



## HAZARDS

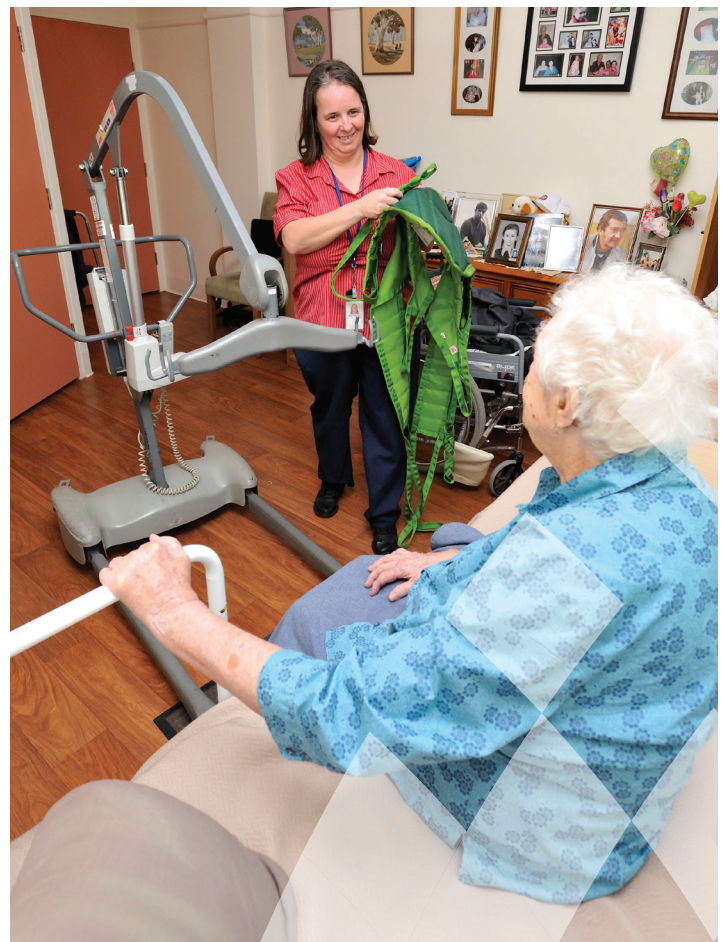
# Hazardous Manual Tasks in Aged Care

A hazardous manual task is an activity that requires a worker to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain a person or thing. Poor manual handling practices can cause injuries ranging from strains and sprains of the back, shoulder, neck, wrist and knee, to abdominal hernias, soft tissue, ligament and tendon damage.

Sprains and strains are the most common injury in the aged care sector. CCI's claims data indicates approximately half of these injuries are the direct result of poor manual handling practices when performing tasks such as:

- ◆ Assisting residents with daily activities such as personal care and mobility tasks.
- ◆ Moving or transporting residents.
- ◆ Pushing or pulling trolleys.
- ◆ Lifting and carrying materials and equipment.
- ◆ Bending to adjust beds.
- ◆ Making beds.
- ◆ Moving furniture.
- ◆ Mopping and vacuuming.
- ◆ Moving boxes of resident records.
- ◆ Sitting at a desk and typing on a keyboard.
- ◆ Unpacking supplies.
- ◆ Sweeping, mowing lawns and carrying tools.

While aged care workers are at risk of being injured as a result of poor manual handling practices, they are not the only workers at risk. Any worker in an aged care facility who performs hazardous manual tasks is at risk of injury. This includes maintenance workers, cleaners, kitchen hands, even those working in administration.



Nationally in 2010/11 42% of all serious claims in the health and community services industry arose from manual handling injuries.<sup>1</sup>

Under work health and safety laws, an aged care facility has a duty to provide a safe and healthy workplace. In order to meet these obligations and their duty of care to residents, an aged care facility must have robust policies in place in relation to hazardous manual tasks. The facility must also provide adequate training and respond to and investigate incidents.

<sup>1</sup> Safe Work Australia, Compendium of Workers' Compensation Statistics Australia 2010-11

## When might this hazard occur?

The moving, transferring and handling of residents by aged care workers is a common cause of injury in aged care facilities. The risk may be greatly increased if a resident is resistant or aggressive, or if the workspace is cramped or poorly designed. Adopting a 'minimal' or 'no lift' policy and promoting the use of mechanical lifting aids and other equipment may help to reduce the risk of injury.

Resident's beds are made and re-made frequently throughout the day and night for the comfort, hygiene and wellbeing of residents. The making of beds involves moving bed frames, lifting mattresses and repetitive bending. If space is inadequate, workers may be forced to adopt awkward postures. Over an eight-hour shift this can put aged care workers at risk of injury from strains to the back, neck and shoulders. The development of a Hazardous Manual Tasks Policy and ongoing training in safe practices should reduce the likelihood of an injury occurring. Devising a system of work whereby the bed-making load is shared should also reduce the likelihood of risk.

Carrying boxes of resident records can lead to an increased risk of injury if done incorrectly. Good office design can minimise the amount of lifting and bending required to carry out common tasks such as this and reducing the amount of time spent engaged in any one activity can also help avoid injury.

## What do I need to do?

- ◆ Consult with workers, work health and safety representatives and supervisors to identify the risks in relation to hazardous manual tasks.
- ◆ Ask yourself these questions:
  - What might happen?
  - When might it happen?
  - Why might it happen?
  - What could cause this to happen? (there may be multiple causes)
- ◆ Ensure policies and procedures are in place.
- ◆ Identify workers who may be at higher risk.
- ◆ Provide all workers with appropriate information, instruction and training to identify the risk factors associated with hazardous manual tasks and the role they have to play in reducing the risk.
- ◆ Consider what you are currently doing to manage the risk and whether it is effective (these are known as controls).
- ◆ Develop and implement any new controls necessary.

## Practical Help

- ◆ WorkCover NSW
- ◆ Victorian WorkCover Authority
- ◆ SafeWork SA
- ◆ WorkSafe NT
- ◆ WorkSafe WA
- ◆ WorkSafe Tasmania
- ◆ Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ)
- ◆ WorkSafe ACT

If you would like further information about hazardous manual tasks in aged care please contact the *risksupport* Helpdesk on:

**1300 660 827**  
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