

Slide 1



This presentation provides an overview of the Victorian Auditor-General's report Sexual Harassment in the Victorian Public Service.



Sexual harassment is harmful, unlawful and, in some instances, a criminal offence. Its impact on individuals and organisations can be significant.

It can occur in any workplace and to any person.

Departments have an obligation to eliminate sexual harassment.

**Focus of this audit**



**Focus**  
**All Victorian government departments**

Is the public service free from harm from sexual harassment?

Do departments effectively prevent, report and respond to sexual harassment?

We examined whether the public service is free from harm caused from sexual harassment.

We looked at whether all eight Victorian government departments effectively prevent, report and respond to sexual harassment.

**What we found**



**Conclusion**

No department is free from sexual harassment

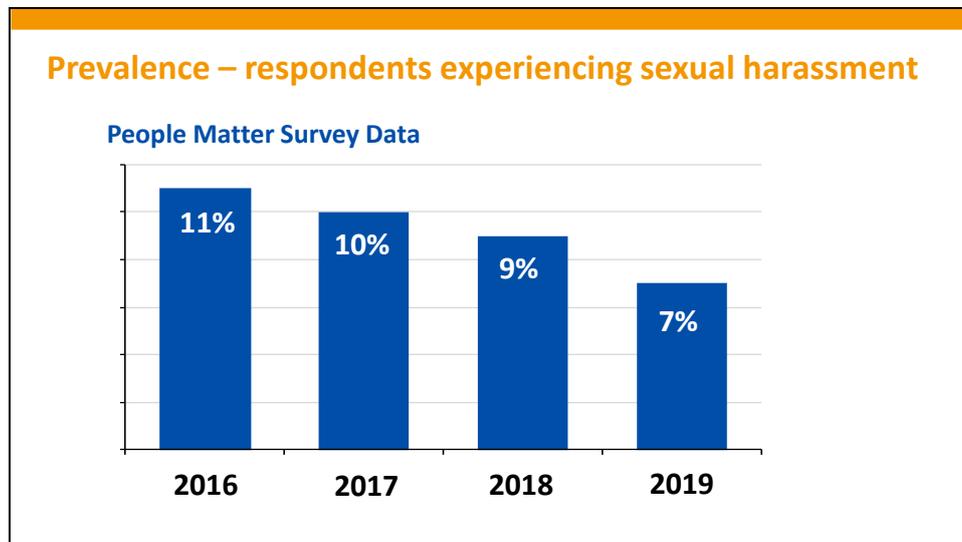
- 1 in 14 people experienced sexual harassment in a 12 month period
- Complaint channels are rarely used
- Departments are committed to prevention, but could improve training

*We found that no department is free from sexual harassment.*

*Complaint channels are available but staff rarely use them.*

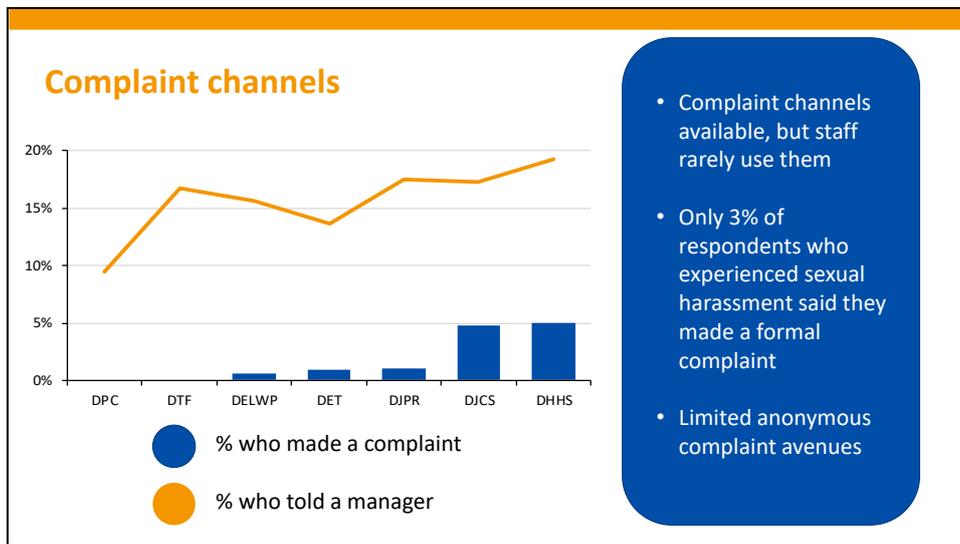
*We found that departments communicate a strong message that sexual harassment is unacceptable and have policies on sexual harassment.*

*Departments do not address high-risk employees in current action plans and training for both staff and managers about sexual harassment can be improved.*



1 in 14 (or 7 per cent) of respondents to the 2019 People Matter Survey reported experiencing sexual harassment in a 12 month period.

This has decreased from 11 per cent in 2016.



Departments have adequate processes to receive and respond to complaints but staff often do not use them.

Only 3% of respondents to the 2019 People Matter Survey who said they experienced sexual harassment also made a formal complaint.



Underreporting is due to many factors, including employee perceptions that their complaint is not serious enough, a belief that there will be negative consequences for their reputation or careers, or lack of faith in the system.

## Complaint handling

**In the 21 cases we reviewed, we saw instances of:**

- delays and lengthy investigations
- inadequate record keeping
- lack of transparency

We reviewed complaint files and found that most were dealt with in a fair and effective manner.

We found some delays and lengthy investigations, inadequate record keeping, a lack of transparency in relation to the outcome of complaints and inaccurate or incomplete records of how departments manage complaints.

**Prevention**

 <b>Strong Policies</b>	 <b>Regular Communication</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most policies aligned with model policy</li><li>• Improvements include references to external avenues, bystander interventions and legislation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sends a powerful message</li><li>• 7 of 8 departments sent communication on sexual harassment in the last 12 months</li></ul>

All departments have policies that cover sexual harassment. Some improved their policies during the course of the audit.

Departments are committed to preventing sexual harassment and communicate a strong message that it is unacceptable.

**Prevention**

 <b>Training</b>	 <b>Targeting high risk areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All departments have induction modules on sexual harassment</li><li>• Other training is limited and not mandatory</li><li>• Managers do not receive specific training</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4 departments had plans to address survey results</li><li>• Action plans do not focus on those at higher risk of sexual harassment</li></ul>

Current training is largely inadequate and mostly limited to induction and online modules.

Managers are often the first ones to receive complaints, and do not always respond appropriately. Departments do not provide specific training to managers on dealing with sexual harassment complaints.

Departments can take proactive steps to address risk factors and target high risk areas. Current departmental action plans do not specifically focus on supporting those at higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment.

### Recommendations

<b>7</b> for all departments 	<b>3</b> for the Victorian Public Sector Commission 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• introduce training for staff and managers</li><li>• encourage complaints</li><li>• improve record keeping</li><li>• store and categorise complaints</li><li>• communicate regularly</li><li>• implement a checkpoint for reporting to police</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• develop guidance on investigating matters where there are no independent witnesses</li><li>• expand guidance on reporting to police</li><li>• develop guidance on sharing information</li></ul>
<b>1</b> for the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 	<b>1</b> for the Department of Justice and Community Safety and the Department of Treasury and Finance 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• develop guidelines on key aspects of addressing complaints</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• introduce a standalone sexual harassment policy</li></ul>

We made seven recommendations to all departments and one only to both the Department of Justice and Community Safety and the Department of Treasury and Finance.

We also made recommendations for guidance to the Victorian Public Sector Commission and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

All of our recommendations have been accepted and work to address these issues has begun.

For further information, please view the full report on our website:  
[www.audit.vic.gov.au](http://www.audit.vic.gov.au)

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