

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2012-2013**

Agency - Comcare

DEEWR Question No. EW0902_13

Senator Abetz asked on 13 February 2013, Hansard page 53

Question

Comcare - Claims settled in relation to Bullying

Senator ABETZ: Are they all Commonwealth? Mr O'Connor: No. A smaller proportion of those relate to the Australia Capital Territory government as well. We have received just over 850 claims since 2009. So it is a growing issue. It is a growing concern. The dollar value of that I would have to take on notice. Senator ABETZ: If you could, please. Clearly it is an issue that Comcare has taken an interest in. Are you able to tell us on notice what Comcare has done to assist Commonwealth agencies to try to reduce the incidence of bullying? Mr O'Connor: Yes. I will keep my comments short and provide some more fulsome supplementary information.

Answer

Comcare has provided the following response:

The dollar value of bullying

There were 1248 bullying and/or harassment claims received by Comcare in the four calendar years 2009 to 2012. The total cost to date of claims with a mechanism of incident of bullying and/or harassment is \$44.6 million with current estimated additional future costs of \$127.5 million.

What has Comcare done to assist Commonwealth agencies to try to reduce the incidence of bullying?

Current prevention interventions and strategies:

Comcare has focussed effort on reducing the risks and impacts of psychological injury through collaboration with:

- expert partners such as the Centre of Excellence for Mental Health and Wellbeing at Work, Beyondblue and the Mental Health Commission
- the Australian Public Service Commission to develop a Mental Health Guide for APS Managers
- licensee and premium paying employees through a Community of Practice in Mental Health and Wellbeing at Work.

Comcare's current campaign on the Prevention of Psychological Injury raise's awareness and encourages organisations to manage psychosocial risk factors through proactive activities.

Campaign activities include;

- Regional Best Practice Forums focusing on psychological injury prevention and risk management strategies. Comcare has held 13 forums in regional and metropolitan areas.
- Proactive national inspections of persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) current systems in place to prevent and respond to behavioural risk factors, including bullying and conflict.
- Roll out of the People at Work Project in partnership with University of Queensland, Australian National University, Safe Work Australia, Worksafe Victoria, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, WorkCover NSW and Beyondblue. The project supports PCBUs to undertake psychosocial risk assessment against a validated Australian database.

Reactive Interventions

In accordance with Comcare's regulatory policy, Comcare uses an escalating, risk based analysis to respond to allegations of bullying and harassment.

The intervention may consider

- The implementation of appropriate policies, procedures and training to demonstrate the PCBU is taking all reasonably practicable action to mitigate or eliminate the risk of workplace bullying, and,
- In the most serious cases, bullying behaviour by individuals requiring regulatory action.

In 2011 Comcare created a specialist Workplace Relationship Resolution team that focusses on bullying as a key WHS issue. This has coincided with the increasing trend in the number of interventions in response to workplace bullying:

- **26 interventions** commenced in 2010
- **81 interventions** commenced in 2011
- **101 interventions** commenced in 2012