

Preventing workplace violence in home health care

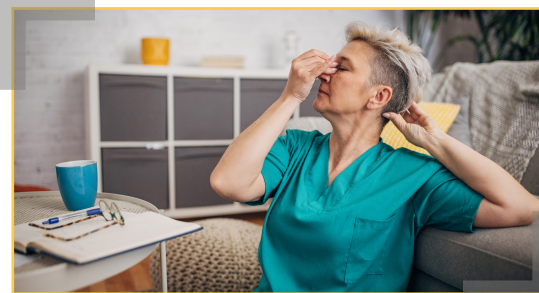
Keeping workers safe

Tools and techniques can assist with workplace violence prevention policies. While not every one of these will work for every business, you might want to evaluate them to see if they will work for you.

- Personal alarms/panic buttons
- Wearable GPS devices
- Code words to discreetly indicate that help is needed
- Attendance software that alerts managers of late clock-ins in real-time
- Employee check-in apps with GPS

Lone workers face an increased risk of emergencies, injuries, and violence because they lack immediate support in their workplace. Home health workers are especially vulnerable as their work is done in uncontrolled environments with unpredictable people. According to OSHA, one in two home health workers have experienced verbal abuse from a patient or family member, and one in four have been physically assaulted while on the job. Workplace violence is five times more likely to occur in the health care sector than in any other private sector. These incidents often go unreported due to fear, normalization, and unclear protocols.

Common concerns in the field



- Verbal abuse, including yelling, threats and harassment
- Physical violence
- Sexual harassment or assault
- Unsafe homes, with undisclosed weapons or aggressive pets
- Isolated environments or unsafe neighborhoods

- Emotional stress such as burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, or compassion fatigue

Tips for employers



- Encourage open reporting without fear of punishment or retaliation.
- Document and track all incidents.
- Follow up on all reported incidents.
- Conduct home risk assessments before assigning patients.
- Train all staff on workplace violence prevention when they are hired and annually. Training should include:
 - Techniques for working with individuals with assaultive or other threatening behaviors including de-escalation techniques and strategies for avoiding physical harm
 - Emergency response procedures including where and how to report workplace violence, procedures for seeking first aid or medical care for employees who have been injured, and resources to assist in post-incident coping including EAP and counseling options.

- Ensure a home health worker is on your safety committee.
- Establish a check-in system to have real-time data on staff locations.

Safety tips for home health workers



- Park strategically: Face outward in a well-lit area where you are not blocked in.
- Always have a clear path to an exit.
- De-escalate situations when possible.
- Request a chaperone to go with you to new locations.
- Document every issue.
- Know your policies and whom to call if you need help.

Summary

Home health workers provide essential patient care, and employers should make every effort to provide them with protection. Using the suggestions in this guide can help lower the risk of workplace violence toward these workers.

Activity ideas

- Review National Safety Council materials on lone worker monitoring (bit.ly/3HjKT7W) and discuss the potential for wearables or other devices to protect home health workers.
- Review current lone worker and workplace violence policies to see if they can be improved. If you have no current policies, create them and ensure all employees are trained using these policies.
- Research de-escalation training programs and select one that fits your business. Train employees and add annual refresher training to your training plan.