

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Measures needed to tackle rising threat of violence against doctors

The Australian Medical Association is calling on governments and hospitals to introduce a range of measures to tackle workplace violence.

The call comes in the wake of reports in Victoria of nurses, doctors and other hospital workers being assaulted at record levels, with more than 20,000 violent incidents in the state's public health services last year.

AMA President Dr Danielle McMullen said the risk of violence in the medical workplace was an unfortunate reality that many doctors and healthcare workers faced every day.

"It's a sad fact that many frontline doctors can expect to become victims of workplace violence or aggression," Dr McMullen said.

"Doctors see patients and their families at some of the most stressful times of their lives, and feelings of frustration, confusion and anger are understandable, but when this frustration spills over into violence and aggression, it puts lives at risk. And it's completely unacceptable."

The World Health Organization estimates up to 38 per cent of medical professionals will suffer from physical violence at some point in their careers. While Safe Work Australia regards healthcare as an industry with an elevated risk of workplace violence. Some estimates predict up to 95 per cent of Australian healthcare professionals have experienced the effects of physical and verbal violence.

Dr McMullen warned that medical staff who are attacked at work suffer physical injuries, including serious harm and death, but also the psychological impacts of increased stress, sleep disturbances, moral injury, anxiety, anger, decreased job dissatisfaction, more leave days, presenteeism, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

"Workplace violence also negatively impacts patients, who are at risk of physical and psychological harm because of the violent incidents they may experience and/or witness," Dr McMullen said. "But it also negatively impacts on patient care and outcomes, as doctors may be affected by impaired confidence and concentration."

In response to rising threats of violence against doctors, the AMA has developed a new position statement — [Managing and responding to violence in the medical workplace](#) — offering a comprehensive approach to addressing violence in the medical workplace, particularly in public hospitals.

The AMA is calling for governments and hospitals to lead change, including the implementation of risk-management systems to reduce the impact and instance of workplace violence, investment in reporting, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of the risk prevention and management strategies, and increased investment by hospitals and medical workplaces to support doctors affected by workplace violence.

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"We need to address this crisis, and we need to address it now," Dr McMullen said. "It's in everyone's best interests we do all we can to eliminate violence in the medical workplace."

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