

Preventing Violence in Home Healthcare

Home healthcare workers tend to be at high risk for workplace violence because they work alone at any hour of the day or night and face a unique set of risks and challenges. When they enter a client's home, they are vulnerable to unprotected and unpredictable environments that may include violent or unstable patients or family members, illicit drug use, domestic violence, and the presence of weapons and aggressive animals.¹

About 18 percent to 65 percent of home healthcare workers have endured verbal abuse from patients, and between 2.5 percent and 44 percent of workers have been physically assaulted on the job.²

The types of workplace violence that home healthcare workers may experience include physical violence, psychological violence, verbal abuse, intimidation, bullying, sexual harassment, and racial harassment.

Organizations that employ home healthcare workers are primarily responsible for their safety. These organizations should have policies and procedures that focus on safety assessment, risk identification, and situation management to prevent violence in home healthcare settings.

The risk tips in this publication are intended to provide general guidance to home healthcare organizations on preventing violence in home care environments and safeguarding workers.³

1

Adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence. This policy should require workers to report any incidents of violence immediately, including verbal, physical, and emotional abuse.

2

Develop a comprehensive violence prevention program that includes robust policies and procedures that address personal safety measures for home healthcare workers. Ensure that the program includes specific policies for unsafe homes or neighborhoods in which violence has occurred previously.

3

Review maps that show crime in the areas in which clients live. Work with local law enforcement to understand the areas in which home health care workers should take special precautions.

4

Educate home healthcare workers about the violence prevention program upon hire and annually. They should be informed about the risks of their assignments and why following the program is vital. Provide all workers with mobile phones for their safety.

5

Train home healthcare workers on all aspects of violence prevention, including hazard prevention and control. Teach them about environmental awareness and how to assess and recognize hazards in their work environments, such as drug abuse, possession of weapons, and aggressive pets. Workers also should be trained to recognize and report domestic violence and child abuse/neglect.

6

Make sure home healthcare workers receive comprehensive training on verbal de-escalation techniques and learn how to be cognizant of any signs of violence facing them, including verbal abuse and aggressive body language. They also should receive training on escape and egress techniques.

7

Create and support safety committees to give workers a forum in which to provide information about their experiences and learn from others on how to stay safe. With commitment from management and participation by workers on safety committees, this collaboration can help generate best practices and effective strategies to prevent violence.

8

If a client's environment is identified as a high risk for violence, ensure that specific safety procedures are in place, such as having workers contact supervisors prior to a visit, sending workers in pairs so they're not alone, asking the client to agree to a "no-harm contract," and providing local law enforcement as escorts.

9

Investigate all reports of violence by conducting postvisit assessments to identify what happened or almost happened (e.g., near misses) and to pinpoint contributing factors. Collaborate with home healthcare workers and safety committees to evaluate these incidents and formulate strategies to prevent them from occurring again.

10

Document all events of violence and monitor those lists to identify any trends in workplace violence that home healthcare workers are experiencing. Additionally, monitor the effectiveness of the organization's violence prevention policies and procedures and adjust as needed.

For additional resources, see MedPro Group's [Risk Resources: Violence Prevention in Home Healthcare](#).

Endnotes

¹ International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety Foundation. (2016, December 15). *Best practices for preventing violence in home health*. Retrieved from

<https://iahssf.org/assets/2016bestpracticesforpreventingviolenceinhomehealth.pdf>

² Famakinwa, J. (2021, October 24). OSHA cracking down on workplace violence against home-based care workers. *Home Health Care News*. Retrieved from <https://homehealthcarenews.com/2021/10/osha-cracking-down-on-workplace-violence-against-home-based-care-workers/>

³ This checklist is based on guidance from the following sources: Lynch, J. P. (2021). *Home care nurses at unique risk for workplace violence*. Nurse.com. Retrieved from <https://resources.nurse.com/workplace-violence-home-care-nurses-at-unique-risk>; International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety Foundation, *Best practices for preventing violence in home health*; Stanley, V., & Oliveri, A. (2021, September 28). Preventing violence against home healthcare workers. Retrieved from www.aiha.org/blog/preventing-violence-against-home-healthcare-workers

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