

RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

1. Introduction

1.1. Description

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCH) is committed to fostering safe, supportive, and respectful work environments. The purpose of this policy is to describe behavioural expectations at VCH, and how VCH will prevent and address [Disrespectful Behaviour](#) towards [Staff](#) and [Medical Staff](#).

This policy applies to [Bullying and Harassment](#) and Disrespectful Behaviour that is based on a personal characteristic protected by the *Human Rights Code* (called [Discrimination](#) and [Discriminatory Harassment](#)), including [Sexual Harassment](#).

VCH recognizes the importance of psychological safety in the [Workplace](#) and encourages Staff to come forward where they are unable to resolve [Complaints](#) themselves or with the support of their leadership.

Raising concerns about Disrespectful Behaviour can be stressful. Staff are reminded that the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) is available at all times for counselling, critical incident stress management, and wellness services.

1.2. Scope

This policy applies to all Disrespectful Behaviour and conduct towards Staff and Medical Staff (collectively defined as [Staff](#)) that:

- occurs at a VCH Workplace, which is defined to include virtual and remote work environments;
- impacts a VCH Workplace; or
- impacts VCH's relationships with Clients, patients, and residents ([Clients](#)), their families, or the broader community.

The Workplace is defined in [Section 4](#) of this policy.

Bullying and Harassment may co-occur with [Violence](#). See the [VCH Workplace Violence Prevention Standard](#) for information on procedures and responsibilities related to Violence in a VCH Workplace.

This policy does not apply to situations where Clients experience Disrespectful Behaviour.

2. Policy

2.1. Guiding Principles

VCH believes relationships underpinned by mutual respect, inclusivity, and personal accountability are fundamental to its ability to provide high quality, appropriate, and timely health services to Clients. VCH values [Inclusion](#) and [Diversity](#) and promotes [Cultural Safety](#) for Indigenous Peoples.

Staff share responsibility for maintaining a respectful working environment by:

- Demonstrating behaviours that are consistent with this policy;
- Reporting Bullying and Harassment they experience or observe in the Workplace as outlined in [Section 2.3](#) and [Section 2.4](#) of this policy; and
- Participating respectfully in conversations that aim to address issues or resolve conflicts related to Disrespectful Behaviour.

VCH recognizes that power dynamics and fear can impact whether Staff feel safe to report Disrespectful Behaviour, Bullying, and Harassment and will support Staff to report such behaviour when they wish to do so.

The following principles will guide VCH's response to Complaints of Disrespectful Behaviour in the Workplace:

- **Timely Response:** [Supervisors](#) and the Respectful Workplace Team will take swift action to respond to Disrespectful Behaviour in a manner that aligns with this policy.
- **Trauma-informed:** Within the bounds of this policy, [Complainants](#) will be given the choice on how to proceed with their Complaint. Complainants will not be required to meet [Respondents](#) face-to-face. The Respectful Workplace Team will maintain communication with the Complainant.
- **Proportional:** VCH's response to Disrespectful Behaviour will be proportional to the nature of the behaviour and will include a formal investigation when appropriate or an explanation of why a formal investigation is not being conducted.
- **Fair and Impartial:** [Investigators](#) will remain impartial. VCH will engage external Investigators as needed, including to support impartiality. Both the Complainant and Respondent will be given an opportunity to share information related to the events.
- **Sensitive to patterns:** The Respectful Workplace Team will be attentive to patterns across Complaints. Where appropriate, the Respectful Workplace Team will refer system level issues to a Human Resources / Labour Relations Advisor (HR/LR Advisor), the Supervisor of the Staff involved, and other resources across VCH such as the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism Team, Indigenous Cultural Safety, Ethics Services etc.

2.2. Respectful Behaviour Expectations

Staff are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful, cooperative, and non-discriminatory manner in the Workplace, and to consider the impact of their actions on others. Staff must treat everyone in the Workplace in a fair, kind, and respectful manner.

Staff must not exhibit Disrespectful Behaviour, or engage in Bullying, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, or Discrimination.

Staff must communicate and behave in a respectful manner throughout all conflict resolution related to a Complaint under this policy.

2.3. Addressing Disrespectful Behaviour through Conflict Resolution

If they feel safe to do so, Staff who experience Disrespectful Behaviour are encouraged to discuss their concerns with the individuals involved, including their Supervisor or union representative.

Supervisors must provide support to the individuals involved in a conflict resolution discussion.

VCH may offer the Staff and Medical Staff involved conflict resolution support, either from a third-party specialist in conflict resolution or a member of the Respectful Workplace Team, where appropriate. An Investigator may offer conflict resolution at any stage of the Complaint process, where appropriate, including during an investigation.

Conflict resolution may include facilitated conversations, healing circles, or mediation.

In order to participate, participants will be required to provide written consent.

VCH supports early resolution without an investigation whenever safe and reasonable but recognizes that this approach may not be appropriate depending on the nature of the Complaint, the Complainant's desired approach, and the participants involved.

2.4. Making a Respectful Workplace Complaint

The Respectful Workplace Team will accept Complaints from Staff. The Respectful Workplace Team encourages Staff to make a Complaint as soon as possible so timely support can be offered.

Staff who witness or experience Disrespectful Behaviour in the Workplace, including Disrespectful Behaviour by Staff, Clients, [Visitors](#), or other members of the public, may make a Complaint by contacting the Respectful Workplace Team:

- [Online](#); or
- Phone: 1 (866) 858-6014

The Respectful Workplace Team accepts anonymous reports. However, the Team will be limited in what action can be taken depending on the circumstance and what is being reported.

Staff must submit their Complaints under this policy within 12 months of an incident of Disrespectful Behaviour in order to support the Respectful Workplace Team to respond to respectful workplace issues in a timely manner. The Respectful Workplace Team may extend this time limit in certain circumstances.

2.4.1. Other Processes and Considerations

Staff Governed by Collective Agreements:

- Staff who are members for the Facilities Bargaining Association (FBA) may, at their request, have their complaint addressed using the process outlined in Article 4.03 of their collective agreement.

- Staff who are members of the Nurses Bargaining Association (NBA) may, at their request, have their complaint addressed using the process outlined Article 31.03 of their collective agreement.

Medical Staff: The Respectful Workplace Team will refer formal Complaints against a member of Medical Staff to Medical Affairs, where the Complaints will be processed in compliance with the VCH [Medical Staff Rules](#) and [Medical Staff Bylaws](#). If there is a conflict between this policy and the VCH Medical Staff Rules and Medical Staff Bylaws that cannot be resolved, the VCH Medical Staff Rules and Medical Staff Bylaws will prevail.

Employees of Contracted Service Providers: If the Disrespectful Behaviour involves the employees of a contracted service provider, the Respectful Workplace Team will communicate with a contracted service provider to identify an appropriate process for addressing aspects of the Complaint that involve their employee.

2.5. Complaint Intake by the Respectful Workplace Team

Upon receiving a Complaint, a member of the Respectful Workplace Team will contact the Complainant to discuss the Complainant's experience and assess whether the Complaint involves Disrespectful Behaviour, Bullying, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, or Discrimination. Based on the discussion with the Complainant, the Team will determine the best course of action.

The Respectful Workplace Team may offer conflict resolution, unless the Disrespectful Behaviour is such that only an investigation is appropriate.

If the Respectful Workplace Team determines on preliminary assessment that the Complaint includes allegations that may involve a breach of this policy, the Team will:

- explain the process before proceeding with an investigation;
- offer informal ways to help resolve the issue where appropriate; and
- involve an HR/LR Advisor or, in some cases, an external Investigator where required.

2.6. Investigation Process

The Respectful Workplace Team will undertake investigations promptly, diligently, and as thoroughly as necessary, given the circumstances.

For more information on how an investigation is conducted, see the [Respectful Workplace Investigation and Bullying & Harassment Investigation Procedure](#).

2.6.1. Evidence Gathering and Interviews for Complaints Involving Staff

Staff must participate in an investigation and provide details of incidents they have experienced or witnessed when requested.

The Investigator will:

- gather evidence from the individuals involved in the Complaint;
- conduct separate interviews with the relevant participants involved, including the Complainant, Respondent, and witnesses selected by the Investigator; and

- provide the Respondent with details of the Complaint and give them an opportunity to respond.

2.6.2. Comfort and Safety Measures During Investigation

Where appropriate, VCH will take interim steps to ensure the safety of all Staff during the investigation process, which may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- implementing a plan to continue Workplace operations;
- temporarily reassigning the Respondent, the Complainant, or other participants, where appropriate and possible; and/or
- restricting contact between the participants involved, where appropriate and possible.

2.7. Complaint Resolution

Upon concluding the investigation and evidence gathering process, the Investigator will:

- Determine whether there has been a breach of this policy; and
- Share a summary of their findings with the Complainant, the Respondent, and their Supervisors (unless the Supervisor is implicated in the Disrespectful Behaviour other than as Respondent).

Upon request by the parties, VCH will confirm:

- whether the policy was violated;
- key findings and expectations; and/or
- whether appropriate action was issued against the Respondent. Due to confidentiality, VCH will not be able to comment on the nature of the action.

The [Respectful Workplace Delegate](#) will consult with the participants' Supervisors and recommend appropriate remedial or disciplinary action to address occurrences and prevent further occurrences of Disrespectful Behaviour, Bullying, Harassment, or Discrimination.

2.8. Review of Investigations for Fairness

Complaints will not be reinvestigated.

The Respectful Workplace Team will consider issues raised regarding the fairness of the Complaint process, including the investigation and resolution of all Complaints. To raise concerns regarding the fairness of a Complaint process:

- Unionized Staff may file a grievance under the applicable collective agreement; and
- Non-unionized Staff may contact the Respectful Workplace Director.

Any issues related to the investigation of Complaints involving Medical Staff must be addressed in a manner that adheres with the VCH Medical Staff Rules and Medical Staff Bylaws.

2.9. No Retaliation or Interference

Staff must not interfere with an investigation or retaliate against a person for making a Complaint or for participating in an investigation. Retaliation occurs when a person receives negative treatment as a result of reporting an incident or participating in an investigation. Retaliation is a violation of this policy and may lead to disciplinary action.

Staff who believe they have experienced retaliation may contact their Union Steward, Supervisor, HR/LR Advisor, or the Respectful Workplace Delegate they have been speaking with.

2.10. Confidentiality and Media

VCH's [Information Privacy and Confidentiality](#) policy applies to information collected, used, and disclosed under this policy.

All participants must keep information relating to an investigation conducted under this policy confidential, except as authorized or required by law. VCH will maintain confidentiality of any information and records made or received under this policy, except as necessary for the investigation process or as otherwise required by law.

VCH will disclose the following information:

- adequate information to Respondents to allow them to meaningfully respond to a Complaint and participate in an investigation; and
- information to witnesses to the extent necessary to allow the Investigator to properly investigate the Complaint.

2.10.1. Public Statements by VCH

VCH's Senior Executive Team reserves the right to issue a public statement denouncing behaviour inconsistent with this policy, including naming a Respondent in a public statement, where the Disrespectful Behaviour implicates VCH in a public manner (e.g., public posts, comments and reactions online, including but not limited to social media, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, or posts made in public newspapers and where the person identifies as a VCH Staff member).

2.11. Bad Faith Complaints

Complaints that are made in [Bad Faith](#) are a form of Bullying and may lead to discipline, up to and including termination of employment or termination of contract. Bad Faith Complaints involving Medical Staff may result in revocation of privileges in accordance with the VCH Medical Staff Rules and Medical Staff Bylaws.

2.12. Record-Keeping

All written records will be kept in confidence and shared only as necessary. No record of any report, investigation, or decision will go on the Complainant's employment file, except where the Respectful Workplace Team concludes the Complaint was made in Bad Faith.

If there is a finding of a breach of this policy, any disciplinary action taken will be documented in the individual's employment file as appropriate.

2.13. Education and Training

VCH will educate and promote awareness of this policy and provide training on respectful conduct in the Workplace.

Supervisors will inform their Staff of this policy.

Staff will complete required training and education regarding the Respectful Workplace policy.

2.14. Compliance

Staff who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment, termination of contract, or, where the Complaint involves Medical Staff, revocation of privileges in accordance with the VCH Medical Staff Rules and Medical Staff Bylaws.

3. Supporting Documents and References

3.1. Legislation

- *Human Rights Code*, [RSBC 1996 c 210](#)

3.2. Cited Policies

- [Information Privacy and Confidentiality Policy](#)

3.3. Guidelines, Procedures and Forms

- [Respectful Workplace Investigation and Bullying & Harassment Investigation Procedure](#)
- [Responding to Microaggressions in Health Care](#)
- [VCH Workplace Violence Prevention Standard](#)

3.4. Resources

- VCH, [Psychological Health and Safety](#)
- WorkSafe BC (Dec 2013). [Toward a Respectful Workplace: A Handbook on Preventing and Addressing Workplace Bullying and Harassment](#)
- WorkSafe BC (Sep 2024). [Prevention Manual](#). Part 2 Division 4. OHS Policy P2-21-2 , P2-22-1, and P2-23-2

3.5. Keywords

Bullying, Complaint, Disrespect, Discrimination, Disrespectful Behaviour, Harassment, Human Rights, Respectful Workplace, Respect, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence, Social Isolation, Workplace, Workplace Investigation, WorkSafeBC.

4. Definitions

“Bad Faith” means acting with an ulterior motive: for example, motivated by ill will, hostility, malice, personal animosity, lack of fairness or impartiality, or lack of total honesty such as withholding information.

“Bullying and Harassment” means inappropriate comments or conduct in the Workplace that a person knew, or should have known, would cause the receiver to be humiliated, offended, or intimidated, whether or not the impact was intended. Bullying and Harassment may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- physical actions, such as touching, shoving, pushing;
- verbal actions, such as jokes, name-calling, using offensive nick-names, shouting, and gossiping;
- non-verbal behaviour intended to intimidate, such as ignoring, eye-rolling, and glaring;
- humiliating a person through criticism or insults; and
- overloading a person with an unreasonable share of an unpleasant job.

Not all difficult interactions or conflicts in the Workplace are considered Bullying and Harassment. The following would generally not be considered Bullying or Harassment:

- respectfully expressing differences of opinion;
- expressing differing perspectives that are not threatening or demeaning; or
- providing constructive feedback about work-related behaviour or performance.

Bullying and Harassment do not include supervisory actions conducted in a fair and respectful manner, including decisions related to job duties, work instruction, supervision, feedback, performance management, discipline, suspensions, and terminations.

“Clients” means all individuals receiving care or services from VCH and includes patients and residents.

“Complaint” means a respectful workplace Complaint submitted in accordance with s. 2.4 of this policy.

“Complainant” means the individual making the Complaint.

A **“Culturally Safe”** environment is physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually safe, and is an outcome of cultural competency, defined and experienced by those who receive the service. Cultural safety is based on understanding the power differentials and potential discriminations inherent in the health service delivery system.

“Discrimination” means making a distinction, whether intentional or not, that is based on a personal characteristic listed in the BC *Human Rights Code*, which has the effect of imposing a burden, obligation, or disadvantage. Currently, the following personal characteristics are listed as grounds of discrimination in the BC *Human Rights Code* in relation to employment: Indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or

mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, and conviction of a criminal or summary conviction offence that is unrelated to employment.

“Discriminatory Harassment” means Bullying or Harassment based on a personal characteristic of an individual or group that is covered by a ground listed in the *BC Human Rights Code*. (See Discrimination above for a list of grounds.)

“Disrespectful Behaviour” means verbal or non-verbal rude behaviour, including low-intensity rude behaviour, irrespective of whether there is any intention to psychologically harm the other person(s). Disrespectful Behaviour includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- micro-aggressions, see [Responding to Microaggressions in Health Care](#);
- eye-rolling;
- making sarcastic comments;
- sending a demeaning note or email;
- gossiping;
- making accusations about someone’s professional competence;
- refusing to work collaboratively;
- reprimanding publicly; and
- socially isolating (e.g. giving the “silent treatment”).

“Diversity” means social identity differences such as age, class, gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ancestry, disability, religion, or physical characteristics. Every person is unique in their human identity and can share identities with other people. Their uniqueness is valuable and should be celebrated.

“Inclusion” means an environment in which all people feel involved, respected, and connected to the organization, different perspectives are actively encouraged and sought out, people have equitable access to opportunities, and everyone can contribute fully to the organization's success.

“Investigator” means an individual appointed to investigate a Complaint.

“Medical Staff” means privileged, employed, or contracted medical providers and medical leaders working at VCH or providing health care services through VCH, including physicians, midwives, nurse practitioners, dentists, and fellows. For clarity, this includes medical providers working both in hospital and community sites.

“Respectful Workplace Delegate” means the individual the Regional Director of Respectful Workplace delegates responsibility to. The Respectful Workplace Delegate is generally a member of the Respectful Workplace Team, an HR/LR Advisor, or an Investigator.

“Respondent” means the individual responding to the Complaint and whose alleged conduct is the subject of the Complaint.

“Sexual Harassment” is a form of Discriminatory Harassment that is based on sex or gender, and means unwelcome comments or conduct of a sexual nature in the Workplace. Sexual Harassment may include, but is not limited to:

- a person in authority asking a Staff member for sexual favours in return for being hired or receiving promotions or other employment benefits;
- sexual advances with actual or implied work-related consequences;
- unwelcome remarks, questions, jokes, or innuendo of a sexual nature including sexist comments or sexual invitations;
- verbal abuse, intimidation, or threats of a sexual nature;
- leering, staring, or making sexual gestures;
- displays of pornographic or other sexual materials;
- offensive pictures, graffiti, cartoons, or sayings;
- unwanted physical contact such as touching, patting, pinching, or hugging; and
- physical Violence of a sexual nature.

“**Staff**” means all employees, Medical Staff, resident doctors, fellows and trainees, students, volunteers, contractors, researchers, and other service providers engaged by VCH.

“**Supervisor**” means a person who instructs, directs, and oversees Staff in the performance of their duties, and includes clinical operating supervisors, operational leaders, supervisors, managers, directors, executive directors, medical associate, medical directors, and department heads.

“**Violence**” means the attempted or actual exercise of any physical force by a person so as to cause injury to a Staff member, and includes any threatening statement or behaviour which gives a Staff member reasonable cause to believe that they are at risk of injury.

“**Visitor**” means a person attending VCH sites for the purpose of visiting or accompanying a Client or Staff member.

“**Workplace**” means any location where Staff work or are engaged in work or work-related activities for VCH and includes non-VCH operated spaces, work-related travel, work-related conferences, events, and gatherings (in-person and virtual/remote), telephone conversations, and electronic communications (such as email, texts and chat groups). If conduct has a Workplace impact, or began taken place in a Workplace.

5. Questions

Contact: Respectful Workplace at rwp.reviewer@vch.ca

Issued by Name:	Wayne Balshin	Signature:	
Title:	VP, People	Date:	February 20, 2025

Before starting a new policy, please contact the VCH Policy Office at policy@vch.ca.

Effective Date:	2025-February-21
First Released:	2002-June-07
Last Revised:	2025-February-20
Review Date	Summary of Changes
	<p>Title Change: Removal of Human Rights from title</p> <p>Added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed outline of how complaints are managed and what information is provided at the conclusion of the process • Consideration on impacts to participants • Interim measures • Guiding principles • Language promoting early and informal resolution • Differentiated processes for different kinds of staff. Clarifies complaints related to medical staff will follow by rules and bylaws • Expanded definitions section