

Guidance: Managing workload and job demands

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Introduction

Legal Aid ACT (Legal Aid) aims to ensure all employees feel safe and supported at work because their health and wellbeing is prioritised, diversity is embraced, and workloads are managed. To protect the health and wellbeing of our staff and ensure we can provide a high-quality service, workload and job demands should be planned and managed to prevent or reduce the impact of work-related stress.

Purpose and scope

This guide aims to help all staff to:

- identify supports for workload and job demands, and
- apply workload demand management guidance, and
- escalate unresolved concerns effectively.

Definitions

Workload: the amount of work assigned within a certain timeframe.

Job demands: the physical, mental, and emotional efforts needed to perform a job.

Workload and demand management (WDM): effectively balancing the work assigned with the job demands required to do that work.

Responsibilities

Managers and supervisors are responsible for:

- Effective workload planning, monitoring, and management in accordance with their program WDM guidance.

- Ensuring teams and employees have the support and resources needed to prevent or reduce work-related stress.
- Cultivating a team culture where people feel comfortable to openly discuss workload and job demands.
- Facilitating resolution of local workload/job demand issues as they arise and escalating where necessary.

All employees are responsible for:

- Taking reasonable care for their own health and wellbeing and raising concerns if excessive workload or job demands negatively impacts wellbeing.

Principles of workload management

Our approach to managing workload and job demands effectively and safely follows these principles:

- We integrate workload management into our routine business and planning processes.
- Workload is assigned based on Legal Aid classification, job descriptions, capacity, capability, professional development, and agreed flexible working arrangements.
- We foster an environment where employees feel comfortable raising workload concerns with their managers, ensuring collaborative resolution.
- We monitor natural workload fluctuations to identify potential issues early.
- If job demands impact a person's wellbeing, we discuss reducing or pausing similar tasks until recovery.
- Workload issues that cannot be resolved locally are escalated to senior management for resolution.

How does Legal Aid pro-actively manage workload?

Some of the main processes in which we pro-actively manage workload are by:

Organisational work planning

To support strategic priorities, workload management is an intrinsic consideration in operational planning, budgeting and risk management. Tools and processes for effective workload planning include:

- Organisational, Practice and program planning
- FTE establishment and workforce planning
- Budgeting
- Rostering and working hours reviews.

Supervision

In supervision, regular one-to-one meetings provide a platform for supervisors/managers and employees to discuss workload and job demands. If concerns arise about excessive workload or job demands, steps can be taken together to adjust the tasks and ensure adequate supports and resources are in place.

Additional activities taken on by employees in a voluntary capacity above their contracted duties should also be considered. When discussing workload, consideration should be given to encourage participation in diversity related activities and initiatives to promote a sense of inclusion and belonging.

Team meetings

Team meetings are an appropriate setting for discussing workload and job demands. Engaging with teams and normalising conversations around workload and job demands empowers team members to suggest adjustments that could improve workload balance. By facilitating these discussions, teams can proactively manage workload issues together, cultivating a supportive and productive work environment for all.

Steps for managing workload and job demands

It is important to consider the following steps that can be taken by managers to effectively manage workload:

Step 1: Identify possible workload and/or job demand issues

Workload and job demand issues can arise in various ways, and it is important to be aware of the potential warning signs. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Employee raises concern about workload and/or job demands, either directly or through an incident report.
- High levels of flexitime being accrued, or personal leave taken.
- Health and Safety Representative (HSR) advises manager of an issue.
- A new program, project or technological change is being planned.

Step 2: Analyse and assess the possible issue/s

Managers should aim to understand the contributing causes of workload or job demand issues by consulting with the individual or team and assessing relevant data. Key questions to consider include:

- Have deadlines moved, workloads increased, or job demands increased?
- Does/will it affect one or more of my team?
- How long has this been occurring, or is it likely to continue for?

Next, determine the key contributing factors:

- Is the increase or change unexpected/unplanned?
- Is the workload issue arising from internal or external demands?
- Are technology issues involved?
- Are there process changes or revised work practices?

Step 3: Identify and implement support options

Review Appendix 1 for resources and supports to determine actions that can be taken to address causes of excessive workload and job demands. Where relevant, actions should be considered in consultation with the affected staff member/s and HSR.

If a manager decides that action is necessary, create and communicate the plan with all relevant parties. Conversely, if it is decided that no action is needed, it is important to communicate why, so that all involved understand the decision-making process. Managers are responsible for monitoring the risk during routine planning activities.

Employee/s who remain dissatisfied may follow established escalation processes.

Step 4: Review and report

Schedule time to review the actions taken and their effectiveness, then regularly check in and monitor progress with those affected. This can happen in one-on-one supervision, team meetings, planning sessions, or any other relevant setting.

Escalation processes

Efforts should be made to resolve workload issues locally between an individual or team and their manager. However, escalation to senior management and the Health, Safety, and Wellbeing team should occur in the following situations:

- when excessive workload persists beyond the expected timeframe
- where attempts to resolve the issue locally have not been successful.
- when implemented controls are ineffective.
- when resolving workload issues requires financial or resource approval that exceeds the manager's authority.

Document control

Program:	People and Culture
Responsible manager:	People & Culture Manager
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Appendix 1: Resources and support

Resources and support should be **proactively** offered to prevent the impact of work-related stress, or **reactively** to prevent the situation from worsening.

Note: this list is not exhaustive, nor will the strategies be applicable to all directorates/programs. It is essential to tailor the approach to meet the specific needs of the directorate, program, or individual to ensure effective support.

Job design

Job design is a foundational strategy in preventing work-related stress, particularly for new or revised work programs or tasks. Job design involves carefully designing tasks and work practices from the outset to ensure that workload and job demands are not excessive, while integrating the necessary supports and resources into the work.

When any vacancy arises, this is an opportunity to undertake a review of the position description and job design, through the lens of workload management principles.

Workload and demanding patterns of work

These strategies can reduce the impact of the volume, pace and time pressures of our work, and where it is identified that employees are working long hours or consistently working overtime:

- Regularly discuss and review workloads during team meetings and supervision.
- Monitor workloads during periods of peak demand and provide additional support where required.
- Ensure sufficient staffing levels are available by recruiting vacancies as soon as practicable.
- Consider who else can provide services (e.g. briefing duties, referring out files to panel firms, outsourcing project or other work).
- Ensure employees have adequate time to complete their tasks and allow them to have input when deciding the timing and pace of their work, including flexibility in the timing of breaks.
- Assist employees to identify and prioritise key tasks, taking into consideration our corporate priorities.
- Provide accurate information and timely communication to support employees to complete tasks efficiently.
- Regularly review workloads in supervision to ensure clear information about role and tasks, there are sufficient resources in terms of time, and there are realistic and achievable targets in place.
- Support employees to set boundaries and manage stakeholder expectations.
- Maximise the use of technology to improve ways of working and take action to address any technology issues that may contribute to excessive workload.
- Discourage employees from regularly working after hours, answering emails or phone calls outside of work hours, or working through breaks.
- Examine alternative supports when there is planned or unplanned leave, for example, rosters and file work are shared amongst the team, consider who else can provide services.

- Involve employees in roster decision and changes.
- Ensure rosters allow for a sufficient break between shifts and avoid scheduling shifts that exceed 12 hours.
- Consider personal circumstances such as caring responsibilities, disabilities or illness that may make it difficult to vary work hours.

Emotional demands

These strategies can support work that is emotionally challenging, requires high emotional involvement or requires people to suppress their emotions to complete their work:

- Reduce unnecessary exposure to traumatic or distressing material where such exposure is not necessary, or where possible, rotate emotionally demanding tasks or schedules.
- Encourage breaks between and during emotionally demanding work and normalise opportunities for informal debriefing support.
- Allow employees greater control over their jobs, where possible, such as greater flexibility over how and when works tasks are completed.
- Ensure employees are adequately trained by completing relevant ACTHRIMS learning modules, and attending inhouse Trauma Informed and de-escalation sessions.
- Schedule regular discussions or check-in procedures for supporting emotionally demanding, for example, case consults, team meetings, supervision.
- Foster a culture that encourages regular discussion of the emotional demands of work and ways of coping.
- Consider buddy systems, community of practice or peer support programs so employees can leverage support from each other.
- Encourage employees to take annual leave when due, to provide breaks from work.
- In conjunction with People and Culture, ensure position descriptions are up to date and capture the emotional demands of a role and that applicants are informed of these during the recruitment process.
- Encourage the use of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and QPS Debriefing Service as proactive wellbeing support to develop strategies for dealing with emotionally demanding work, or if an employee has been impacted by their work.
- Maintain professional boundaries in line with ACT public sector Code of Conduct.

Cognitive demands

These strategies can support work that requires lengthy periods of concentration, making complex decisions, or requires continued attention of monitoring for things going wrong:

- Rotate tasks and schedules so employees are not always assigned jobs that require a high level of decision-making or long periods of concentration.
- Allow employees additional time to perform tasks and allow adequate time for breaks.
- Give employees some control over the way they do their work, including work pace and order of tasks.

- Have systems in place to support employees when they must make difficult decisions or when challenging situations might arise following decisions they have made.
- Provide additional practical assistance, for example, a second person to assist and ensuring adequate access to helpful resources, or a mentor.
- Provide additional training, coaching or feedback where needed.

Work environment and physical demands

These strategies can support work that is completed in environments that may be noisy, crowded or isolated, hot or cold, or where duress alarms are available:

- Make the physical environment as comfortable as possible and designed specifically for employees' tasks; for example, where needed, make changes to the workstation, tools or equipment or the way a job is done.
- Have appropriate controls in place in to support employees with managing difficult situations, e.g., duress alarms and/or emergency procedures, client safety framework.