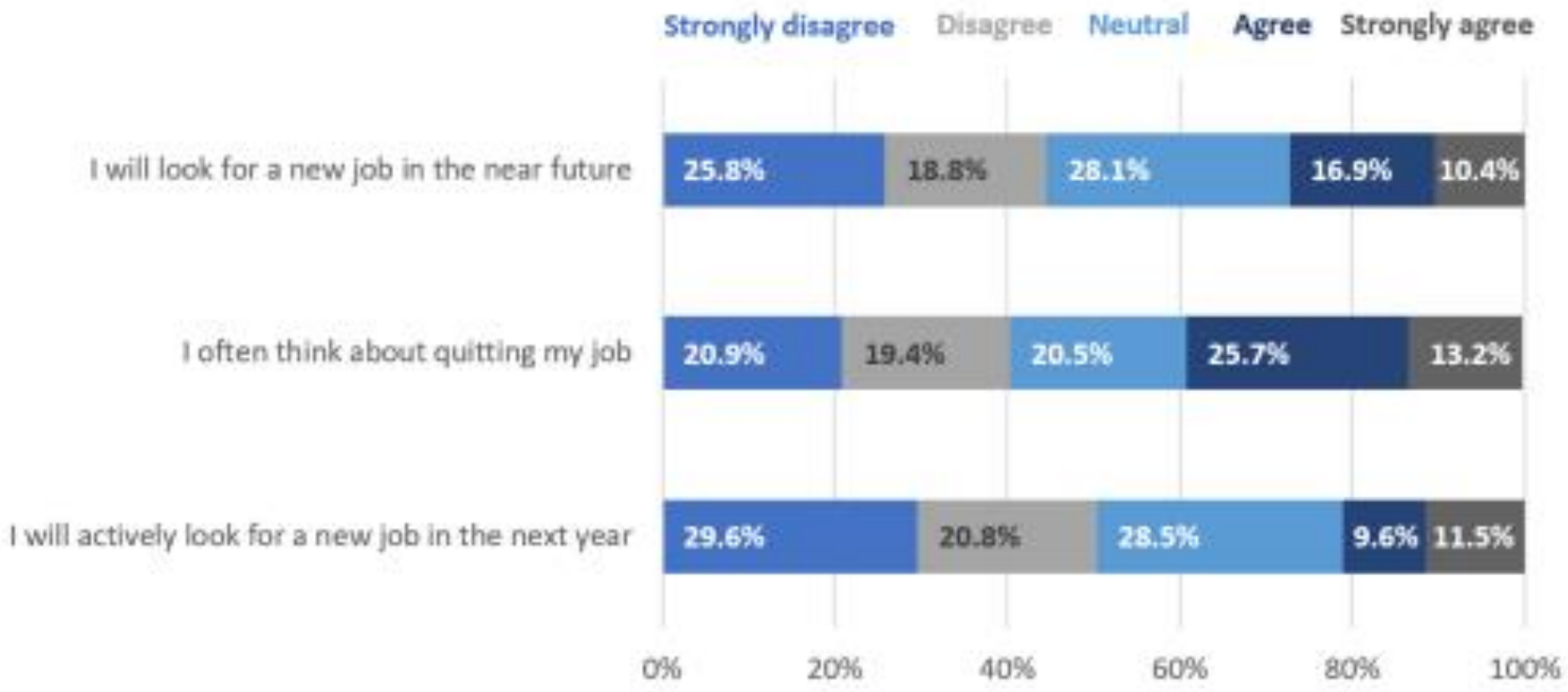
Turnover intentions



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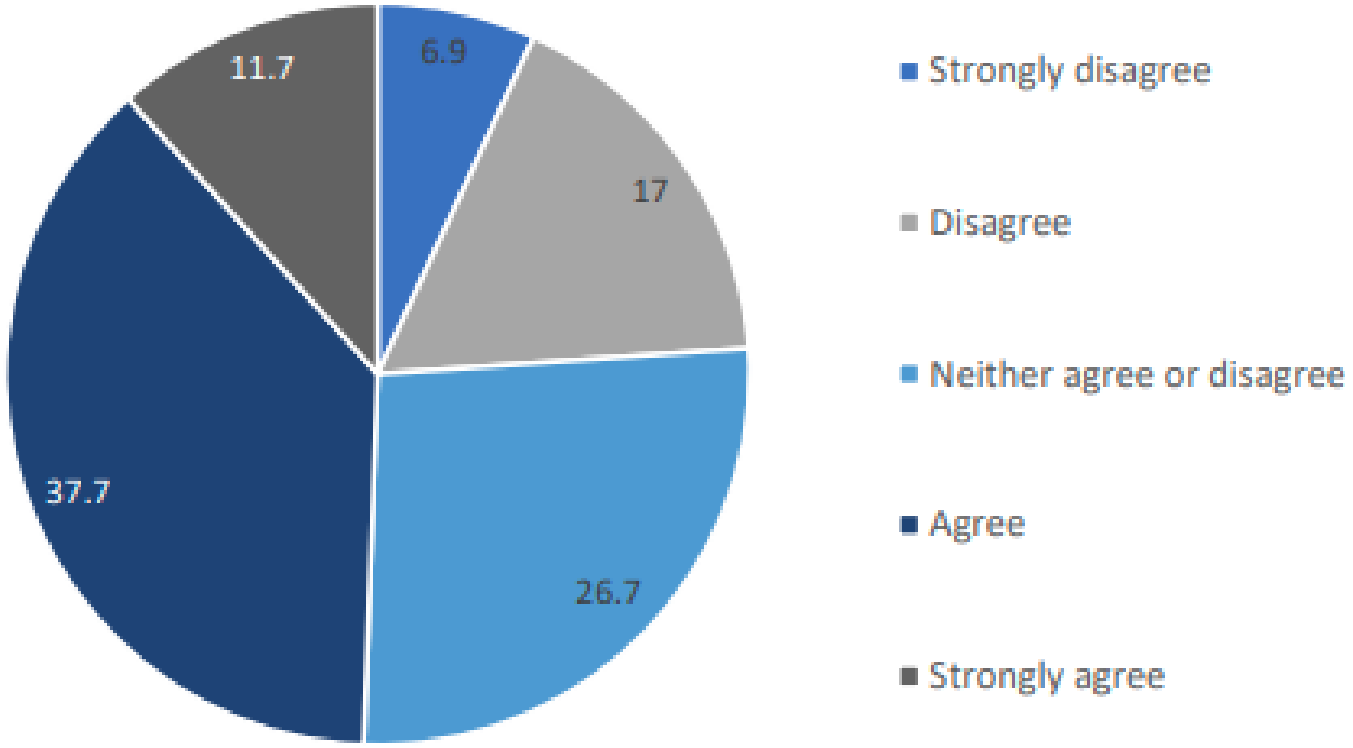
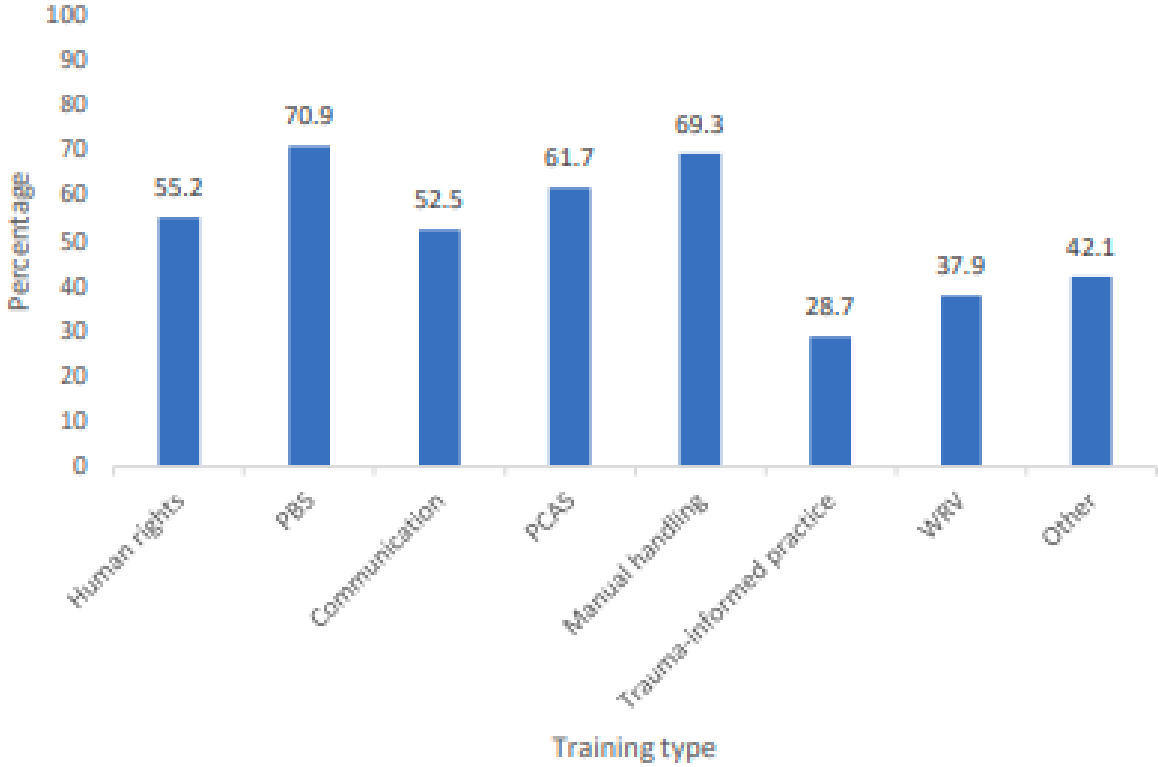
Training Experiences

Percentage of survey participants who agreed that induction training prepared them for their role



Percentage of survey participants who had completed training on various topics within the last 2 years



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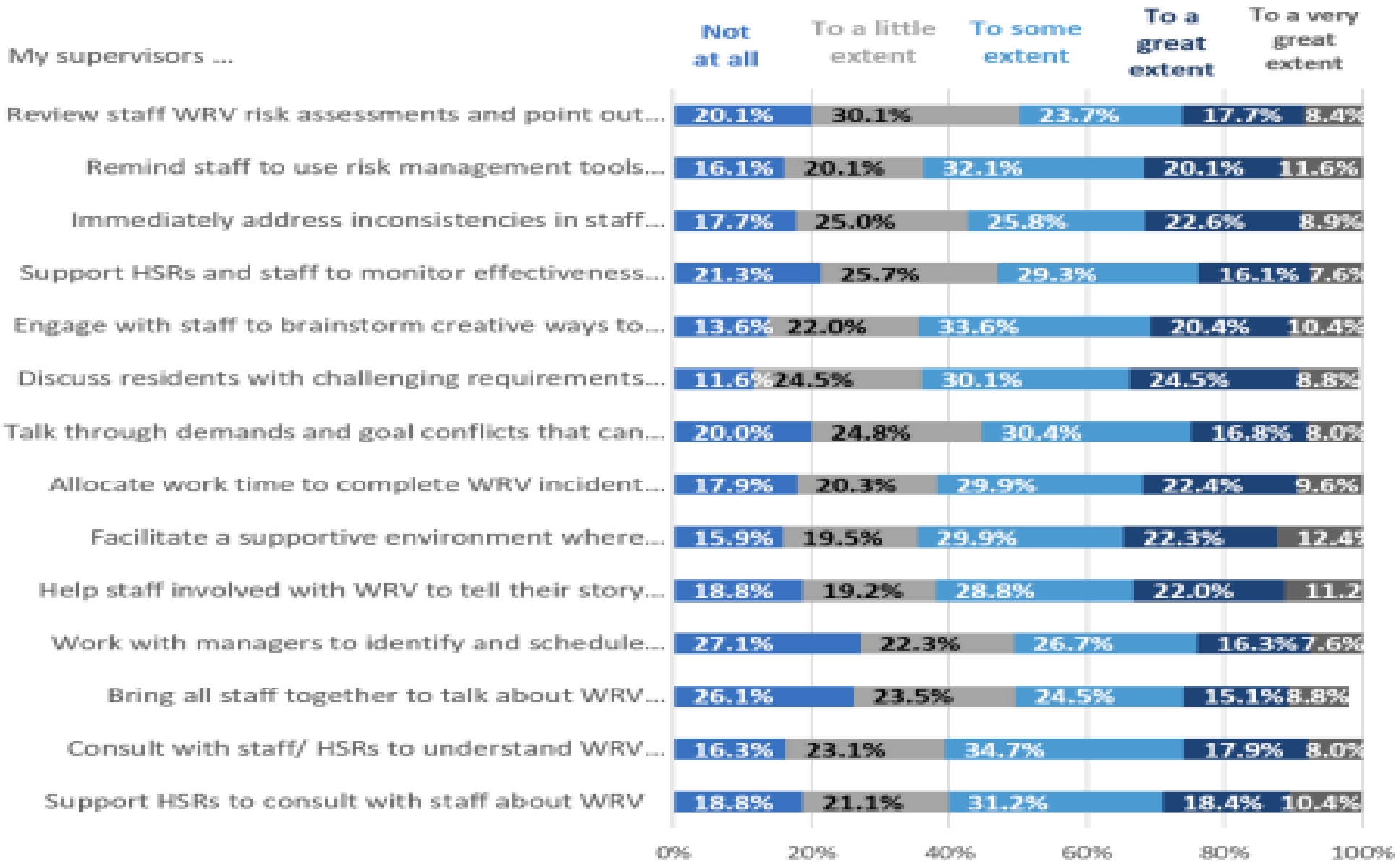
Supervisor safety leadership



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Safety Climate

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Four key themes emerged from the research:

- Staff capability
- Physical environment
- Safety culture and safety leadership
- Resident compatibility

Staff Capability

Frontline staff are vital in preventing WRV, however, they often lack the skills and knowledge needed for effective support

Stakeholders stress the importance of:

- WRV-specific skills
- Person-centred support skills, complex communication skills
- Specialised knowledge of disability, mental illness and trauma

Challenges are worsened by factors such as:

- Low staffing entry requirements
- Inconsistent supervision
- Inaccurate and/or overly complex behaviour support plans

Physical Environment

The physical environment can impact the presence of workplace violence and aggression (WRV).
Poorly designed building can contribute to WRV, while well-designed buildings can prevent it.

Examples of poor building design include:

- Single points of egress
- Low visibility
- Inadequate space
- Low-quality materials

Contributory factors to poor building design include:

- Funding and budget constraints for building adaptation
- Unsuitable accommodation allocation for resident needs (e.g., location)
- Limited space for resident privacy

Safety Culture and Safety Leadership

Low levels of safety culture are often observed in the sector, where staff accept violence as part of the job.

This culture is influenced by higher system factors such as:

- Management messaging
- Regulatory emphasis on resident safety

Capacity to demonstrate safety leadership in the sector can also be constrained by systematic factors such as:

- Funding for safety initiatives
- Compliance-focussed legislation

Resident Compatibility

The compatibility of residents and resident needs with SDA, SIL, STA providers, other residents, and staff can impact WRV.

Factors that can impact the suitability of resident compatibility include:

- Intake and exit processes
- Resident mix in congregate housing

These factors are influenced by higher-level factors such as:

- Limited flexibility in funding guidelines to facilitate movement between accommodations in the case of incompatibility

Options for government and regulators to consider include:

1. Increase provider access to funding - to attract and retain highly skilled staff

2. Review and redefine staff competency requirements in alignment with best care practices

3. Increase provider access to funding – for the provision of relevant and timely education for staff and enable staff attendance

4. Regulate reporting of OHS incidents affecting staff

Options for organisations (e.g., support providers) to consider include:

1. Provide funding and access for relevant staff education and professional development
2. Provide adequate support and resources to address cognitive demands

Options for frontline staff to consider include:

1. Actively encourage colleagues to report WRV incidents and engage in organisational health and safety consultation obligations
2. Actively engage in and seek out ongoing training and professional development

Research into work-related violence (WRV) in the residential disability sector

261
workers from the residential disability sector surveyed.

83%
reported experiencing WRV in the past year (2023-24).

33%
experienced WRV every week, every day, or several times a day.

Contributing Stakeholders

A systems mapping analysis of work-related violence across all sector levels was conducted in partnership with WorkSafe Victoria, National Disability Services (NDS) and Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

WorkSafe · NDS National Disability Services · QUT

What did the research show?

135 contributory factors (associated with WRV) were identified.
With **27** potential preventative initiatives put up for consideration.

Forum outcomes

Attendees prioritised 5 key preventative options:

- Regulatory alignment
- Funding accessibility
- Communication and consultation
- Data measures
- End-to-end reporting systems

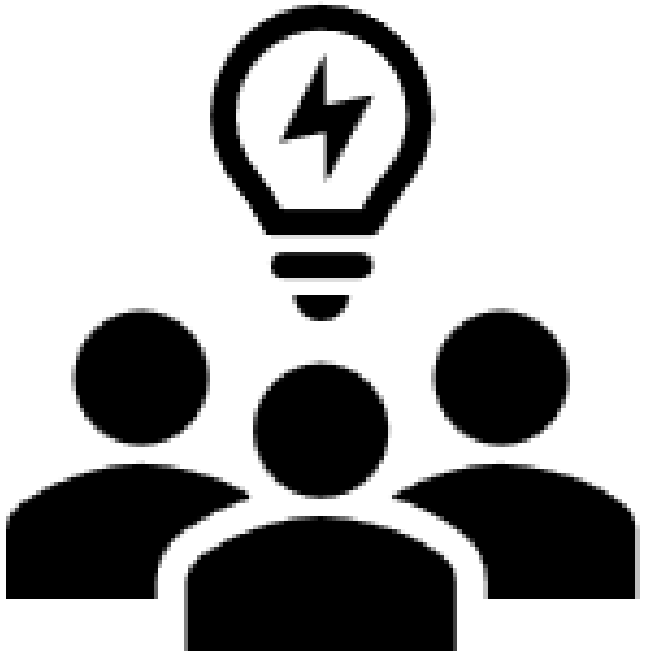
Suggested actions for these priorities included:

- Reviewing work design
- Improving communication channels and data
- Developing a shared risk management plan
- Developing a benchmarking measurement tool on safety culture
- Developing industry guidance for incident reporting and investigation

Next steps

- WorkSafe, NDS and QUT will continue working collaboratively to share the knowledge (and its application) from this research with industry.
- WorkSafe will continue to support organisations in the sector with current and future preventative initiatives to influence, motivate, and enable change to prevent work-related violence in the residential disability sector.

Safety is the shared responsibility of everyone in the system



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References for Systems Analysis into WRV

Olivia Miller, Olivia Dobson, Tristan Casey, Sharon Newnam, ***Work-related violence interventions in the disability sector: A systematic review and systems mapping exercise***, Safety Science, Volume 184, 2025, 106765, ISSN 0925-7535, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2024.106765.

Olivia Miller, Olivia Dobson, Natassia Goode, Sharon Newnam, ***Actors, contributory factors, and preventative strategies for work-related violence in the Australian residential disability sector: A systems analysis***, Safety Science, Volume 191, 2025, 106934, ISSN 0925-7535, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2025.106934 .

NDS Website: https://nds.org.au/news/report-shows-actions-to-address-work-related-violence-in-disability-accommodation

WorkSafe Victoria: https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/work-related-violence-residential-disability-sector

NDS OV Hub

https://nds.org.au/resources/all-resources/addressing-occupational-violence-in-the-victorian-disability-sector

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