

St Vincent's Health Australia
SVHA Group Policy

Portfolio: People & Culture

Policy Title:

Family and Domestic Violence Workforce Support Policy

Policy Statement:

St Vincent's Health Australia is committed to the safety and well-being of all our employees. We know the devastating impacts that family and domestic violence has for an individual and those they live with and we acknowledge that this is the reality for some of our own people as they come to work. The impacts are not limited to physical harm alone. The harm resulting from domestic violence is often long-lasting and can effect a person's emotional well-being and create significant levels of stress and anxiety. As an organisation inspired by the healing mission of Jesus, SVHA wishes to stand with and support our staff who experience these and other effects of domestic violence. Along with our support to individual staff members, SVHA is also committed to reduce the occurrence of family and domestic violence. Our commitment is a comprehensive one of support and raising awareness to domestic violence.

Applicable to:

This policy applies to all employees of SVHA (permanent, fixed term, casuals).

Definitions

What is family and domestic violence?

Most definitions of family and domestic violence commonly refer to both the characteristics of and behaviours associated with violence and abuse as well as the impact on family members. SVHA have chosen to use the definition outlined in the National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010-2022 (*Department of Social Services*).

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and their children, and can be both criminal and non-criminal.

Domestic and family violence may take a range of forms. This may include:

- Verbal, sexual or psychological abuse;
- Physical abuse – e.g direct assaults of the body, destruction of property, abuse of pets in front of family members, assault of children, locking the victim out of the house, using weapons, diving dangerously and sleep deprivation;

- Emotional abuse—e.g. blaming the person for all problems in the relationship, undermining the person’s self-esteem and self-worth;
- Social abuse— e.g. systematic isolation from family and friends, preventing the person from going out to meet others;
- Financial abuse—e.g. controlling all money, forbidding access to bank accounts;
- Spiritual abuse— e.g. denial and/or misuse of religious beliefs or practices to force victims into subordinate roles.

If you are experiencing Family or Domestic Violence and need urgent advice, call 1800 RESPECT - 1800 737 732 which is a 24 hour, National Sexual Assault, Family & Domestic Violence Counselling Line for any Australian who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault (or) Safe Steps on 1800 105 188 which is a 24 hour service providing a range of professional support services for women and children experiencing violence.

Policy Procedures and Outcomes:

1. How can SVHA assist you?

If you are experiencing the effects of family and domestic violence you may receive up to 10 days paid leave per calendar year to attend medical appointments, counselling, legal proceedings, arrange to relocate and/or any other activities related to the effects of family and domestic violence. The amount of leave provided on any one occasion will be determined through consultation between you and your manager. The HR team may also provide guidance if required.

Family and domestic violence leave can be taken as a part day absence. This leave does not accrue from year to year and will not be paid out if unused. If you require greater than 10 days leave in a calendar year, further paid leave may be provided at SVHA discretion. You may also access, where appropriate, other forms of paid or unpaid leave with the approval of your manager.

If you are supporting an immediate family member or a member of your household experiencing the effects of family and domestic violence you may apply for carer’s leave. Your manager or the HR team can assist you with this.

Human Resources and Mission staff are available for a confidential discussion.

2. Safety

SVHA is committed to providing a flexible, safe and rewarding workplace for all employees. A safe workplace is especially important for employees who may be experiencing family and domestic violence. All managers have responsibility for upholding this commitment and can assist in ensuring that staff are treated respectfully at work and afforded opportunities for support and assistance.

In consulting with the employee concerned, the relevant Manager is to give consideration to developing strategies to ensure the safety of the employee whilst at work including but not limited to:

- Programming mobile phones with emergency and contact numbers
- Screening incoming calls to the employee
- Changing work/location (on a temporary basis) to improve safety.

3. Family and Domestic Violence and the Workplace

Family and domestic violence has a range of impacts on workplaces, most commonly:

- Affected employees may be prevented from or delayed in getting to work or need to leave work at short notice
- They may receive threatening or abusive calls, texts or emails at work
- Managers and supervisors may receive distorted information that may affect the



reputation of the employee

- They may need to take time off work to attend court hearings, counselling or to access family support services to protect themselves and their children
- Sometimes affected employees may have trouble managing their workload and may be distracted, anxious or distressed.

Other staff in the workplace may also be impacted by working with an affected employee; this may be by witnessing threats and /or violence and abuse towards the employee in the workplace.

4. Disclosure

Victims of family and domestic violence may disclose to a colleague or manager/supervisor or the effects of the violence may become obvious. Sensitivity is to be used where women have experienced an assault (either physical or verbal).

5. Aboriginal Family Violence

The term Aboriginal Family Violence is accepted amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a more appropriate term to describe violence perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, families and communities. The term *Aboriginal Family Violence* includes violence perpetrated within intimate partner relationships, however it is also encompasses other forms of violence perpetrated against individuals, families and communities. While the term domestic violence is used throughout this policy, it is important to recognise for Aboriginal employees the term *family violence* may be more appropriate.

6. Am I eligible?

All SVHA employees except casual employees are eligible to receive paid leave. Casuals may access unpaid leave.

7. What do I get paid?

All SVHA employees except casual employees will receive their normal pay while on leave due to family and domestic violence.

8. Applying for leave due to family and domestic violence

If you want to apply for leave you must:

- seek your manager's approval, and
- if requested by your manager, provide supporting evidence for this leave.

9. Confidentiality, adverse action and anti-discrimination

Information concerning matters of family and domestic violence will be kept confidential by SVHA and would only be divulged where required by law or where it is imperative to maintain the safety of you and/or co-workers. You will not suffer adverse consequences on the basis of your disclosure, experience or perceived experience of domestic and family violence.

10. What other support is available?

Access to the SVHA [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP). This program includes free and confidential counselling services that can be used by employees, their partners and immediate family members. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by phoning 1800 818 728.

- Speak confidentially to Human Resources or Mission staff for guidance.
- Speak to your manager about what reasonable measures can be taken to prioritise your safety in the workplace (such as a change to email address or phone number).
- Request flexible work arrangements. Such as, a temporary change to a work location, change in work pattern or part time work arrangements.

11. Where can I go for more information or support?

To get more information or support, you may call:

- 1800 RESPECT - 1800 737 732. This is a 24 hour, National Sexual Assault, Family & Domestic Violence Counselling Line for any Australian who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault.
- Safe Steps- 1800 105 188. This is a 24 hour, Family Violence Response Centre and provides a range of professional support services for women and children experiencing violence and abuse from a partner or ex-partner, another family member or someone close to them.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I apply for leave?

You can apply for this leave via your direct manager.

2. Who is considered a family member or current or former intimate partner?

A family member may include your spouse, de facto partner, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, aunty, uncle or sibling or your spouse or de facto partner's immediate family. A spouse or de facto partner includes a former spouse or de facto partner. A child includes an adopted child, stepchild, ex-nuptial child or adult child.

An intimate partner is any person who is, or was formerly, in an intimate relationship with another person.

3. Will I be required to provide satisfactory evidence?

In some cases your manager may request that you provide satisfactory evidence to support the need for leave.

4. If an employee discloses to their manager, peer, HR or Mission that they are experiencing family and domestic violence what obligations would that person have to report this internally (e.g. to HR or their manager) or externally (e.g. to the police)?

If someone tells you that they are experiencing family and domestic violence you should encourage them to seek the intervention of the police, speak to their manager about accessing leave, and direct them to utilise the resources that are referenced in the Family & Domestic Violence Policy (including the SVHA [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP)). You should only disclose this information to another party if you have the employee's consent first. The main circumstance where you would have a duty to disclose this information (even without the employee's consent) is where this violence occurs or is threatened to occur in the workplace and there is an immediate risk to the employee or their peers' health and safety. At any time if a manager is unsure of what to do with information that has been disclosed to them by an employee the manager can seek advice from the HR team on a strictly confidential and anonymous basis.

5. What should I do if I think one of my staff or a colleague is experiencing domestic violence?

- Talk to her about what you see and assure her that you are concerned. Tell her you believe that it is not her fault and that help is available.
- If she is reluctant to tell you about the abuse right away, you could gently say, "I have noticed you seem upset and I am concerned about you and your safety. Please know that when you are ready, I'm here for you." Be patient; she may open up to you in time.
- Listen in a non-judgemental way to what she says, being careful to show concern and support and not suggest an action she could take.
- Encourage her to seek expert help and provide details of the SVHA Employee Assistance Program on 1800 818 728 or the National Sexual Assault, Family & Domestic Violence Counselling Line on 1800 737 732.

Legal and Compliance Considerations:

- Domestic & Family Violence Protection Act 2012

Relevant References:

- Group/ Divisional/ Facility Delegations Manual

Review Officer:

Group General Manager People & Culture

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1 September 2015

Last Review Date:

N/A

Next Review Date:

1 September 2017

Approval:

Toby Hall, SVHA Chief Executive Officer



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Signature: