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Workplace bullying rife: employers need to take responsibility

The ACTU has called for proposed Codes of Practice on workplace bullying to be strengthened and combined with regulation which makes it a responsibility of employers to provide a bullying-free workplace.

ACTU president Ged Kearney said that workplace bullying caused long-term mental and emotional damage to victims and cost the economy upwards of \$6 billion each year.

In a submission to Safe Work Australia on its draft Code of Practice for workplace bullying, the ACTU said it supported the establishment of a Code of Practice, but that regulation was also required to tackle bullying.

“Workplace bullying damages lives, and it should be treated in the same way as other workplace hazards,” Ms Kearney said.

“Employers are required by law to provide a safe workplace, and this should include acting to prevent bullying. A strong workplace culture is the best way to stop bullying, but this can only occur if employers’ responsibilities are clearly outlined in regulation.

“It is not good enough to treat bullying as isolated incidents or ‘personality clashes, employers must recognise that bullying is often a product of the culture they create in the workplace.

“Workplace bullying can come in many forms, including social media, emails, initiation rites and practical jokes.

“Employers must take responsibility for identifying risks and acting on complaints of bullying.

“If workers feel they can make a complaint as soon as bullying behaviour starts, then we can reduce the damage caused by bullying.

“Everyone is entitled to respect at work. The effects of bullying are serious - many people who are bullied report depression or other mental health issues and affect them beyond work.

“Bullying needs to be explicitly defined in workplace health and safety laws and the penalties of serious incidents of workplace bullying should match those for other major breaches of health and safety.”

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