

# Disrupting the System

Preventing and responding to  
**sexual harassment** in the workplace

## Sexual Harassment: Actions for leaders and organisations



Sexual harassment is much more than a legal issue – it is a social problem, one that is driven by gender inequality in the workplace and exacerbated for certain groups.

Greater action at the leadership, organisational and team level will be critical in reducing the incidence and impact of sexual harassment at an individual level.

## We are collectively committed to action

Our approach is outlined on the following pages and summarised here. We will:

# 01 02

Elevate the prevention of sexual harassment and early intervention as a leadership priority



Address sexual harassment as a workplace health and safety issue



# 03

Introduce new principles on confidentiality and transparency for high-profile sexual harassment cases



# 04

Inform, empower and expect everyone to speak up and take action on sexual harassment in the workplace



# 05

Listen to, respect, empower and support people impacted

# Practical actions for leaders and their organisations

## 01 Elevate the **prevention** of sexual harassment and **early intervention** as a leadership priority

### ➔ Actions for leaders

- ✓ **Develop and publicise** a gender equality strategy and action plan and strive for gender balance in the workforce.
- ✓ **Set expectations** and support leaders to address gender inequality, gender-based discrimination, everyday sexism, sexual harassment and violence against women.
- ✓ **Understand** how sexual harassment manifests in your own organisation and industry, the risks and impacts (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, pages 101-103).
- ✓ **Role model** standards of behaviour, addressing disrespectful and/or unlawful behaviour in the moment and empowering others to do so (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, pages 76–77).
- ✓ **Clearly articulate** that eradicating sexual harassment is a leadership priority (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 72).
- ✓ **Ensure all employees** – especially those with a high status – know your stance that sexual harassment, everyday sexism and unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated in any circumstance.
- ✓ **Share leadership stories** and de-identified case studies to support individual and organisational learning and behaviour change.
- ✓ **Require oversight** of incidents and regular reporting (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 98).

### ➔ Fundamentals for organisations

- ✓ **Develop and share** a robust and effective standalone sexual harassment policy that responds to current issues and expectations of all employees or relaunch one with a strengthened commitment (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 84).
- ✓ **Develop and communicate** a clear position on personal relationships at work (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 96).
- ✓ **Reference** sexual harassment and its consequences explicitly in employment contracts, codes of conduct and/or performance management frameworks. Make clear to all, and in particular senior men, and with contractors, consultants and sub-contractors, that unlawful and inappropriate behaviour will have real consequences.
- ✓ **Explicitly state expectations** of behaviour in contractor, subcontractor and consulting agreements.
- ✓ **Measure and monitor** information and data that provides insight into culture, as well as reports of sexual harassment, the number and characteristics of formal allegations of sexual harassment, and also informal reports that are managed within teams.
- ✓ **Report** sexual harassment cases regularly and transparently to senior leaders, board and external stakeholders (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 98).
- ✓ **Incorporate** reporting on these issues, and the financial impact of settlements, as part of our annual reports (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 100).

## 02

### Address sexual harassment as a workplace **health and safety** issue

#### Actions for leaders

- ✓ **Clearly articulate** that the prevention of sexual harassment is a leadership and workplace health and safety issue to ensure the physical and psychological well-being of all employees (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 72).
- ✓ **Ensure** a risk assessment has been undertaken in your organisation (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 74).
- ✓ **Be clear** about consequences and disciplinary action for different types of behaviour and follow through where necessary.
- ✓ **Make** the consequences visible for those who have breached sexual harassment policy, by sharing aggregated and de-identified case studies.

#### Fundamentals for organisations

- ✓ **Ensure** alignment and collaboration between leaders and the core functions responsible for preventing and responding to sexual harassment – workplace health and safety, human resources, legal and communications.
- ✓ **Adapt** workplace health and safety strategies to address sexual harassment in all its forms.
- ✓ **Include** questions about sexual harassment in employee engagement surveys or conduct standalone surveys to create a more robust and reliable measure of prevalence and high-risk work groups beyond actual complaints made (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 101).
- ✓ **Include** sexual harassment on risk registers to be managed in the same manner as other workplace safety risks.
- ✓ **Develop** Standard Operating Procedures for 'critical incidents' of sexual harassment.

## 03

### Introduce new principles on **confidentiality and transparency** for high-profile sexual harassment cases

#### Actions for leaders

- ✓ **Develop and endorse** new principles around transparency and confidentiality as part of our processes covering communication with parties involved, the media and the organisation.
- ✓ **Change** standard approaches to non-disclosure agreements to avoid silencing complainants and allow some transparency and disclosure to employees, stakeholders and the community.
- ✓ **Communicate** the guidelines widely so that the organisation's position is clear, supports prevention efforts and acts as a deterrent to offenders.
- ✓ **Share** internal updates on sexual harassment with the organisation.

#### Fundamentals for organisations

- ✓ **Work** with key internal teams and relevant suppliers covering HR, Legal, Compliance and Corporate Affairs to introduce and apply the principles. Lead a change in approach and communicate it widely.
- ✓ **Build** internal updates on efforts to address sexual harassment into the schedule of staff communications.

## 04 **Inform, empower and expect everyone to speak up and take action on sexual harassment in the workplace**

### **Actions for leaders**

- ✓ **Establish** a common framework and language for identifying, raising and responding to sexual harassment in all its forms.
- ✓ **Build** into leadership communication, policy and practice that speaking up and taking action against sexual harassment in the workplace is an expectation on all employees, and in many circumstances a workplace health and safety obligation.
- ✓ **Create** a workplace environment that is safe for people to speak up.

### **Fundamentals for organisations**

- ✓ **Build capability** of internal teams to respond appropriately to sexual harassment.
- ✓ **Ensure** that systems, processes and communication treats sexual harassment as a type of workplace harm.
- ✓ **Help** employees to understand the range of behaviours that constitute sexual harassment and the range of responses for people impacted, observers, offenders and organisations. (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, page 104).
- ✓ **Provide** employees with tools and language to help them safely raise concerns about inappropriate behaviour in the moment and/or support those that may be impacted.

## 05 **Listen to, respect, empower and support people impacted**

### **Actions for leaders**

- ✓ **Establish** person-centred, safe and supportive reporting, investigation processes and responses.
- ✓ **Build capability** of internal teams to respond appropriately to people impacted by sexual harassment.
- ✓ **Develop and implement** new standards for the use of non-disclosure agreements.

### **Fundamentals for organisations**

- ✓ **Provide** multiple, confidential avenues for advice and complaints (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, pages 105–107).
- ✓ **Have skilled advisory teams** in place to respond to issues when they arise.
- ✓ **Provide** the person impacted with the opportunity to guide the course of action taken, respecting their wishes for informal or formal action, where possible.
- ✓ **Appoint** peers or external experts to support all parties to a complaint (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, pages 118–119).
- ✓ **If appropriate to investigate**, complete the investigation of matters in a timely, compassionate and fair manner with communication of outcomes and de-identified case studies shared with staff (Refer to *Disrupting the System*, pages 108–115).
- ✓ **Ensure** there is swift, proportionate and appropriate outcomes for offenders.

## Disrupting the System

This resource is an extract from *Disrupting the System - Preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the workplace*. Find the full report here:

[championsofchangecoalition.org/resource/disrupting-the-system/](https://championsofchangecoalition.org/resource/disrupting-the-system/)

## About Champions of Change Coalition

Champions of Change Coalition Members include CEOs, secretaries of government departments, non-executive directors and community leaders. Champions of Change believe gender equality is a major business, economic, societal and human rights issue. Established in 2010, by Elizabeth Broderick AO, our mission is to step up beside women to help achieve gender equality and a significant and sustainable increase in the representation of women in leadership.

[championsofchangecoalition.org](https://championsofchangecoalition.org)

