

THE HEALTHY OLDER WORKER (HOW) TOOLKIT

Welcome to the HOW Toolkit! This step-by-step tool will help you to identify psychosocial hazards and physical hazards associated with work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSD) affecting older workers in your workplace and potential measures to control these risks.

This Toolkit has been produced through research by the Centre for Work Health and Safety, Edith Cowan University, and The University of New South Wales.

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Centre for Work Health and Safety Centre for Work + Wellbeing STRATEGIC RESEARCH CENTRE





NSW GOVERNMENT

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Introduction



This step-by-step tool will help you to identify psychosocial hazards and physical hazards associated with work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSD)/strains and sprains affecting older workers in your workplace, and the context in which such hazards expose workers to harm. You will be encouraged to consider what controls the organisation already has in place to manage these hazards, and additional controls that would help manage the specific risk to older workers. The Toolkit will guide you to develop an action plan which you can then use for implementing the intervention/control within your organisation. The Toolkit can be used multiple times with different risk scenarios once you have established how to use this resource effectively.

To assist you with this process, we have provided examples from a fictional case study: GasX – a utilities company. Many workers in the GasX utility company are approaching traditional retirement age and too few younger workers are joining the organisation to replace the impending loss of skills. We have included examples from the GasX case throughout the document to help you think about your response to each element of the HOW Toolkit.

A Participatory Approach: The Steering Group

It is anticipated that you will complete the HOW Toolkit as a group with 5-10 members to ensure a range of expertise and perspectives. This group (hereafter 'Steering Group') should include older workers as subject matter experts for their work tasks. This Steering Group would typically include the participation of a work health and safety and/or a wellbeing specialist alongside older workers and others as considered relevant (we suggest including an HR manager and/or senior manager and line manager). The Steering Group will work through each step in the HOW Toolkit as a team, discussing each task and responding to the activities by typing into the interactive fields. You can also refer to the digital resources provided, including other case studies and links to helpful information.

We recommend reading the "Guide to Using the HOW Toolkit" provided as an attachment to this Handbook before commencing Step 1 of the HOW Toolkit.



The HOW Toolkit's four steps:

Step 1: Hazard detection and assessment

This first step focuses on identifying a risk scenario where the Steering Group are concerned that older workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards or WMSD hazards in the workplace.



Write down your risk scenario here briefly. Select one risk scenario (a task, process, activity, or role) for either psychological Injury or WMSD.

(e.g. social isolation of older engineers working remotely, fatigue of older drivers on night shifts, early shifts for older workers, frequent exposure to abusive clients/public, heavy lifting and carrying in loading bay).

GasX case example:

Our older workers are worn-out physically, many with chronic musculoskeletal injuries due to the heavy nature of engineering tasks that make up a large proportion of their work.

| Name of risk scenario | (Please add a name for your risk scenario here (short version) |
|---|--|
| Description of your risk scenario | |
| | |
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| | |



Discuss what makes the Steering Group concerned about this risk scenario for older workers.

Have there been incident reports, absenteeism, insights from hazard management checks, complaints, exit interviews, etc.?

GasX case example:

Some of the concerns about older workers at GasX include:

- Exit surveys and interviews with older workers revealed that many older workers felt increasingly fatigued and were struggling to maintain the long and demanding work hours.
- Night work and early shifts were particularly unpopular, and were the reason many engineers were looking for either new employment or considering early retirement.
- Injury and lost-time data for the previous 12 months indicated that sick days were taken at a greater rate by older workers than the general workforce.
- Reports of musculoskeletal injuries were high for older workers, with long recovery periods.

What are the reasons you have selected this risk scenario for older workers?

| Risk | Add risk scenario rationale here |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| scenario rationale | |
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Consider which of the hazards listed in the table below may be present in the risk scenario that you are concerned about for older workers. Tick as many as apply for your assessment of hazards associated with the selected older worker risk scenario.

Note: psychosocial hazards can be relevant to WMSD and vice versa.

In the GasX case example:

Older workers have been exposed to several of the WMSD hazards as part of their work over many years, notably much physical lifting and carrying of materials. However, they also face a number of hazards from the list of psychosocial hazards, including role overload and high exposure to customers. Finally, they face organisational risks, notably low organisational commitment to older worker WHS and inadequate availability of flexible work arrangements.

| Psychosocial hazard | | to this hazard? | | |
|---|-----|-----------------|----|--|
| | Yes | Maybe | No | |
| Role overload (high workloads or job demands) | | | | |
| Role underload (low workloads or job demands) | | | | |
| Exposure to traumatic events | | | | |
| High exposure to customers | | | | |
| Role conflict or lack of role clarity | | | | |
| Low job control | | | | |
| Conflict or poor workplace relationships between workers and their supervisors and co-workers | | | | |
| Poor support from supervisors and managers | | | | |
| Poor co-worker support | | | | |
| Social isolation | | | | |
| Work-family conflict | | | | |
| Workplace violence | | | | |
| Bullying | | | | |
| Harassment including sexual harassment | | | | |
| Age-discrimination from manager or co-workers | | | | |
| Inadequate reward and recognition | | | | |
| Hazardous physical working environments | | | | |
| | | | | |

| Psychosocial hazard (continued) | | Older workers exposed to this hazard? | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Poor procedural justice (processes for making decisions) | | | |
| Poor organisational change consultation | | | |
| Inadequate opportunities for rest and recovery | | | |
| Extended periods of vigilance or monitoring tasks | | | |
| Job insecurity | | | |
| Other: describe here | | | |
| | | | |

| WMSD hazard | Older workers exposed to this hazard? | | |
|--|--|-------|----|
| | Yes | Maybe | No |
| Physical lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving | | | |
| Repetitive or sustained force exerted | | | |
| High or sudden force | | | |
| Repetitive movement | | | |
| Sustained or awkward posture | | | |
| Exposure to vibration | | | |
| Poor physical environment – lighting, thermal, noise, etc. | | | |
| Thermal hazards/weather/climate | | | |
| Poor or inadequate training for work task/s | | | |
| Inability to rotate to less strenuous tasks | | | |
| Other: describe here | | | |
| | _ | | |

Organisational factors

Older workers exposed to this hazard?

| | Yes | Maybe | No |
|---|-----|-------|----|
| Lack of or poor organisational commitment to older worker WHS | | | |
| Poor safety culture/climate | | | |
| Lack of or poor inclusive climate/diversity management | | | |
| Inadequate availability of flexible work arrangements for older workers | | | |
| Poor recognition of older workers' skills and contributions | | | |
| Administration factors impacting older workers | | | |
| Shift scheduling unsuitable for older workers | | | |
| Lack of supportive HR practices for older workers | | | |
| Poor training and development opportunities for older workers | | | |
| Lack of promotion or advancement opportunities for older workers | | | |
| Poor/inappropriate leadership approaches/styles for older workers | | | |
| Other: describe here | | | |





Focusing on the hazards where you have selected 'Yes' or 'Maybe' in the previous table, describe the hazards in more detail below in your selected scenario for older workers.

| Hazard details: | Risk scenario analysis for older workers |
|--------------------|---|
| | Psychosocial risks: describe the nature of the risk identified for older workers |
| | |
| | |
| | WMSD risks: describe the nature of the risk identified for older workers |
| | |
| | |
| | Organisational factors: describe the nature of the risk identified for older workers |
| | |
| | |





Next, note why the hazards described in the previous table contribute to injury risk for older workers, using a similar method of analysis as used in the GasX case example below (i.e. how do these psychosocial, WMSD and organisational hazards interact or combine to create the injury risk to older workers at your organisation?).

GasX case example:

These psychosocial, WMSD and organisational hazards act together in the injury risk faced by older workers at GasX. For example, older workers face high workloads, with much time spent doing physically demanding tasks. The lack of flexibility means they do not have options to work part-time or ability to rotate to less stressful tasks, and they do not get sufficient recovery time.

| Risk Contribution | How Psychosocial, WMSD and organisational hazards act together/interact to create injury risk for older workers in your selected scenario. |
|----------------------|--|
| for older workers | Add your analysis here |
| | |
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Consider what the impacts (or potential impacts) of the risk scenario you have identified might be for individual older workers and the organisation. These are likely to be important to understand when making a business case for intervention. Fill in the box below.

GasX case example:

The potential impacts that GasX identified included more frequent early retirement by older workers due to worn out bodies; low productivity; absenteeism/ presenteeism costs; short-cuts and risk taking to avoid physical effort.

| Risk Contribution for older workers | Add your analysis here |
|--|--|
| | Describe impact here: (i.e. fatigue; absenteeism; injuries; unsafe practices; distress) |
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Tip: Sometimes it is easy for Steering Group discussions to drift towards risks for the general workforce. Before moving to Step 2 review your responses to ensure that they are focused on the hazards for older workers and apply to the risk scenario that you have selected.



Step 2: Specify the context

In this part of the process, the task is to describe where and when the hazards occur for your selected scenario, including the work content, and who is involved. These deliberations will help when it comes to designing the intervention for older workers and action planning.



Describe your risk scenarios by filling in the boxes in the table below to the extent that you know or can find the answers to each question.

GasX case example:

Tasks/processes

- Older workers do a lot of engineering tasks which include physical lifting and carrying of materials
- Older workers often have a high exposure to customers

Where are they performed?

· Indoor and outdoor areas where heavy machinery is present, and it is noisy

How many older workers do the task(s)?

• A high proportion of the workforce are older workers (more than 65% are 45 years or older)

Supervision

• Supervised by an experienced line manager (older worker), with over 30 years experience

Your responses for your selected scenario

| What tasks/processes are being undertaken by older workers? | |
|---|--|
| | |
| | |

Your responses for your selected scenario (continued)

| Where are the tasks/processes performed by older workers? | |
|---|--|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| When is the task/process being performed by | |
| older workers? (e.g. time of day, week, | |
| how often) | |
| | |
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| | |
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| | |
| How many older workers are doing this work? | |
| How many older workers are doing this work? | |
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| How many older workers are doing this work? | |
| How many older workers are doing this work? | |
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| How many older workers are doing this work? | |
| How many older workers are doing this work? Who is supervising | |
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| How many older workers are doing this work? Who is supervising the work? | |

Your responses for your selected scenario (continued)

| Who are the key connections inside or outside the organisations relevant to this task/process? | |
|--|--|
| (e.g. partners, customers, contractors) | |





Tip: The HOW Toolkit is a great tool for getting people together to talk about the aging workforce, so make sure that you schedule several meetings to work through the Toolkit as a group as well as time between the meetings to source information and organisational support for your older worker WHS intervention.

Step 3: Identify and discuss existing controls

In this section, the task is to consider current controls that are in place to manage hazards, whether these controls are adequate to manage the risks to older workers' health and safety, including the risk scenario you have identified, and whether new controls need to be implemented to address this risk



For each of the following headings, consider the range of initiatives that currently contribute to the prevention of physical and psychological injury to older workers across your organisation.

Note: these may be controls designed for the general working population or initiatives specifically implemented for older workers.

GasX case example:

GasX know that the issues of WHS and older worker retention are inter-related, so they have in place measures that protect older workers from harm and enable them to stay in employment longer. GasX consult older workers to understand the hazards that they face and when designing preventive controls for these hazards (i.e. they ask what older workers perceive as the greatest risks in their current work activities). GasX have no policy or HR strategies that provide for flexible work arrangements or shifting to part-time working. They do provide some basic training in looking after your body and physical health for their older workers.

Hazard/risk management processes focused on older workers

(e.g. assessment of high-risk roles, processes, tasks and targeted controls; consultative approaches to hazard detection and prevention)

Tip: include consideration of how these relate to your risk scenario

Write your response here

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Policy relevant to older workers' health, safety and wellbeing

(e.g. flexible working arrangements; dignity and respect policy; diversity policy; bullying and harassment policy; workload policy)

Tip: include consideration of how these relate to your risk scenario

Write your response here

HR strategies relevant to older workers' health, safety and wellbeing

(e.g. part-time working hours; flexible arrangements – working from home; flexi-time; recognition; training and development; mentoring opportunities; graduated retirement)

Tip: include consideration of how these relate to your risk scenario

Write your response here

Work design/redesign relevant to older workers' health, safety and wellbeing

(e.g. workplace accommodation for older workers; redesign of tasks to reduce physical or mental load; shift scheduling; ergonomics improvements)

Tip: include consideration of how these relate to your risk scenario

Write your response here

Training and development relevant to older workers' health, safety and wellbeing

(e.g. training and development program for older workers; professional development; exercise program; training for managers of older workers)

Tip: include consideration of how these relate to your risk scenario

Write your response here

Other interventions, initiatives, controls

(e.g. EAP, flu shot program, healthy eating program or fitness program)

Tip: include consideration of how these relate to your risk scenario

Write your response here



Tip: Some steering groups find that completing this section of the HOW Toolkit helps to solidify what they already know, as well as highlighting where additional controls are needed. Steering groups often revisit this section as more information is uncovered and/or emerging issues are recognised.



Next, discuss whether these initiatives are satisfactory, operating effectively, or need refreshing or enhancing.

Consider whether these initiatives are effective in addressing the risk scenarios you have identified. Consider how specific they are to older workers. Is there is room for improvement? What additional action needs to be taken to address the risk areas you have identified for older workers?

Note: these may be controls designed for the general working population or initiatives specifically implemented for older workers.



Write down the key conclusions from your discussion.

To what extent are these current controls effective in managing the risk scenarios you have identified?

GasX case example:

GasX current controls have limited effectiveness in managing the risk scenario. The controls are mostly tertiary in nature and tend to focus on helping older workers cope with the heavy physical work they undertake for large parts of their working day. However, they do little to reduce risk exposure meaning WMSDs are likely following extended exposure.

Write your response here



What additional controls or initiatives specific to managing the risk scenario are needed to eliminate or minimise effectively the risk of physical or psychological injury to older workers?

Gas X case example:

GasX recognise that their older workers may require reduced working time so their exposure to hazardous tasks is reduced and there is more time for rest and recovery. They have found that some of the older workers had moved to part-time or flexible work hours, but few had been successful in negotiating these new conditions due to issues around the complexity of the scheduling system and a shortage of qualified staff. HR were aware of the issue and had commenced a major recruitment drive to attract a younger more diverse workforce to GasX. Training provided for older workers by GasX helps keep workers physically healthy but does not reduce their exposure to hazards that impact their health, safety and wellbeing.

Write your response here

Step 4: Action planning



The action planning process is shown below. This section commences with selecting intervention/s or controls for the risk scenario you have identified for older workers, then developing an action plan that details the implementation steps and considers potential barriers and facilitators for your intervention.





Consider the intervention/control options in this graphic and consider what can be done to address your risk scenario.

Note: The graphic includes many primary or organisational interventions recommended by experts or identified in research designed to prevent injury risk to older workers. These can sometimes be most effective when used in combination (i.e. combining two or more approaches and/or combine one or more of these organisational measures with an individual level approach such as training or exercise interventions). Take some time to review the graphic and then consider whether any of these interventions address your risk scenario.

| Scheduling of | Work design/ | HR practices supporting older | Workplace |
|--|---|--|--|
| roles/tasks | redesign | | accommodation/ |
| Night and early shift avoidance Forward rotating shifts Greater consultation on work scheduling Length of work day | Rotation to less demanding tasks Autonomy or consultation in work design Maintenance roles Job enrichment strategies | worker health and wellbeing Training for line-managers in work design and management of older workers Flexible working arrangements Leave options | physical environment adaptation Ergonomics adaptation Refitting tools Increased lighting Noise reduction |
| Breaks and rest | Load reduction | Graduated | Underfoot |
| periods | | retirement Mentoring Recognition and | comfort |



When thinking about your intervention/control options, note that controls may have multiple components, to reflect the multi-factorial nature of the hazards and risks you are aiming to prevent. Consider potential control actions that will address your risk scenario under the different sectors of the graphic below.



Hazard control components



% Write down the key conclusions from your discussion about the hazard control components available to you here.

Write your response here





Helpful resources:

You can also click here to bring up some real case examples of interventions that organisations have applied to address the risk of injuries to older workers.

Video

 Good Work Design Can Help Older Employees Stay Sharp https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUVwRMmUQt0 About mental health and cognitive abilities and work design

Websites

- IOSH Position Ageing workforce https://iosh.com/more/our-influence/iosh-older-workers-policy-position/
- SafeWork NSW https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/hazards-a-z/working-at-heights There are stories here that include older workers (i.e. 55-year-old worker, 60-year-old worker)
- NSW Code of Practice Managing psychosocial hazards at work https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/983353/Code-of-Practice_Managing-psychosocial-hazards.pdf pages 7-8 explains what different psychosocial workplace hazards are with examples.

Podcasts

- **Designing work for your workforce: Younger and older workers** (approx 43 mins) Presented by: Helen Lingard, RMIT University Distinguished Professor and Director of the Centre for Construction Work Health and Safety Research https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/resources/podcasts/construction-forum/ presentation-3-designing-work-for-your-workforce-younger-and-older-workers
- Good work design and human factors employee engagement and safe design for a parcels handling system (approx 36 mins)

Presented by: Stephen Hehir, Australia Post

In this presentation Stephen uses the SafeWork Principles of Work Design and talks about them in practice, i.e. implementing them at his organisation. He also talks about older workers and their approach.

https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/resources/campaigns/msd-symposium/2017content/presentation-podcasts/presentation-8-good-work-design-and-humanfactors-employee-engagement-and-safe-design-for-a-parcels-handling-system



Write down the controls you plan to implement to manage each of the risk scenarios.

Provide as much detail as possible in relation to the nature of the control/s, the components of the control/s, the scope of implementation–including which operational areas/tasks/processes/roles it will apply to across the organisation or workplace.

Tip: Remember to focus on controls for older workers

GasX case example:

The re-design of jobs/work tasks is more effective in controlling risks than individual-level approaches (e.g. resilience training or walking groups) that focus on the worker rather than their work, so GasX chose a multi-phased or composite approach to manage older worker WHS most effectively. Most older workers value flexibility highly, so at GasX, WHS and HR will work together to create an organisational approach that is not only an excellent retention strategy but also helps provide better balance and reduces the risks of psychosocial and musculoskeletal injuries where more time is available for rest and recovery. GasX will also implement a new training program to help older workers to look after their physical health, including strengthening body areas most vulnerable to WMSD. Finally, they will train their line managers to manage older worker workloads and the work environment to reduce exposure to psychosocial and physical risks.

Key hazards you plan to address: Name the hazards identified for this risk scenario, referring to Step 1 hazard identification and assessment

| Control | Write your response here |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| component 1 | |
| Describe | |
| of this control. | |
| (e.g. introduce | |
| arrangements for | |
| all older workers | |
| division) | |
| | |
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| Control component 2 Describe component 2 of this control: (e.g. training for looking after your physical health for all staff in the engineering division) | Write your response here |
|---|--------------------------|
| Control component 3 Describe component 3 of this control: (e.g. Training line-managers in managing workload of older workers across the organisation) | Write your response here |

Some organisations who have used this Toolkit:

- Added health and safety for older workers as a topic in their leadership training programs.
- Look to HR strategies and policy approaches for creating workplaces conducive to healthy older workforces.
- Chose to introduce coaching and mentoring programs to support the wellbeing of older workers. For example, they train a group of older workers to be Champion Users of new a technology being introduced so that they can mentor other older workers who may need additional assistance adapting to the new technology.

Recording your action plan



Complete the following table for the risk scenario for older workers you wish to address in your organisation.

If the intervention has multiple components, consider this when responding to each of the action planning items.

| Action Plan for the control of: | add risk scenario name here |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Action steps | List your control components here: |
| What will be done? | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| Responsible | |
| Who will do the intervention work? | |
| (note, this may need to be broken down by control | |
| component) | |
| Deadline | |
| By when? | |
| (note, this may need to be broken down by control component) | |

| Resources What resources are required? (note, this may need to be broken down by control component) | |
|--|--|
| Potential barriers | |
| What could get in the way of task completion? How will this be overcome? | |
| (note, this may need to be broken down by control component) | |
| Enablers | |
| What will enable completion of the task (e.g. senior management support, data/evidence, etc) | |
| (note, this may need to be broken down by control component) | |
| Evaluation | |
| How will the impact of the intervention/control be evaluated after implementation? | |
| (note, this may need to be broken down by control component) | |

Steering Group 'To do' items – use this space to record tasks that need to be completed following each session or to record notes regarding 'to-do' items

| To do item | Date to be done by |
|------------|--------------------|
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And finally...

Thank you for completing the HOW Toolkit.

The next step is to consult within your organisation on your intervention. You will need to consider feedback from a range of people within your organisation. You may also need to develop a business case for getting the intervention approved and you can draw the information you have recorded in this Toolkit to assist you with your business plan. Thank you for using this Toolkit. If it was useful, please let your contacts know.

Contact

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