

## Absence management

**Policy Number:** G4 (QH-POL-094)

**Publication date:** July 2020

**Purpose:** To establish a framework for the pro-active, effective and fair management of unscheduled absences from work.

**Application:** This policy applies to all permanent, temporary and casual Queensland Health employees.

This policy does not apply to Queensland Ambulance Service employees. Instead, Queensland Ambulance Service employees are to refer to their local policy/procedure.

**Delegation:** The 'delegate' is as listed in the relevant Department of Health Human Resource (HR) Delegations Manual, or Hospital and Health Service Human Resource (HR) Delegations Manual, as amended from time to time.

### Legislative or other authority:

- *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*
- *Human Rights Act 2019*
- *Industrial Relations Act 2016*
- *Public Service Act 2008*
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*
- *Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003*

### Related policy or documents:

- Code of Conduct for the Queensland Public Service
- Carer's leave HR Policy C9 (QH-POL-109)
- Sick leave HR Policy C64 (QH-POL-230)
- Guideline: Absence management (QH-GDL-094)

### Policy subject:

#### 1 Policy Statement

Queensland Health is committed to establishing a work environment which encourages regular and consistent attendance at work and will actively monitor and manage unscheduled absences from work.

#### 2 Principles

An employee is entitled to access their sick leave entitlements:

- when they are unable to attend work due to illness or injury; and
- to take carer's leave to care for members of their immediate family or household.



Managers should establish expectations with employees regarding attendance at work, and absence notification and recording requirements. An employee is required to be aware of the notification arrangements for unscheduled absences and ensure they advise their supervisor of their absence.

When concerns arise regarding an employee's rate or pattern of unscheduled absence, the management of such absenteeism needs to occur. This should be undertaken in a fair and reasonable way, in accordance with award, legislative and other policy provisions. Proactive and consistent absence management practices should be utilised along with a work environment that encourages attendance at work.

Responsibilities for managing absence are outlined in Attachment One.

### Definitions:

Absence/Absenteeism	Unscheduled absences from work.
Employee Assistance Service (EAS)	A confidential, counselling service providing support to Queensland Health employees and their families through provision of short-term counselling, to manage personal and/or work related issues.
Immediate family	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a spouse (including a former spouse, a de facto spouse and a former de facto spouse) of the employee; and</li> <li>• a child (including an adult child, an adopted child, a foster child, a step-child or an ex-nuptial child), parent, grandparent, grandchild or sibling of the employee or spouse of the employee.</li> </ul>

### History:

July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– amended to update references and naming conventions</li> <li>– application amended as a result of changes to the Hospital and Health Boards (Changes to Prescribed Services) Amendment Regulation 2019.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– formatted as part of the HR Policy review</li> <li>– updated to include reference to the <i>Human Rights Act 2019</i>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
August 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– formatted as part of the HR Policy review</li> <li>– amended to update references and naming conventions</li> <li>– application excludes employees of Queensland Ambulance Service.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
January 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy formatted as part of the HR Policy Simplification project.</li> <li>• Policy amended to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– limit application of the policy to Department of Health employees</li> <li>– update policy statement to clearly and simply explain the expectations of employees and managers regarding employee absences from work</li> <li>– update references and naming conventions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
October 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amended to update reference to Public Service Act 2008.</li> </ul>
April 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed from the HR Policy Consolidation Project.</li> </ul>
Previous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IRM 8.1 Policy for the Management of Unrostered Absence from Duty</li> </ul>

# Attachment One – Absence management responsibilities

The following information is provided as the minimum mandatory standard practice, procedure or process to enable satisfactory compliance with this Department of Health HR policy.

Local guidelines/procedures may be developed to facilitate implementation of this policy. Any local guidelines/procedures must be consistent with this policy and attachment and ensure employee entitlements continue to be met.

## 1 Managers' responsibilities

To manage absence fairly and pro-actively, managers should:

- be aware of the requirements relating to absence management and apply them fairly and transparently
- understand the majority of sick leave is genuine and needs to be dealt with empathetically
- understand that each employee's circumstances should be managed on a case by case basis
- treat information provided by employees about their health on a confidential basis. Information shall only be provided to other persons who have a legitimate reason to know
- ensure employees are aware of available support e.g. employee assistance service
- use available information management systems to monitor and analyse sick leave data/reports
- identify options, strategies and support available to manage absences when they occur
- develop and facilitate return to work plans where appropriate
- recognise and act on underlying causes that may contribute to absences
- maintain open two-way communication with work teams, regularly communicating that attendance matters and why.

## 2 Employees' responsibilities

Employees should understand:

- accrued sick leave enables an employee to recover from illness without loss of pay
- employees are responsible for attending work in accordance with their contracted working hours and fulfilling their contract of employment – if employees are fit for duty they must come to work
- employees should be fit for duty before returning to work following a sick leave absence
- employees are required to keep in touch with their manager during periods of absence, if they are medically fit to do so
- payment during periods of leave is subject to the provision of appropriate paperwork i.e. leave forms and medical certificates. In situations of carer's leave, and in accordance with the Carer's leave HR Policy C9, an employee is to, if required, provide a medical certificate or statutory declaration to show that the immediate family/household member concerned is ill
- in cases where health and/or attendance becomes a concern, employees should discuss the situation with their manager at the earliest opportunity to seek a positive outcome
- personal commitments should be attended to during off duty hours, with other appropriate leave, or where available through the use of flexible working hours arrangements
- be aware of available support e.g. employee assistance service.

## 3 Establish an attendance culture

Managers should seek to establish a work environment that encourages attendance at work including:

- ensuring a safe and healthy workplace
- promoting healthy workers by supporting workplace health initiatives

- recognising and managing potential stress factors
- being approachable and considerate
- supporting the use of Queensland Health family friendly practices and flexible hours arrangements (where applicable)
- supporting the view that leave provisions can be accessed during times of genuine illness ensuring employees are aware of available support e.g. employee assistance service.

#### 4 Notification of absence

Managers should establish a standardised process for communicating and reporting unplanned absences and must communicate these expectations to employees.

Managers must ensure that employees are aware of the notification arrangements for unscheduled absences including:

- the person to be notified of the absence
- the timeframe for the notification of the absence
- the information to be provided by the employee i.e. the reason for the absence and the likely duration of the absence
- if any essential work priorities need to be attended to in their absence
- any other information required by the relevant award.

Employees are required to comply with the absence notification arrangements applying to their work unit.

#### 5 Proactive absence management practices

Managers must implement proactive and consistent absence management practices, which include:

- ensuring employees are aware of the Absence management HR Policy G4
- reviewing the extent to which they have established a work environment that encourages attendance at work
- adopting practices to establish an attendance culture in their work team
- standardising the process for absence notification and recording in their work team
- monitoring unscheduled absences within their work team including the identification of any patterns of unscheduled absences
- establishing and maintaining appropriate communication with absent employees, while they are absent on unplanned leave
- conducting timely discussions on a consistent and equitable basis with employees about unscheduled absences
- following available Absence management guidelines to facilitate implementation of the consultation with local Human Resource units.