

Bullying and harassment in the workplace

Every Alberta worker is entitled to a harassment-free workplace. If you are experiencing bullying or harassment at work, we want to help support you. It is important for you to understand what could constitute workplace bullying or harassment and how to access compensation support.

How is workplace bullying and harassment defined?

Workplace harassment is defined as a single or repeated incident of objectionable or unwelcome conduct, comment, bullying or action intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or group. It's a serious issue and creates an unhealthy work environment resulting in psychological harm to workers.

*"Workplace bullying is a repeated pattern of negative behaviour aimed at a specific person or group...Although it can include physical abuse or the threat of abuse, workplace bullying usually causes psychological rather than physical harm. Workplace bullying can involve sexual harassment and discrimination. Because workplace bullying is often psychological, it can be hard to recognize. The most harmful forms of bullying are usually subtle rather than direct, and verbal rather than physical."**

*<https://alis.alberta.ca/succeed-at-work/manage-challenges/bullies-at-work-what-to-know-and-what-you-can-do/>

A worker is bullied and harassed when someone takes an action that he or she knew or reasonably ought to have known would cause that worker to be humiliated or intimidated. When an employer or supervisor takes reasonable action to manage and direct workers, it is not bullying and harassment.

Examples of behaviour that might constitute bullying and harassment include verbal aggression or insults, calling someone derogatory names, harmful hazing or initiation practices, vandalizing personal belongings, and spreading malicious rumours.

When can WCB provide support and compensation coverage in these cases?

When you're hurt on the job, WCB-Alberta is there to help you get back to work and feeling like yourself again.

In the case of workplace bullying and harassment, WCB can provide compensation coverage when the bullying or harassment has led to the victim developing a diagnosable injury or illness. Some related diagnoses include depression, anxiety, adjustment disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Mental stress is a commonly used term that describes a person's physical and psychological response to events or changes occurring in his or her life. These events are known as stressors. Some level of stress is a normal part of life. However, when a person's ability to cope with the stressors is overwhelmed, distress (a negative form of mental stress), can develop and result in diagnosable psychological or psychiatric injuries.

If your experience at work has resulted in an injury, WCB can provide compensation coverage and arrange for treatment.

Are there situations that would not be considered bullying/harassment?

Yes. In every workplace, conflict can arise between you and co-workers that may feel unpleasant, but does not escalate to the point bullying or harassment. Differences of opinion or minor disagreements between coworkers are not generally considered to be workplace harassment.

Bullying and harassment may be present when work-related interpersonal conflicts are beyond the normal scope of maintaining employment from a reasonable person's perspective. For example, clear and confirmable harassing behaviour at the workplace where a worker has been subjected to threats of harm, violations of personal privacy, public shaming or baseless threats to his or her employment status.

Reasonable actions taken by your employer relating to management of work and employees are considered a normal part of employment, and would not constitute bullying or harassment. This might include:

- Hiring employees and terminating employment.
- Performance evaluations and/or performance corrective actions.

- Staff assignments, transfers, or restructuring.
- Promotions, demotions, and lay-offs.
- Periodic workload fluctuations and/or assignment changes.
- Timeline pressures.
- General work environment, including health and safety concerns, and union issues.

For more information about psychological injuries, refer to the [worker fact sheet](#).

Interpersonal events of mutual consent between a worker and coworkers or management, are not considered traumatic events unless they result in behaviours that are considered unwanted, aggressive, threatening, or discriminatory.

If you think you may be experiencing bullying or harassment in your workplace and want to talk to someone, please call our main number at 1-866-922-9221. Our call centre agents will put you in touch with a specialized adjudicator who can help.

How does WCB confirm an incident(s) of bullying and harassment?

When adjudicating a claim for bullying and harassment, we require corroborating information to reach a fair and balanced coverage decision. Adjudicators will investigate the details of the allegation by examining:

- Available documentation (emails, texts, etc.)
- Witness interviews and statements
- Employer investigation results
- The completion of an investigation by WCB

Compensation coverage

If you have been diagnosed with a psychological condition that was caused by workplace bullying or harassment as defined above, we encourage you to submit a claim for compensation.

As with any work injury, your claim will be reviewed by an adjudicator who will help you understand your eligibility for benefits and treatment, or suggest other sources of support if we are not able to accept your claim.

