

Moving and supporting people with a disability

What is the problem?

The task of moving and supporting people with a disability has been associated with musculoskeletal injuries within the disability services industry.

What are the risks?

Workers may be at risk of injuries from strains to the back, neck and shoulders when bending, twisting, lifting, pushing, pulling and exerting high or unexpected forces.

The common sources of risk include:

Task

- Exerting high forces to lift, transfer or move people where no equipment or aids are available.
- Moving unexpectedly or with abrupt forceful motions such as when preventing people from falling.
- Working in an awkward position for sustained periods (eg assisting with meals or dressing/undressing).
- Managing unpredictable client movements or behaviours such as seizures, expressions of strong emotion or self-harm.

Equipment

- Unsuitable equipment or aids.
- Faulty equipment or aids.
- No equipment or aids.

Environment

- Insufficient space for workers to use equipment.
- Equipment or aids stored in inaccessible locations.
- Inappropriate working heights.
- Thick carpets or soft underlay on floor.
- Different floor levels.
- Uneven surfaces.

These issues should be considered during the initial assessment of the person's needs and if they pose a risk, must be controlled prior to the provision of service.

What are solutions to the problem?

The risk of injury to workers can be eliminated or reduced by the following safety measures:

Equipment/aid provision and use

- When supporting a person who requires minimal physical support, equipment to reduce the risk of injury to workers may include:
 - hand/grab rails
 - electric stand chair
 - modified/specific chair
 - leg lifter
 - bed stick
 - dining chair with lockable wheels
 - walking aids such as a frame or stick.
- When supporting a person who is able to partially assist, additional equipment to reduce the risk of injury to workers may include:
 - electric hi-lo bed
 - standing hoist to lift person into a supported standing position, to transfer from one location to another, or when assistance is required
 - mobile sling hoist to lift and transfer people short distances
 - slide sheet
 - slide board
 - hi-lo change table
 - height-adjustable ergonomic chair for workers
 - sock/stocking applicator
- When a person requires full support, additional equipment to reduce the risk of injury to workers may include:
 - overhead tracking hoist to move person from the floor, chair or bed
 - wheelchair with electric motor.
- Ensure transfer equipment and aids are:
 - suitable for the task
 - easy to use and manoeuvre
 - maintained in good working order.

A Health and Safety Solution

Environment

- Reduce clutter.
- Provide adequate working space.
- Use furniture and equipment that is light, compact and easy to move where necessary.
- Assess floor surfaces for suitability for moving any wheeled equipment and make appropriate modifications if required (vinyl or low pile carpet).
- Store equipment in a convenient location.
- Adjust transfer surfaces to support movement at approximately the same level (eg from bed to wheelchair).

Task

- Allocate two workers for transfers for a person who requires full or partial assistance.
- Develop and implement a system so the transfer

of a person will not proceed until a second worker is available.

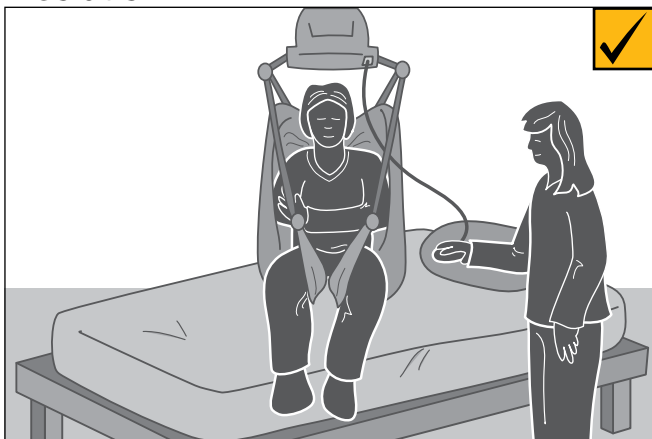
- Develop and implement a system to regularly seek information from the worker to check if the work environment, tasks or person's needs have changed or need to change.
- Regularly review the person's mobility and behavioural requirements with worker and person to identify potential changes to client care, update relevant documentation and occupational health and safety controls.
- If changes have been made or need to be made, employers should complete a re-assessment of the worker's tasks and environment. Fix any safety issues as soon as possible so the worker's and person's needs are safely met.
- Train workers in using equipment, aids and specific task or work instructions. Update the training regularly.

The problem



Exerting high forces to lift, transfer or move people where no equipment or aids are available.

A solution



Mobile electric hoists may be used for tasks such as lifting people from bed to chair, chair to toilet, bed to trolley and up from the floor.

Further Information

WorkSafe Advisory Service

Toll-free 1800 136 089
Email info@worksafe.vic.gov.au
worksafe.vic.gov.au

Related WorkSafe Health and Safety Solutions

- *Supporting people with personal hygiene care*
- *Assisting people in wheelchairs*
- *Handling wheelchairs in and out of vehicles*
- *Occupational violence*
- *Moving/lifting objects*
- *Vacuuming*
- *Mopping*
- *Cleaning bathrooms*
- *Making beds*
- *Work related driving: Transporting people and moving equipment*

Related WorkSafe publications

- *Manual Handling Code of Practice, 2000*
- *Transferring people safely*

Other related publications

- *Victorian home care industry occupational health and safety guide, 2005*
- *Department of Human Services, Accommodation standards and design guidelines – Shared supported accommodation, 2004*

Available from
worksafe.vic.gov.au and health.vic.gov.au

On 18 June 2017, the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (OHS Regulations 2017) replaced the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007 (OHS Regulations 2007), which expired on this date. **This publication has not yet been updated to reflect the changes introduced by the OHS Regulations 2017 and should not be relied upon as a substitute for legal advice.**

Information on the key changes introduced by the OHS 2017 Regulations can be found in the guidance titled *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017: Summary of changes* - available at https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/207659/ISBN-OHS-regulations-summary-of-changes-2017-04.pdf. However, this guidance document contains material of a general nature only and is not to be used as a substitute for obtaining legal advice.