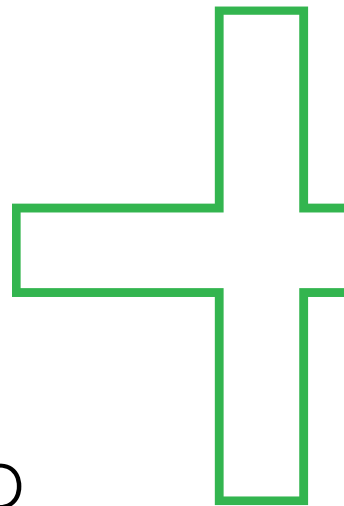




ACT PUBLIC SERVICE AND PUBLIC SECTOR STRATEGY

2023-2025

October 2023





BACKGROUND

The functions of WorkSafe ACT are set out in the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#) (WHS Act), and include:

- providing advice and information on WHS to duty-holders and the ACT community
- promoting and supporting education and training on matters relating to WHS, and
- fostering a cooperative and consultative relationship between duty-holders and the persons to whom they owe duties and their representatives in relation to WHS matters.

WorkSafe ACT is committed to ensuring safe workplaces for all workers in the ACT, including the ACT Public Service (ACTPS) and Public Sector.

WorkSafe ACT value statement

VISION  Healthy, safe and productive working lives	MISSION  To protect workers and ensure compliance with workplace obligations
STRATEGIES  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fair and firm enforcement against non-compliance• Minimising physical and psychological harm and improving WHS culture and practice• Engaging with stakeholders to better respond to current and emerging WHS issues• Creating an exemplary regulator	
VALUES  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrity• Professionalism• Innovation• Fairness• Collaboration	OUTCOME  SAFE + HEALTHY WORKPLACES

Strategic alignment

WorkSafe ACT's *ACT Public Service and Public Sector Strategy 2023-25* (the Strategy) has been developed in alignment with WorkSafe ACT's governance structure and encompasses the priorities within the:

- [Strategic Plan 2020-2024](#)
- [Statement of Operational Intent](#), and
- [Compliance and Enforcement Policy 2020-2024](#).



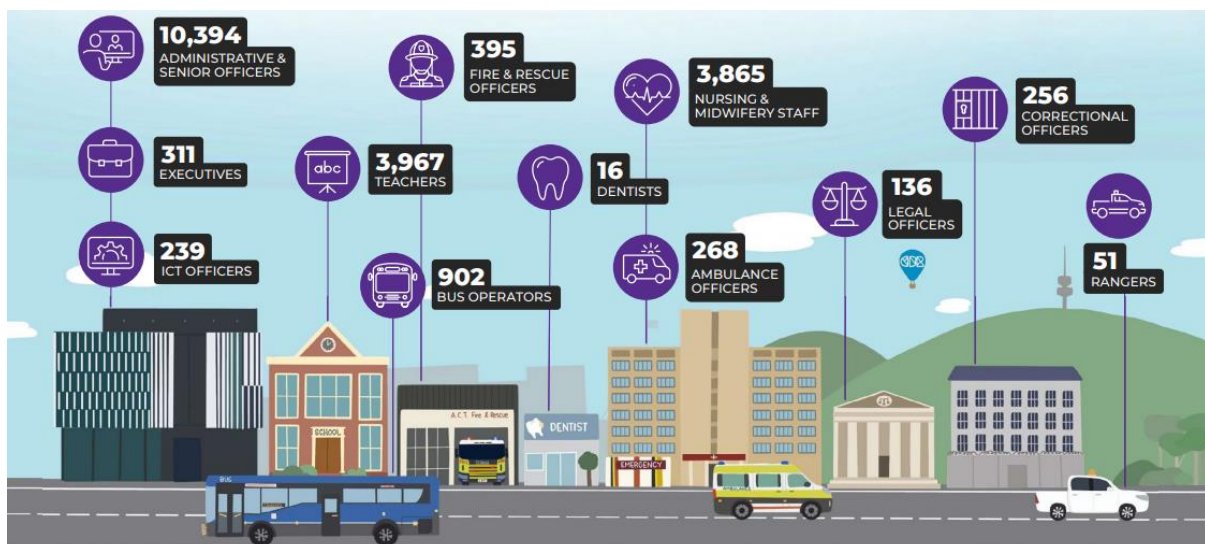
In addition, WorkSafe ACT will leverage off a number of existing strategy's relevant to both the ACTPS, public sector and the broader ACT workforce including:

- [Strategy to Prevent Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders 2022-2024](#)
- [Managing Work-Related Psychosocial Strategy 2021-2023](#)
 - Managing Work-Related Violence and Aggression Plan 2021-23
 - Managing Work-Related Sexual Harassment Plan 2021-23
- [Young Workers Strategy 2021-2023.](#)

The Strategy is informed by WorkSafe ACT's data and business intelligence and the four high-level strategies that underpin its activities, as set out in the *Strategic Plan 2020-2024*.

The ACT Public Service and Public Sector

The ACTPS is the largest and most diverse business WorkSafe ACT regulates with over 27,000 workers representing 12% of ACT's total workforce. The ACTPS has broad responsibilities including the management of parks, greenfield and brownfield construction developments, public transport, fire and ambulance services, municipal services, health, education and justice systems, including corrections, and community support services (see the [State of the Service 2021-22 Annual Report](#)).



There are currently eight directorates, each specialising in different functions of the ACT Government. The directorates are:

- ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD)
- Canberra Health Services (CHS)
- Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD)
- Community Services Directorate (CSD)
- Education Directorate (EDU)
- Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD)
- Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS), and
- Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate (TCCS).

The ACTPS also includes Major Projects Canberra, an administrative unit established on 1 July 2019.



A further 16 public sector bodies employ approximately 3,000 staff under the *Public Sector Management Act 1994*. The public sector bodies are:

- ACT Auditor-General
- ACT Electoral Commission
- ACT Integrity Commission
- ACT Teacher Quality Institute
- Calvary Health Care ACT (Public)
- Canberra Institute of Technology
- City Renewal Authority
- Cultural Facilities Corporation
- Director of Public Prosecutions
- Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission
- Long Service Leave Authority
- Office of the Legislative Assembly
- Office of the WHS Commissioner
- Principal Registrar, Courts and Tribunal
- Solicitor-General and Government Solicitor's Office, and
- Suburban Land Agency.

In 2021-22, approximately 90% of the ACT public sector was employed within the ACTPS directorates, with the remaining 10% in the independent public sector bodies.

With such a diverse workforce comes a broad range of physical and psychosocial risks including but not limited to slips, trips and falls, being hit by moving objects, body stressing, bullying, work-related violence, mental stress and fatigue.

What the data tells us

We have had regard to both compliance and enforcement (WHS) and workers' compensation data to inform the development of the Strategy.

WorkSafe ACT's compliance and enforcement activities

In 2021-22, WorkSafe ACT conducted 68 workplace visits across the ACTPS and public sector. Most of these workplace visits were reactive visits in response to complaints (56%) or *notifiable incidents* (15%) reported to WorkSafe ACT.

WorkSafe ACT issued a combined 50 notices across 11 ACTPS and public sector entities in 2021-22. Of these notices, 42 were improvement notices and eight were prohibition notices. CHS received the most notices with 14, followed by TCCS with 12.

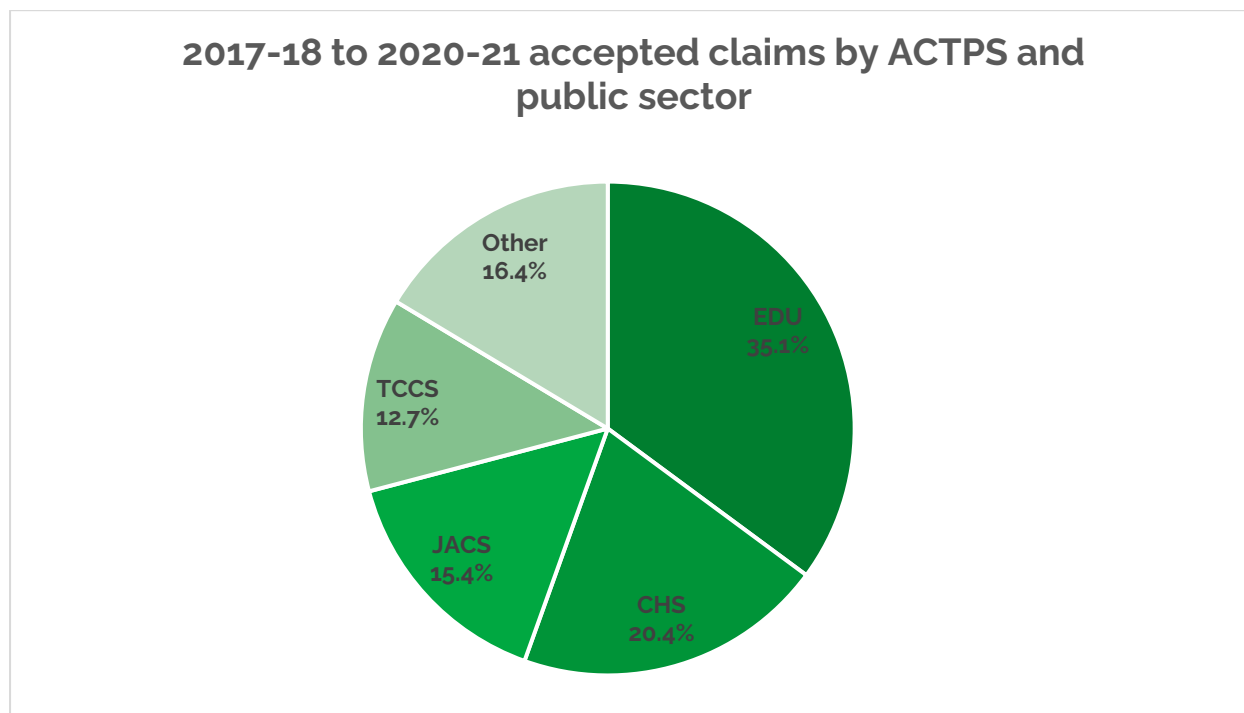
Of the 50 notices, 26 were issued for breaches of s19 – Primary duty of care – of the WHS Act 2011. Breaches of s19 included failures to provide and maintain safe working environments and safe systems of work and failures to provide adequate training or consultation – including with respect to risks posed by occupational violence, sexual harassment, and bullying. The other 24 notices were for 17 different offences, including three breaches of the WHS Regulation 2011 s41 – Duty to provide and maintain adequate and accessible facilities.



Workers' Compensation Data

Between 2017-18 and 2020-21 there were 1,828 accepted ACTPS and public sector workers' compensation claims. Those with the most accepted claims were:

- EDU
- CHS
- JACS, and
- TCCS.



In 2020-21 these four directorates were among the five largest ACTPS and public sector employers; 28% of ACTPS and public sector employees worked in EDU, 27% in CHS, 8% in JACS, and 8% in TCCS.¹ CMTEDD – which was the third largest ACTPS and public sector employer in 2020-21, accounting for 9% of workers – was responsible for only 4% of accepted workers' compensation claims between 2017-18 and 2020-21.

Of the 1,828 accepted claims, 61% were by women and 39% by men. In 2020-21, the ACTPS and public sector was 65% female and 35% male. The largest number of accepted claims (29% of all accepted claims) were made by workers aged 45-54, followed by those aged 34-45 (23%).

The occupations with the highest number of accepted claims were:

- school teachers (21%)
- midwifery and nursing professionals (11%)
- education aides (9%), and
- health and welfare support workers (9%).

¹ ACT public sector figures are taken from the [State of the Service 2020-21 Annual Report](#). This report includes information about the ACTPS and those ACT public sector bodies that have head of service management powers under the *Public Sector Management Act 1994*.



Unfortunately, data for the percentage of ACT public sector workers by occupation is not available. However, such data is available specifically for the ACTPS workforce, which comprised 90% of the public sector workforce in 2020-21. In 2020-21 school teachers were 15% of the ACTPS workforce and midwives and nurses were 14%.²

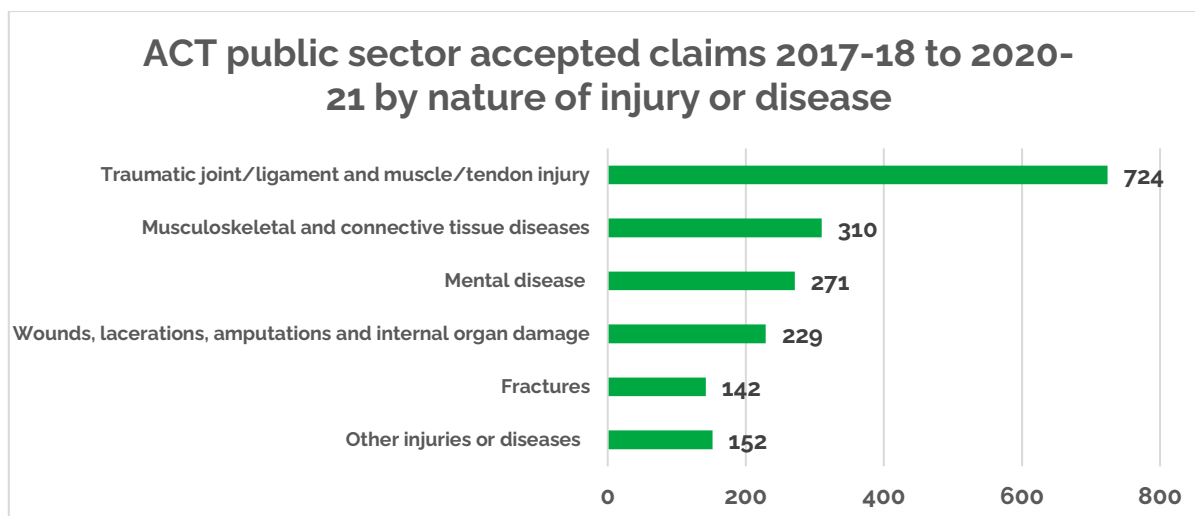
Certain professions are significantly overrepresented in the workers' compensation claims data relative to their representation in the ACTPS workforce. For instance, correctional officers were just 1% of the ACTPS workforce in 2020-21 but accounted for 3% of workers' compensation claims between 2017-18 and 2020-21. Similarly, fire fighters (along with rescue officers) comprised 1% of the ACTPS workforce but were responsible for 4% of accepted claims.

Nature of injury or disease

The most common injuries or diseases resulting in accepted claims were:

- traumatic joint/ligament and muscle/tendon injury
- musculoskeletal and connective tissue diseases
- mental diseases, and
- wounds, lacerations, amputations and internal organ damage.

Traumatic joint/ligament and muscle/tendon injury and musculoskeletal and connective diseases – which together comprise the category musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) – accounted for 56.6% of total accepted claims during the period.



² Midwives and nurses likely represent a significantly larger percentage of the entire ACT public sector workforce, given that the ACTPS figures don't include those midwives and nurses employed by Calvary Health Care ACT.



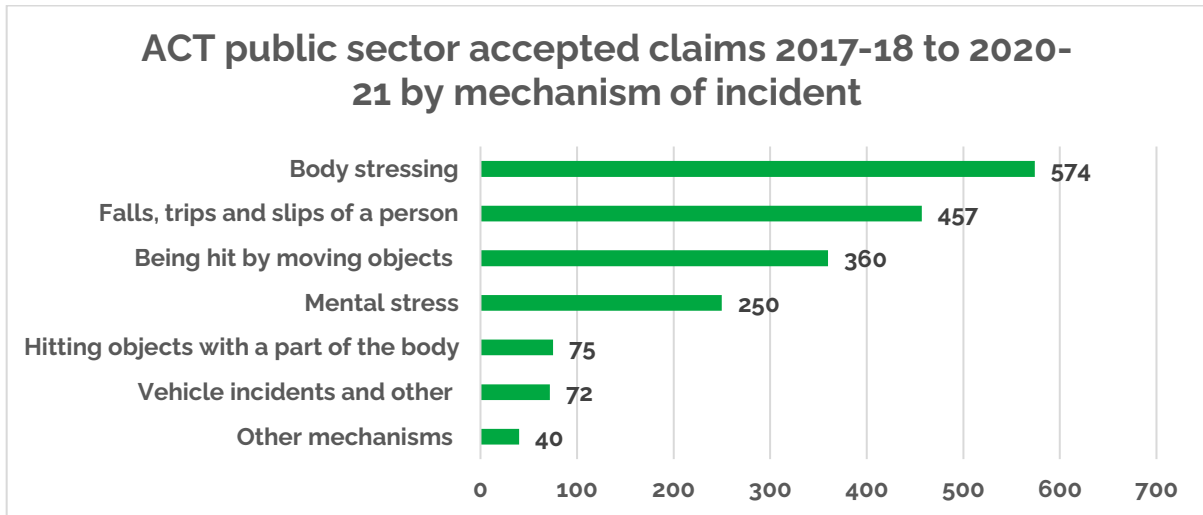
Nature of injury or disease	Number of accepted claims			Percentage of accepted claims		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Traumatic joint/ligament and muscle/tendon injury	407	317	724	37%	44%	40%
Musculoskeletal and connective tissue diseases	191	119	310	17%	16%	17.0%
Mental disease	186	85	271	17%	12%	15%
Wounds, lacerations, amputations and internal	147	82	229	13%	12%	13%
Fractures	95	47	142	9%	7%	8%
Other injuries or diseases	87	65	152	8%	9%	8%
Total	1,113	715	1,828	100%	100%	100%

* Percentages are rounded to the nearest decimal place and may not sum to total.

Mechanism of incident

Accepted claims were most commonly due to:

- body stressing
- falls trips and slips of a person
- being hit by moving objects, and
- mental stress.





Mechanism of incident	Number of accepted claims			Percentage of accepted claims		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Body stressing	304	270	574	27%	38%	31%
Falls, trips and slips of a person	309	148	457	28%	21%	25%
Being hit by moving objects	241	119	360	22%	17%	20%
Mental stress	173	77	250	16%	11%	14%
Hitting objects with a part of the body	29	46	75	3%	6%	4%
Vehicle incidents and other	36	36	72	3%	5%	4%
Other mechanisms	21	19	40	2%	3%	2%
Total	1,113	715	1,828	100%	100%	100%

* Percentages are rounded to the nearest decimal place and may not sum to total.

Psychosocial Hazards

Bullying and harassment has been identified through a range of means as a priority area of focus. The [State of the Service 2021-22 Annual Report](#) identified over 500 reports of bullying and harassment in the ACTPS in 2021-22.

Workers' compensation data indicates that claims due to mental stress comprised 14% of all ACTPS and public sector claims between 2017-18 and 2020-21. Of these mental stress claims, 40% were due to work-related harassment or bullying and 24% were the result of exposure to occupational violence.

What WorkSafe ACT's engagement with the ACTPS and public sector tells us

Prior to 2021-22 WorkSafe ACT had limited engagement with the ACTPS and public sector in terms of both proactive and reactive workplace visits. As indicated by the compliance and enforcement activity data above, the reactive visits were largely in response to complaints made to WorkSafe ACT (56%).

Through WorkSafe ACT's increased presence in ACTPS and public sector workplaces it is evident there is a varied approach in how ACTPS/public sector persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) and private sector PCBUs engage with WorkSafe ACT.

This difference is particularly stark in instances where a notice is issued on a PCBU. Private sector PCBUs are far more likely to engage with WorkSafe ACT inspectors to resolve an identified safety concern. Although not always the case, ACTPS and public sector PCBUs do not take the direct approach and engage with WorkSafe ACT inspectors to resolve a matter. A lack of direct engagement can result in a safety matter taking longer to resolve than necessary.

What this variance in approach indicates is that WorkSafe ACT and ACTPS/public sector need to develop a sound and respectful working relationship wherein the ACTPS/public sector is comfortable in engaging directly with WorkSafe ACT.



This Strategy has been developed to facilitate building this relationship by adopting a mutual obligation approach.

PURPOSE

This Strategy is the overarching document that captures WorkSafe ACT's approach to improving safety behaviours and compliance within the ACTPS and public sector. The Strategy will guide the activities of WorkSafe ACT to enforce, engage and educate WHS in the ACTPS over the next two years.

Building on the work of 2021-22, this strategy has been developed to encourage and facilitate positive engagement between the ACTPS/public sector and WorkSafe ACT with a focus on protecting the health and safety of public sector workers and improving compliance across the ACTPS and public sector.

OBJECTIVES

The Strategy's objectives are to:

- increase the knowledge within the ACTPS/public sector of WHS and broaden its understanding of WorkSafe ACT's role
- embed good WHS practice in all work across all ACTPS and public sector workplaces
- secure ACTPS and public sector stakeholder commitment to improve compliance rates, and
- enforce compliance.

If successful in meeting these objectives, the Strategy will enhance safety outcomes for ACTPS and public sector workers by creating an environment where:

- PCBUs are aware of their WHS duties
- PCBUs will actively engage with WorkSafe ACT with questions relating to notices and matters of non-compliance, and
- WorkSafe ACT will have relevant resources including fact sheets and guidance material available on its webpage.



Supporting the Objectives

Table 1 outlines the rationale for each objective and possible supporting activities. The activities for each objective are flexible and targeted, based on ACT specific data and experience.

Table 1: Rationale and possible activities to support key objectives

	Objective	Rationale	Possible activities
1.	Increase the knowledge within the ACTPS/public sector of WHS and broaden its understanding of WorkSafe ACT's role.	In partnership with Work Safety Group (CMTEDD), and leveraging on its existing WHS stakeholder groups, provide the ACTPS and public sector with insight into WorkSafe ACT's procedures and priorities. This will be undertaken with a view to enhancing the understanding of WorkSafe ACT's expectations in satisfying WHS duties and complying with notices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With Work Safety Group's support WorkSafe ACT to conduct workshops, or question and answer sessions, with ACTPS and public sector WHS practitioners on topics such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ risk assessments ○ notifiable incidents, and ○ how to deal with notices.
2.	Embed good WHS practice in all work across all ACTPS/public sector workplaces.	Encourage the ACTPS and public sector to embed WHS and safe systems into work design that identifies and takes into consideration the local risk profile.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the advantages of safe work design. • Distribute WorkSafe ACT's Psychosocial Maturity Indicator Survey and subsequent results to provide the ACTPS/public sector with key insights on how to improve psychosocial risk management. • Shift compliance focus to include review of higher-level systems when WHS breaches are observed. • Develop and publish fact sheets and guidance material specific to the ACTPS and public sector.



	Objective	Rationale	Possible activities
3.	Secure ACTPS/public sector stakeholder commitment to improve compliance rates.	In partnership with Work Safety Group, collaboration with the ACTPS and public sector is key to influence safety behaviours and will help build co-operation, trust and the expectation of improved WHS compliance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on established networks to form safety partnerships in the ACTPS and public sector. • Engage with ACTPS to deliver WHS messages and campaign outcomes. • Identify opportunities for the WHS Commissioner to engage with ACTPS and public sector senior executives to discuss safety and reinforce the importance of safe workplaces.
4.	Enforce compliance.	The ACT community has the right to expect that WHS breaches will be consistently enforced in line with WorkSafe ACT's <i>Compliance and Enforcement Policy 2020-2024</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive compliance and enforcement campaigns. • Full use of compliance tools. • Improve practices by working collaboratively within the ACTPS and Public Sector.³ Investigate commencing prosecutions for repeat offenders at a systems level.

PRIORITY HAZARDS AND WORKGROUPS

Priority hazards and workgroups will be the focus for the Strategy. These were identified through analysis of Safe Work Australia reports, ACTPS/public sector workers' compensation claims data, Salesforce (WorkSafe ACT's case management system), investigations, and stakeholder feedback.

Hazards

The Strategy will focus on the most common hazards leading to workers' compensation claims. In the ACTPS and public sector these are:

³ For example, when/if breaches occur issue notices to Director General/CEO to trigger a coordinated and timely response.



WORKSAFEACT



Workgroups

The Strategy will focus on high-risk workgroups. These workgroups have been identified through analysis of workers' compensation data and WorkSafe's inspection activities. They include:



Collaborating to achieve safe and healthy workplaces

In the ACTPS, the directorate responsible for oversight of whole of government WHS policies is CMTEDD. Within CMTEDD, the Work Safety Group is responsible for the whole of government strategic framework, program and policy development required to deliver these functions.

Crucial to the success of the Strategy is the collaborative partnership between WorkSafe ACT and the Work Safety Group to ensure a cohesive alignment between policy, legislation and regulatory compliance and enforcement.



WORKSAFE ACT SERVICE CHARTER

[WorkSafe ACT's Service Charter](#) provides details of the behaviours and actions the ACT community can expect from engagement with WorkSafe ACT, as well as the avenues available if someone is unhappy with an interaction with a WorkSafe ACT officer.

The Charter also provides details of the behaviours and actions expected of those who engage with WorkSafe ACT.



EVALUATION

WorkSafe ACT is committed to evaluating and reporting on its activities to support its strategic initiatives. This will be achieved through yearly reviews of implementation and a final evaluation report for the life of the Strategy.

The progress of the Strategy will be reported in WorkSafe ACT's Annual Reports published on the website: <https://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/>