
Office of the Director-General

Dear Secretary Health Services Union

Consultation - Accommodation for ACT Health Directorate Employees 2-6 Bowes Street Woden – increasing roster to three days per week

ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD) is committed to effective consultation with employees and their representatives, and participation in decisions in matters that affect their employment.

I am writing in accordance with the consultation provisions within ACT Public Sector Enterprise Agreements on the next phase of revised accommodation arrangements at 2 - 6 Bowes Street Woden (Bowes Street).

As you are aware, the majority of ACTHD staff have been working remotely on and off since March 2020. The availability of workspace has been limited since that period due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the requirements for the Digital Health Record (DHR) projects. Current arrangements provide all staff with the option of attending the office for one day per week based on a roster system, and any day of the week via booking a limited number of desks. Rarely are the desks fully booked.

With the Covid-19 Response Branch (CRB) and the Digital Health Record (DHR) staff numbers reducing, desk space has become available on level 2 and level 3. Therefore, there is now an opportunity to offer three days per week for all staff to work in Bowes Street. There will also be enough desks for staff to book for the remaining two days. Based on staff and manager feedback to me, I am confident that this opportunity will be welcomed by many staff who are keen to have more of a presence and connection in the office. I am aware that some staff may require some additional supports and encouragement to increase their attendance in the office and managers will be supported to identify needs and offer supports. Individual circumstances and needs will be addressed on a case-by-case basis, such as those staff with health concerns or working from interstate.

I am excited by the opportunities that increased office availability brings to ACTHD in offering greater flexibility in our approach to hybrid working, increasing collaboration and connection, and driving more engagement in our ongoing cultural journey. I am familiar with research that shows a return to the office environment and more interactions with colleagues is good for our mental health and may counter feelings of isolation, depression and anxiety that has become more present in the covid environment.

We consulted with staff and unions in early and mid 2021 to obtain feedback regarding returning to the office, however due to the COVID-19 wave the return to the office was delayed. I consulted again in 2022 when the arrangement currently in place was more fully implemented, using feedback from both consultations. I am now consulting on this next

phase over a two-week period to enable unions and staff to provide feedback on the proposal.

The revised accommodation roster (attached) has been informed by, and reflects as best as possible, the requests to date from all divisions.

Welfare of employees

The health and wellbeing of our staff remains of paramount consideration. Hot desks will remain available for booking by staff who wish to work in the office on non-rostered days. This may include individuals who feel socially isolated working from home. These shared desks are also available for employees who are unable to work from their home due to lack of a suitable space, internet unavailability, children or other caring responsibilities. We also have an online booking system for desks that allow staff to book their own hot desk without the requirement to seek manager approval to work for more than a day a week if this is desirable to suit personal circumstances.

Meeting spaces

The number of meeting spaces throughout Bowes Street has been limited to accommodate DHR training, CRB and other needs. Under the revised arrangement more meeting rooms are now available on level 2 and 3. This presents much more opportunity for teams to meet and collaborate. A stocktake of all meetings spaces is being undertaken and staff will be communicated with as more becomes available. All key team and other meetings will continue to be Teams/Webex enable to ensure everybody can be present.

Hygiene and cleaning

We are currently looking at facilities, on level 2 in particular, to ascertain if any additional cleaning or office refresh is needed, within budget (for example, replacement of some older meeting room chairs). No-touch hand sanitising stations are installed at Bowes Street in entry/exit points with increased signage and floor decals. Staff are also required to sanitise their workstation and wipes are available and regularly replenished throughout the office. Appropriate daily office cleaning arrangements, including high touch contact surface cleaning, continue to be in place. The scope of requirements for daily cleaning has been developed in consultation with the [ACTPS WHS guidance for managing COVID-19 in the workplace](#).

ICT equipment and storage

All desks are equipped with two monitors and a docking station. A mouse and keyboard will also be provided (in response to requests from staff) for those who do not wish to transport their own from home. Staff have been allocated a headset by ACTHD and will need to bring that into the office. A number of currently unused credenzas/storage cabinets are available throughout the office. These can be allocated based on business unit needs and explored through the consultation process.

Special requirements

Any specific or additional needs, including work health and safety requirements, will continue to be managed by individual managers with support from People Strategy and Culture. Space will be provided to enable officers from People Strategy and Culture to be present in Bowes every day. This will facilitate greater contact and support with staff and managers.

Access to other ACT Government buildings and remote working

ACTHD staff are able to access hotdesks at the Civic Government Office block and increased access to other ACT Government hotdesk sites will occur throughout 2023. A small number of hotdesks are also available for booking at the HPS in Howard Florey Centenary House, Holder. This information is available on HealthHQ and will be updated as needed.

Future arrangements

A longer-term accommodation strategy will be developed however this will not be finalised for more extensive consultation until later in the year. This interim strategy provides up to three days back in the office.

Traffic arrangements and parking

We are aware that roadworks around the Woden area and some 'park and ride' locations are making it difficult for some staff to commute via bus and car. We acknowledge these temporary barriers, and once again, staff will be encouraged to discuss any impediments or concerns about an increased return to the office with their manager. I also appreciate the increased costs in parking over the past 18-24 months. However, these costs are beyond the control of all workplaces.

This consultation will provide staff with an opportunity to provide feedback on the proposal, make suggestions, identify issues and raise concerns. The consultation period will commence on 6 March 2023 and close on 17 March 2023. Staff will have the option of giving feedback on the plan anonymously through a survey on the intranet site. Following due consideration of the feedback received the new arrangements will be introduced as soon as possible.

The accommodation arrangements implemented will be reviewed by the executive team on a bi-monthly basis.

If you wish to provide feedback on the proposed accommodation plan please do so via email to HDHR@act.gov.au by close of business 17 March 2023.

Yours sincerely



Rebecca Cross
Director-General

6 March 2023