

# Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022



*Healthy, safe and productive working lives*



**safe work australia**

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# Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012–2022

*Healthy, safe and productive working lives*



# Introduction

The Australian Strategy builds on the *National Occupational Health and Safety Strategy 2002-2012* (the National OHS Strategy). In 2002 the Workplace Relations Ministers' Council, the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry endorsed the National OHS Strategy to provide a framework for a broad range of national activities to improve the health and safety of workers in Australia.

The National OHS Strategy was held in high regard internationally throughout its duration. It set ambitious targets and resulted in significant reductions in work-related traumatic fatalities and injuries. Governments, unions and industry worked in partnership to improve work health and safety awareness and skills and to develop nationally-consistent legislation.

Reviews of the National OHS Strategy identified the need to sustain consistent attention and effort on key areas in order to achieve improvement. The reviews also highlighted the importance of developing and monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation process. The reviews established the need to expand the scope of involvement in implementation beyond government regulators to include collaborative partnerships with all parties with an interest in work health and safety.

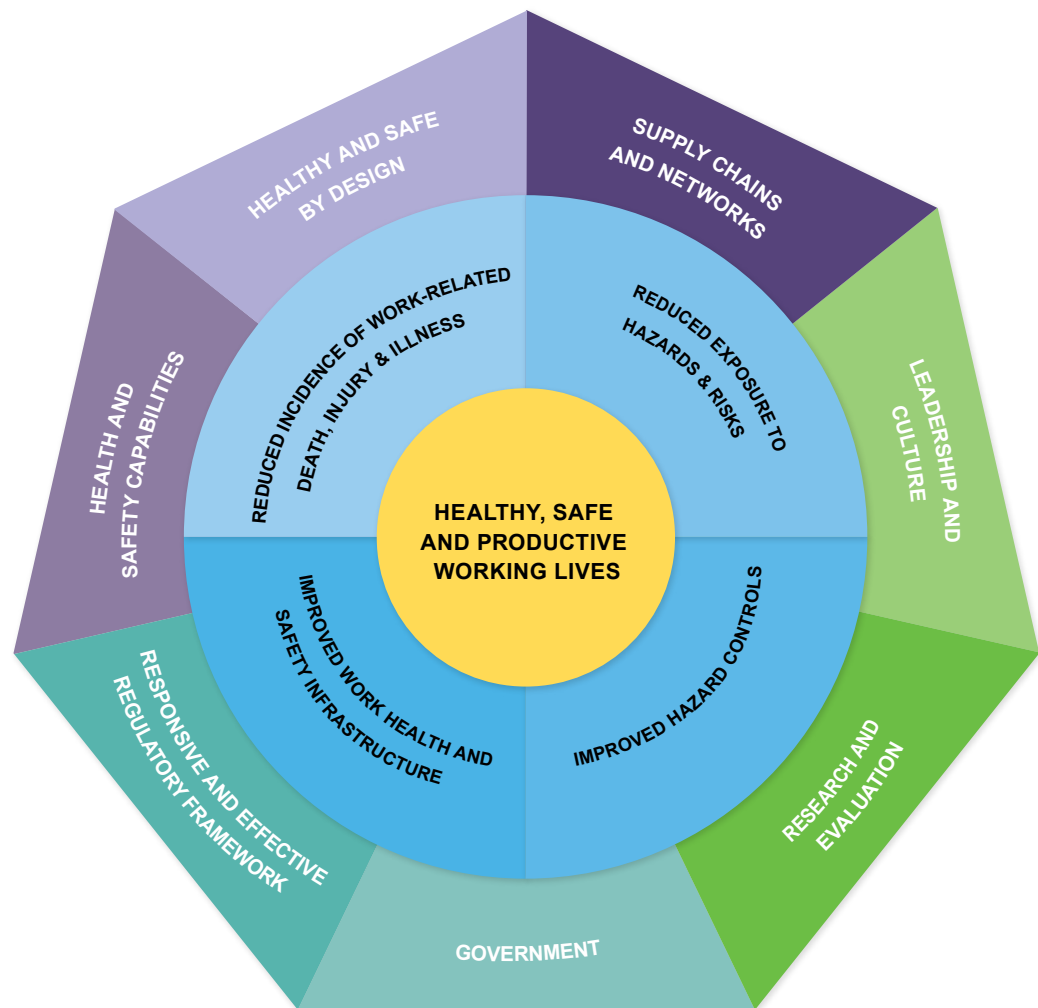
While improvements to work health and safety were made during the National OHS Strategy current data show that on average over 250 workers in Australia die from an injury sustained at work each year. It is estimated that over 2000 workers die from a work-related illness each year. In 2009-10 640 000 workers reported experiencing a work-related injury or illness. In the same year 303 000 workers were compensated for an injury or illness.

Safe Work Australia has calculated that the total cost of workplace injury and illness to the Australian economy for the 2008-09 financial year was \$60.6 billion. This represented 4.8 per cent of the Australian Gross Domestic Product. The significant economic costs of work-related injury, illness and death are borne by workers, their families, the broader community and employers.



# Overview of the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012–2022

The Australian Strategy promotes the vision of *healthy, safe and productive working lives* and sets four outcomes to be achieved by 2022 (*2022 Outcomes*). Seven action areas have been identified to collectively contribute to the delivery of these outcomes. These components are described in more detail on the following pages.



# Purpose

The purpose of the Australian Strategy is to drive key national activities to achieve improvement in work health and safety. It is aimed at regulators, industry, unions, other organisations and governments that in turn influence work and workplaces across Australia.

The Commonwealth, state and territory governments, industry and unions have strategies to support and improve work health and safety. The Australian Strategy has been designed to be sufficiently broad and high-level so that governments, industry, unions and other organisations can undertake activities that assist in meeting the desired outcomes.

Those responsible for regulating work health and safety, public health, energy and transport will need to work collaboratively to achieve the vision and outcomes of the Australian Strategy.

Individual organisations and workplaces, professional associations and interest groups are encouraged to undertake supporting strategic activities.

Around half of all workers in Australia are employed in small businesses. It is important that national strategic activities support improvement in the capability of small businesses to successfully manage health and safety risks.

Throughout the life of the Australian Strategy, evidence on work health and safety issues will be collected and analysed to inform and evaluate national and organisational policies, programs and practice.

# Principles

The Australian Strategy is underpinned by two key principles. Firstly all workers, regardless of their occupation or how they are engaged, have the right to a healthy and safe working environment; and secondly well-designed, healthy and safe work will allow workers in Australia to have more productive working lives.

This is consistent with the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and is reflected in duties of care established in all Australian work health and safety legislation.

These duties flow from the philosophy that workers should be given the highest practical level of protection against harm to their health and safety from hazards and risks arising from work.



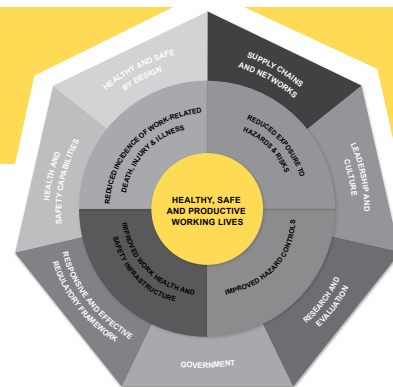
## Healthy, safe and productive working lives

Over the next decade the nature of work in Australia will continue to change in response to economic pressures, technological changes and demographic shifts. These changes will bring new risks, but also new opportunities to improve work health and safety.

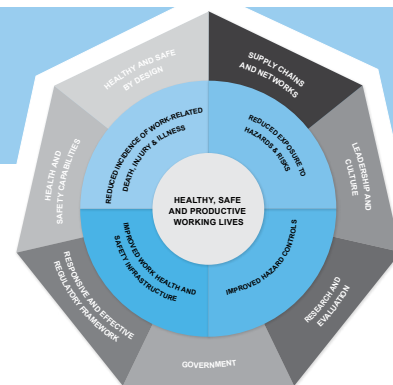
In this changing environment Australian business needs to remain competitive and productive. While there are costs inherent in providing healthy and safe workplaces the costs of not doing so are even greater. It has been shown that good work health and safety improves long-term business productivity.

Effective systematic management of risks results in improved worker health and safety and productivity by:

- » preventing and reducing the number and severity of injuries and illnesses and associated costs
- » promoting worker health, wellbeing and capacity to work, and
- » fostering innovation, quality and efficiency through continuous improvement.



# 2022 Outcomes



Progress towards the vision will be made through a set of outcomes to be achieved by 2022 which in turn will be supported through seven Action Areas.

The outcomes are:

- » *reduced incidence of work-related death, injury and illness achieved by*
- » *reduced exposure to hazards and risks using*
- » *improved hazard controls and supported by*
- » *an improved work health and safety infrastructure.*

We can only achieve the vision and the outcomes if the systematic management of risks happens at the workplace level and concerted effort is made by duty holders and those who support them.

## **What is work health and safety infrastructure?**

- » A responsive and effective regulatory framework.
- » The knowledge and skills of all parties with a role in work health and safety.
- » A robust evidence base.

# Targets and performance indicators

The Australian Strategy includes national targets and performance indicators that are used to measure the success of national actions. The number and incidence rate of fatalities, injuries and disorders are important indicators of health and safety performance.

Targets to be achieved by 2022 include:

- » a reduction in the number of worker fatalities due to injury of at least 20 per cent
- » a reduction in the incidence rate of claims resulting in one or more weeks off work of at least 30 per cent, and
- » a reduction in the incidence rate of claims for musculoskeletal disorders resulting in one or more weeks off work of at least 30 per cent.

A range of performance indicators will be developed to monitor progress against all areas of the Australian Strategy including the reduction of exposures to hazards and improvements in the control of hazards.

The method for target setting and measurement will be explained in a supplementary document.

## **Targets to be achieved by 2022**

- » A reduction in the number of worker fatalities due to injury of at least 20 per cent.
- » A reduction in the incidence rate of claims resulting in one or more weeks off work of at least 30 per cent.
- » A reduction in the incidence rate of claims for musculoskeletal disorders resulting in one or more weeks off work of at least 30 per cent.

# Action Areas

The Australian Strategy has seven national Action Areas:

- » Healthy and safe by design
- » Supply chains and networks
- » Health and safety capabilities
- » Leadership and culture
- » Research and evaluation
- » Government, and
- » Responsive and effective regulatory framework.

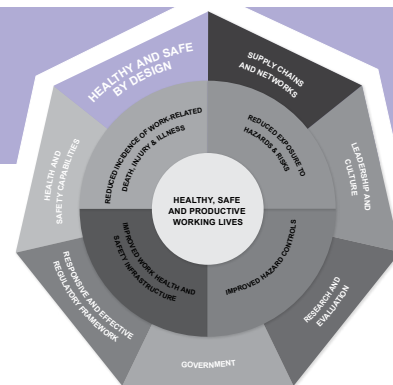
These national Action Areas were chosen because:

- » Prevention activities should be directed to where there is the greatest potential for reducing harm.
- » Hazards and risks are most effectively controlled at the source.
- » Prevention effort should focus on eliminating or minimising exposure to serious hazards and risks and progressively improving controls. If elimination is not practical then risks need to be minimised according to the hierarchy of control.
- » Where a hazard exists but the level of risk is not certain, the risk should be assumed to be high and managed accordingly until the actual level of risk is known.
- » Creating healthy and safe work requires that jobs and tasks be designed to accommodate the abilities, diversity and vulnerabilities of workers, including those returning to work following injury or illness.

- » Continued improvement in work health and safety requires ongoing collaboration and cooperation between all parties.
- » Workers have the right to be genuinely consulted in all matters relating to their work health and safety.
- » Organisation leaders influence work health and safety through their management, education and procurement practices.
- » Work health and safety improvements are best achieved when health and safety is supported by the organisation's culture and embedded in its procedures and processes.
- » The community and its leaders can influence attitudes and cultural norms.
- » All parties with a role in work health and safety require appropriate knowledge and skills.
- » Work health and safety policy and practice should be informed by evidence.
- » Governments can strongly influence work health and safety.
- » The regulatory framework needs to be flexible, responsive and adaptive to the changing nature of work and work circumstances.

## Action Areas and Strategic Outcomes to be achieved by 2022

Action Areas	Strategic Outcomes	
<b>Healthy and safe by design</b>	Hazards are eliminated or minimised by design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Structures, plant and substances are designed to eliminate or minimise hazards and risks before they are introduced into the workplace.</li> <li>» Work, work processes and systems of work are designed and managed to eliminate or minimise hazards and risks.</li> </ul>
<b>Supply chains and networks</b>	Improved work health and safety through supply chains and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Supply chain and network participants understand their cumulative impact and actively improve the health and safety of the supply chain.</li> <li>» Commercial relationships within supply chains and networks are used to improve work health and safety.</li> <li>» Industry leaders champion work health and safety in supply chains and networks.</li> </ul>
<b>Health and safety capabilities</b>	Improved work health and safety capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Everyone in a workplace has the work health and safety capabilities they require.</li> <li>» Those providing work health and safety education, training and advice have the appropriate capabilities.</li> <li>» Inspectors and other staff of work health and safety regulators have the work health and safety capabilities to effectively perform their role.</li> <li>» Work health and safety skills development is integrated effectively into relevant education and training programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership and culture</b>	Leaders in communities and organisations promote a positive culture for health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Communities and their leaders drive improved work health and safety.</li> <li>» Organisational leaders foster a culture of consultation and collaboration which actively improves work health and safety.</li> <li>» Health and safety is given priority in all work processes and decisions.</li> </ul>
<b>Research and evaluation</b>	Evidence-informed policy, programs and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Research and evaluation are targeted to provide the evidence to prioritise and progress areas of national interest.</li> <li>» Australia has an effective research and evaluation infrastructure and capacity.</li> <li>» Evidence is translated to assist practical application.</li> <li>» The results of research and evaluation are disseminated and implemented.</li> </ul>
<b>Government</b>	Governments improve work health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Work health and safety is actively considered in the development, implementation and evaluation of government policy.</li> <li>» Governments use their investment and purchasing power to improve work health and safety.</li> <li>» Governments exemplify good work health and safety.</li> </ul>
<b>Responsive and effective regulatory framework</b>	The regulatory framework improves effectiveness by responding and adapting to changing circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Legislation, policies and regulatory practice are reviewed and monitored to ensure they are responsive and effective.</li> <li>» Relationships between regulators and all who have a stake in work health and safety are effective, constructive, transparent and accountable.</li> </ul>



## Hazards are eliminated or minimised by design

The most effective and durable means of creating a healthy and safe working environment is to eliminate hazards and risks during the design of new plant, structures, substances and technology and of jobs, processes and systems. This design process needs to take into account hazards and risks that may be present at all stages of the lifecycle of structures, plant, products and substances.

Good design can eliminate or minimise the major physical, biomechanical and psychosocial hazards and risks associated with work. Effective design of the overall system of work will take into account, for example, management practices, work processes, schedules, tasks and workstation design.

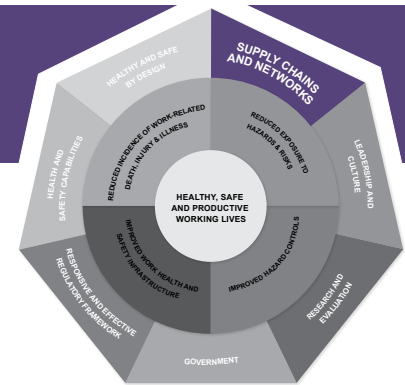
Sustainable return to work or remaining at work while recovering from injury or illness is facilitated by good job design and management. Managers have an obligation to make reasonable adjustments to the design of the work and work processes to accommodate individuals' differing capabilities.

Workers' general health and wellbeing are strongly influenced by their health and safety at work. Well-designed work can improve worker health. Activities under the Australian Strategy build appropriate linkages with healthy worker programs to support improved general worker wellbeing as well as health and safety.

National activities support the following outcomes:

- » Structures, plant and substances are designed to eliminate or minimise hazards and risks before they are introduced into the workplace.
- » Work, work processes and systems of work are designed and managed to eliminate or minimise hazards and risks.

# Supply chains and networks



## Improved work health and safety through supply chains and networks

“Supply chains and networks” refers to the often complex chain or web of commercial or business relationships designed to provide goods or services like moving agricultural produce to a supermarket or car components to vehicle manufacturers.

Supply chains and networks are usually established through formal or informal contractual arrangements. When people within a supply chain act cooperatively they can exert greater influence on health and safety than when acting alone.

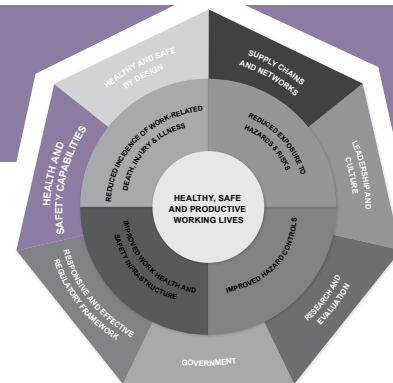
Industry leaders within supply chains and networks need to be champions of health and safety. Safety practices often improve when one respected member of a group adopts new practices, influencing others’ perceptions, expectations and actions.

Relationships between parties within a supply chain or network can exert positive or negative pressure on work health and safety practices. This is especially the case for micro and small businesses which may have limited resources or bargaining power.

National activities support the following outcomes:

- » Supply chain and network participants understand their cumulative impact and actively improve the health and safety of the supply chain.
- » Commercial relationships within supply chains and networks are used to improve work health and safety.
- » Industry leaders champion work health and safety in supply chains and networks.

# Health and safety capabilities



## Improved work health and safety capabilities

Every person requires the capabilities—the knowledge, skills and resources—to fulfil their role in relation to work health and safety.

In the workplace those in control of work need to be able to make informed decisions. Managers need to be able to identify hazards and understand how to manage associated work health and safety risks, judge whether controls are effective and communicate with staff.

Where work is high risk, specialist skills and knowledge are required.

Work health and safety regulators provide support to duty holders to help them comply with the legislation. Inspectors and other staff need the skills, knowledge and resources to effectively perform their roles.

A key challenge for national activities under this Action Area is to both expand opportunities for learning and ensure continuous improvement of the standard and quality of training and education.

In a decade many existing workplace hazards will still be present and new ones will have appeared. It is particularly important that education and training enable those who provide professional or practical advice to competently deal with old and new hazards. Those who provide advice need to know when to refer the matter to others with appropriate expertise.

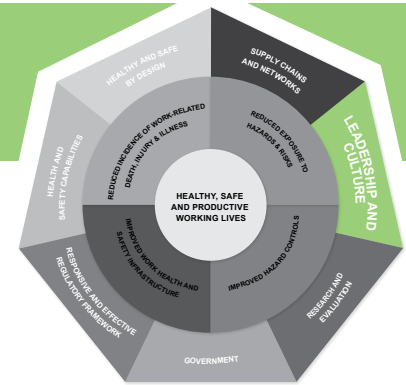
The data show that young people are at high risk of work-related injury. Effective work health and safety training should occur at school, during vocational and higher education, at the time of induction, and in the workplace.

This is an important part of providing young people with the knowledge, skills and experience to help protect themselves and their workmates.

National activities support the following outcomes:

- » Everyone in a workplace has the work health and safety capabilities they require.
- » Those providing work health and safety education, training and advice have the appropriate capabilities.
- » Inspectors and other staff of work health and safety regulators have the work health and safety capabilities to effectively perform their role.
- » Work health and safety skills development is integrated effectively into relevant education and training programs.





## Leaders in communities and organisations promote a positive culture for health and safety

Within organisations, leaders promote positive cultures by demonstrating a commitment to:

- » systematic management of risks
- » role clarity, worker involvement and workgroup cohesion
- » consultation and clear two-way communication
- » compliance with procedures
- » organisational learning
- » appropriate training
- » organisational justice and an environment of dignity and respect
- » supervisor support, and
- » a positive leadership and management style.

There is strong evidence that performance is improved when organisations address work health and safety risks along with other important business risks.

Organisational cultures can be influenced by broader community values and attitudes. Community expectations can be powerful drivers of change and collectively influence the nation's health and safety culture. When the Australian community expects and demands that work be free from harm any failure to do so generates community pressure and action.

It is important to:

- » lead and influence community debate on work health and safety through media and other public forums and mechanisms
- » counteract inaccurate media reporting about work health and safety
- » create more accurate injury and illness risk perceptions, and
- » generate community confidence that workplace risks can be managed.

If these messages are delivered by opinion leaders they are more likely to be believed and acted upon.

National activities support the following outcomes:

- » Communities and their leaders drive improved work health and safety.
- » Organisational leaders foster a culture of consultation and collaboration which actively improves work health and safety.
- » Health and safety is given priority in all work processes and decisions.



## Evidence-informed policy, programs and practice

Work health and safety policy, programs and practice need to be informed by robust evidence. Continuing to improve national data is essential to developing the evidence base. Evidence helps the ongoing identification of national priorities and measurement of our progress towards achieving the vision and the outcomes.

A nationally-coordinated and cooperative approach is required to promote the efficient and effective use of Australia's research resources. Australia's research infrastructure and capability must be developed by using innovative approaches to increase research funding and resources in both the public and private sectors. Research should lead to practical results to strengthen risk controls in workplaces.

Effective recruitment, training and support of the next generation of research professionals ensures that in 2022 Australia's research capacity equals the best in the world.

National activities support the following outcomes:

- » Research and evaluation are targeted to provide the evidence to prioritise and progress areas of national interest.
- » Australia has an effective research and evaluation infrastructure and capacity.
- » Evidence is translated to assist practical application.
- » The results of research and evaluation are disseminated and implemented.

### What are Australia's national work health and safety research priorities?

- » Build a national picture of work health and safety performance.
- » Evaluate the effectiveness and cost of work health and safety legislative changes.
- » Better understand current hazard exposures, the effectiveness of controls, and attitudes towards health and safety.

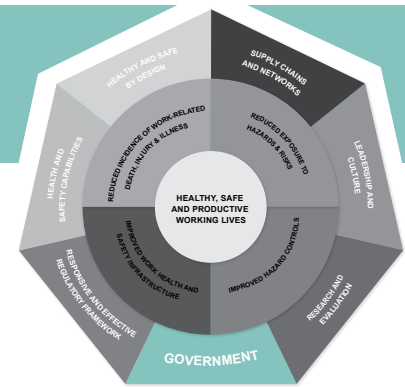
## Governments improve work health and safety

Governments have a range of tools they can use to change behaviours including regulation and information, education, awareness and compliance campaigns.

Governments can promote and influence work health and safety within Australian organisations and in the community through policy development and in the programs and services they deliver.

Governments are also major purchasers of products and services. By incorporating work health and safety and safe design requirements into government investment, procurement arrangements and contracts, governments can actively encourage suppliers to improve products and their health and safety practices and performance.

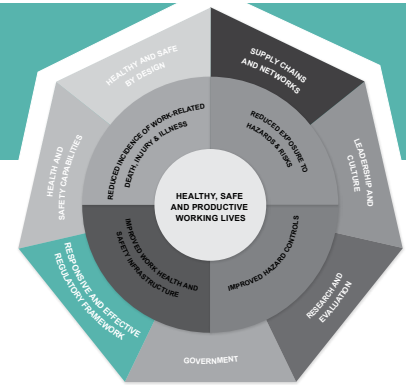
In meeting their obligations as employers, governments have the opportunity to set an example by ensuring the highest level of protection of their workers.



National activities support the following outcomes:

- » Work health and safety is actively considered in the development, implementation and evaluation of government policy.
- » Governments use their investment and purchasing power to improve work health and safety.
- » Governments exemplify good work health and safety.

# Responsive and effective regulatory framework



## The regulatory framework improves effectiveness by responding and adapting to changing circumstances

An effective regulatory framework provides for a flexible response taking into account the particular circumstances, available evidence, community expectations and the environment in which organisations operate.

Legislation, policies and practice are reviewed, monitored and updated regularly to continue progress towards national consistency and regulatory effectiveness. Regulators are encouraged to work collaboratively. There is also a need to reduce costs and improve efficiency by removing unnecessary red tape around compliance costs.

Businesses, unions, employer associations, the community and governments need to work together to improve work health and safety outcomes. At the highest level these relationships involve formal tripartite consultation.

National activities support the following outcomes:

- » Legislation, policies and regulatory practice are reviewed and monitored to ensure they are responsive and effective.
- » Relationships between regulators and all who have a stake in work health and safety are effective, constructive, transparent and accountable.

# Priority industries

The following broad industry groups have been identified as national priorities for prevention activities. These are:

- » agriculture
- » road transport
- » manufacturing
- » construction
- » accommodation and food services
- » public administration and safety, and
- » health care and social assistance.

In 2012, these industries were found to have high numbers and rates of injury and/or fatalities, or were by their nature hazardous. The national industry priorities focus attention and activities on identifying the cause of injury and illness and on working to find and implement solutions.

In order to focus attention on areas that require the greatest improvement, relevant sub sectors from within these broad industry groups will be chosen by jurisdictions during specified periods during the life of the Australian Strategy.

The agriculture and road freight transport industries will be the focus of efforts in all jurisdictions during the first five years of the Australian Strategy to reduce the high numbers of fatalities in these industries.

# Priority disorders

The following work-related disorder categories are identified as national priorities in the first five years of the Australian Strategy. They have been chosen based on the severity of consequences for workers, the number of workers estimated to be affected, and the existence of known prevention options.

The priority work-related disorders are:

- » musculoskeletal disorders
- » mental disorders
- » cancers (including skin cancer)
- » asthma
- » contact dermatitis, and
- » noise-induced hearing loss.

# International collaboration

Australia is a signatory to a range of international work health and safety conventions and agreements. This is one important way Australia can demonstrate our commitment and regional leadership in work health and safety.

Australia should continue to contribute to building the international evidence base on work health and safety through appropriate international collaboration, cooperation and exchange of information particularly about our national priorities. Australia can support the building of work health and safety capacity in our region.

# Implementation activities

The Australian Strategy has been designed to be sufficiently broad and high-level so that governments, industry, unions and other organisations can undertake activities that assist in meeting the desired outcomes.

National activities to achieve the Australian Strategy's outcomes will be collaboratively developed with key stakeholders and interested parties. Guidance and tools for those interested in undertaking activities to support the Australian Strategy will be developed and published.

# Reporting

An annual report on the Australian Strategy will be published. The Australian Strategy will be reviewed in 2017 to ensure it continues to generate sustained improvements in work health and safety.



