



## WellLink Health Alliance Statement on Protecting Healthcare Workers from Violence

WellLink Health Alliance supports policies at the local, state, and federal levels that strengthen protections for healthcare workers against violence, threats, and harassment in the workplace. Healthcare workforce violence is a growing national concern affecting hospitals, clinics, emergency responders, and community-based providers alike. Healthcare workers routinely face physical assault, verbal threats, intimidation, and harassment. Despite the frequency and severity of these incidents, they are significantly underreported to law enforcement, and even fewer result in formal charges or prosecution.

Even with the proactive efforts by health systems and healthcare organizations to prevent incidents and safeguard staff, healthcare workers remain five times more likely than workers in any other sector to experience physical assault on the job, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Workplace violence not only endangers our dedicated staff, but it also directly impacts the quality and safety of patient care. Intimidation and physical threats hinder clinicians' ability to focus on patients' needs. Providers cannot deliver compassionate, effective care when they are fearful for their safety, distracted by disruptive behavior, or recovering from prior traumatic encounters. Beyond individual harm, violent incidents can delay critical care, diminish staff productivity, and increase the risk of adverse outcomes for all patients.

Strengthening legal consequences, such as reclassifying certain offenses to higher-level misdemeanors or felonies, can serve as an important deterrent, reinforce accountability, and signal the seriousness of these offenses. Federal legislation includes an exemption for individuals who may be mentally incapacitated due to illness or substance use. This means that if a person is determined to be mentally incapacitated at the time of the incident, they would not be prosecuted under the proposed federal law.

WellLink recognizes that enhanced penalties alone are not sufficient to address the full scope of workplace violence. A comprehensive approach is required. Effective policy solutions should include:

- **Stronger legal protections** that clearly define and penalize violence against healthcare workers.
- **Improved reporting mechanisms** that reduce the burden on individual workers and encourage timely reporting.
- **Employer-supported response systems** that assist workers in navigating legal and administrative processes.
- **Investment in prevention strategies**, including workforce training, de-escalation protocols, and environmental safety measures.
- **Data collection and transparency** to better understand the prevalence, causes, and outcomes of workplace violence incidents.

Healthcare workers should not bear sole responsibility for pursuing legal action following a violent incident. Policies that reduce barriers to reporting and ensure institutional support are essential to creating a culture of safety and accountability.

Protecting healthcare workers is fundamental to maintaining a stable, effective healthcare system. Ensuring their safety not only supports workforce wellbeing and retention, but also directly impacts the quality and continuity of care for patients and communities.

WellLink Health Alliance urges policymakers across all levels of government to advance coordinated, comprehensive strategies that both deter violence and support those who experience it.