

From Universal Health Coverage to Universal Occupational Health Coverage

A global aspiration: protection of health at work for every worker, everywhere.

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Occupational Health Physician

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**The world is one family –
and every worker,
everywhere, deserves
protection of health
at work.**



*Human well-being is shared, interconnected,
and should not be limited by occupation,
geography, or circumstance.*



**If health coverage is intended
to be universal, should protection
of health at work not also move
toward universal coverage?**



The Missing Dimension: Health at Work

Work gives people income, identity, social connection, and purpose.
But work can also expose people to physical, chemical, biological, ergonomic,
psychosocial, and organisational hazards that can harm health and well-being.



1 Unequal access



Many workers in large organisations have more structured support, while informal, migrant, agricultural, domestic, temporary, and small-enterprise workers may have little or no access.

2 Missed prevention



Occupational exposures may go unrecognised, work-related disease may go undetected, and prevention opportunities may be missed.

3 Same hazard, different protection



Two workers with the same exposure may receive different protection depending on sector, organisation, or country.



No worker should be excluded from protection of health at work because of occupation, employment status, geography, income, or organisational size.



What Could Universal Occupational Health Coverage Mean?

A minimum level of occupational health protection for all workers, adapted to each setting.



Universal occupational health coverage should not be understood as requiring a specialist occupational health clinic for every worker. Rather, it means progressive provision of a minimum level of occupational health protection for all workers.

1



Recognition of workplace hazards

Identify and understand hazards in the workplace.

2



Access to basic occupational health advice

Provide timely, practical advice to workers.

3



Occupational history in routine healthcare

Include work history as part of routine care.

4



Early identification of work-related illness

Detect problems early to prevent progression.

5



Appropriate health surveillance

Monitor health where risks are significant.

6



Referral pathways for specialist assessment

Ensure timely access to specialist evaluation.

7



Support for safe return to work and accommodation

Facilitate recovery and sustainable work.

8



Effective systems for reporting and learning from occupational disease and injury

Capture data, learn lessons, drive improvement.

9



Preventive action to reduce harmful exposures before disease occurs

Act upstream to protect health and well-being.

Occupational Health Services Versus Occupational Health Protection



Services-focused view

Often centred on specialist occupational physicians and multidisciplinary occupational health teams.

VS



Protection-focused view

May be delivered through specialists, primary care, public health systems, labour inspection, employer initiatives, community health services, digital tools, or referral networks.

The goal should be common, but the pathway can differ.

Different Countries, Different Pathways

Universal occupational health protection requires inclusion, adaptability, and practical implementation.



Occupational health (OH) systems vary widely across the world.

Some countries have mature infrastructure and strong regulation; others have limited specialist capacity, large informal workforces, or services concentrated in major industries or urban centres.



A CONTINUUM OF APPROACHES

RESOURCE-RICH SETTINGS



Comprehensive
workplace
programmes



Specialist
OH services



Primary care
integration



Exposure
recognition



Referral and
reporting

RESOURCE-LIMITED SETTINGS

REACHING THE WORKERS MOST LIKELY TO BE LEFT BEHIND



Informal
workers



Migrant
workers



Agricultural
workers



Domestic
workers



Self-employed
individuals



Temporary
workers



Gig
workers



Workers in small
and micro-
enterprises



Which workers remain outside the system — and how can we reach them?



FROM EVIDENCE TO PRACTICAL PROTECTION

Research matters when it improves policy, workplace practice, clinical recognition, prevention, and the reduction of disease and injury. The goal is not perfect systems, but progress that reaches more workers, in more places, more effectively.



Policy



Workplace
practice



Clinical
recognition



Prevention



Less disease
& injury



WHY GLOBAL COLLABORATION MATTERS

Supply chains, migrant labour, new technologies, climate-related risks, demographic change, psychosocial hazards, and evolving employment models cross national boundaries. Solutions must be shared, not siloed.



THE IRIOSH PERSPECTIVE

IRIOSH contributes through research collaboration, educational initiatives, professional networking, international forums, and connecting evidence with practice — to support stronger, more inclusive occupational health for all.



A technically ideal intervention matters less if it cannot reach the workers who need it.

Events, Opportunities & How to Engage

Join IRIOSH in advancing safe, healthy, and productive workplaces worldwide.

FEATURED EVENT



IRIOSH Global Occupational Safety, Health and Worker Well-being Summit 2026



11 November 2026



Sands Expo & Convention Centre, Singapore



Registration is open via the summit page.



iriosh.org/summit-2026



UPCOMING HIGHLIGHT



Pre-Singapore – Global Webinar 2026



21 September 2026



11:00 AM (MYT / BNT)



Online



Free Global Participation

Webinar Topic:

Occupational Safety and Health as a Global Concern:
The Way Forward – A Canadian Perspective.

OPPORTUNITIES



Apply
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Submit
Original
Research



Call for Abstract
Presentation +
Poster
Presentation



Authors Guidelines –
Global Call for
Book Chapter 2026



Immediate
Press
Release



WHY ENGAGE WITH IRIOSH?



Research collaboration
Work with experts on evidence-based solutions.



Knowledge exchange
Access global insights, tools, and best practices.



Global networking
Connect with professionals, institutions,
and organizations worldwide.



Practical workplace impact
Translate ideas into actions that
make workplaces safer and healthier.



STAY CONNECTED

Be part of our global community.
Share, collaborate, and create
impact together for a safer,
healthier world.

