

LIGHTING THE WAY FOR AN ETHICAL, FAIR AND CONFLICT COMPETENT ORGANIZATION

Annual Report
2018-2019



OMBUDSMAN, INTEGRITY AND RESOLUTION OFFICE



Health
Canada

Santé
Canada

Canada 

Health Canada is the federal department responsible for helping the people of Canada maintain and improve their health. Health Canada is committed to improving the lives of all of Canada's people and to making this country's population among the healthiest in the world as measured by longevity, lifestyle and effective use of the public health care system.

Également disponible en français sous le titre :

Éclairer la voie vers une organisation éthique, juste et compétente en gestion des conflits:

Rapport annuel 2018-2019 du Bureau de l'ombudsman, de l'intégrité et de la résolution pour Santé Canada

To obtain additional information, please contact:

Health Canada

Address Locator 0900C2

Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9

Tel.: 613-957-2991

Toll free: 1-866-225-0709

Fax: 613-941-5366

TTY: 1-800-465-7735

E-mail: hc.publications-publications.sc@canada.ca

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Health, 2019

Publication date: September 2019

This publication may be reproduced for personal or internal use only without permission provided the source is fully acknowledged.

Pub.: 190339

Ombudsman, Integrity and Resolution Office

Phone

NCR: 613-948-7816

Toll-free: 1-888-490-2753

Email

hc.ombudsman.sc@canada.ca

Mail

Ground floor—Holland Cross

Tower B, Room 110-4

1600 Scott Street

Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter to the Deputy Minister	4
Vision, mission, principles	6
Who we are	7
What we do	8
How we work	10
Highlights of 2018-19	11
How we spent time with you in 2018-19	15
Wrongdoing: what you need to know	18
13 Psychosocial Factors	20
Why you should visit OIRO	21
How we work with our partners	22
How to contribute to a healthy workplace	23
Myths and facts	25
Ombudsman's closing reflections	26

Kristina Namiesniowski

President
Public Health Agency of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0K9



Karen Shepherd, Ombudsman

Dear President:

I am pleased to present the Ombudsman, Integrity and Resolution Office's (OIRO) 2018–2019 Annual Report.

The theme of this year's report, *Lighting the way for an ethical, fair and conflict competent organization*, is based on the lighthouse symbol that OIRO uses to promote its services. Just as a lighthouse guides people and helps them to navigate through rough waters, so too does OIRO. In the past year, we've helped employees at all levels deal with difficult workplace situations. And, like a lighthouse, we've acted as an early warning system for the Public Health Agency of Canada (Agency) as a whole, by identifying workplace issues and trends and providing recommendations on how they can be addressed.

I am proud of how OIRO's work over the past year has contributed to the overall health of the organization. During the 2018-2019 fiscal year, approximately 30% of Agency employees used at least one of the services that OIRO provides. These individualized services included consultations, coaching, mediation and facilitated discussions, and delivering training and awareness sessions. Throughout this report you'll find examples of the types of cases OIRO sees and how our services are linked to our public sector values. You'll also see some of the observations I've made in my role as Ombudsman.

It has now been three years since OIRO was established as an independent, confidential, impartial and informal place for employees to raise and discuss workplace issues. In the past year, our aim has been to encourage employees to come to us early for guidance, before a situation escalates and is difficult to manage. Moving forward, this will continue to be an area of focus.

In 2018-19, we took steps to make our Internal Disclosure Services more accessible to employees. We have listened to feedback from all levels of the organization and are developing a new online training course and suite of products so that employees have the tools they need for disclosing wrongdoing. OIRO looks forward to rolling these out in the coming months.

Since August 2018, I am pleased to have had opportunities to meet with you and other senior colleagues in my role as Ombudsman. This has allowed me to provide independent and impartial guidance related to the Department's work, responsibilities and priorities, including responding to the latest *Public Service Employee Survey* results and the *Safe Workspaces* report. One of the recommendations coming out of the *Safe Workspaces* report was for all federal departments and agencies to create an Ombuds-type function. Health Canada is among the leaders in this respect, and is regularly being called upon to provide guidance to others.

In 2019-20, OIRO looks forward to continuing to strengthen OIRO's relationships with departmental partners and bargaining agents to ensure that Health Canada is an ethical, fair and conflict competent organization. OIRO will also be engaging with its partners on the implementation of Bill C-65. This important legislation expands the employers' obligations under the *Canada Labour Code* to prevent and protect against violence and harassment. This will include providing employees with a sounding board, tools and helping them navigate the system as appropriate.

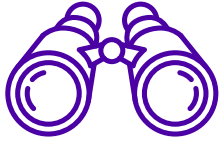
In closing, I am pleased to have had the opportunity to work this year with OIRO's team of dedicated professionals. I look forward to working with them again this year to ensure Health Canada has the support it needs to be a conflict competent organization.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'K. Shepherd', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Karen E. Shepherd
Ombudsman and Executive Director

VISION



**A HEALTH CANADA THAT IS ETHICAL,
FAIR AND CONFLICT COMPETENT.**

To be an impartial, confidential, independent resource where all employees can raise, discuss and address work-related issues through informal approaches; and

To be a communication channel that supports and promotes an ethical organizational culture.

MISSION



PRINCIPLES



CONFIDENTIALITY

Interactions with OIRO are confidential. The Office will neither disclose an individual's identity nor will it disclose identifiable information without the individual's consent.



INFORMALITY

OIRO's services are voluntary, guided by individuals' needs and can be initiated at any time. The informal approach used by the Office is complementary to the existing formal mechanism for grievance disputes or formal complaints within the Department.



INDEPENDENCE

OIRO reports to the Deputy Minister of Health Canada for administrative purposes, but operates independently of line and staff structures.



IMPARTIALITY

The Office advocates for fair and equitable organizational processes. It does not advocate for employees or for management.

WHO WE ARE

A lighthouse symbolizes the role that the Ombudsman, Integrity and Resolution Office (OIRO) plays within the organization.

Like a lighthouse, OIRO assists employees by:

- * lighting the path forward towards understanding and resolution;
- * helping them to navigate through the system; and
- * providing guidance and direction on resolving work-related issues.

OIRO also acts as an early warning system for issues of concern across the organization. By identifying root causes, patterns of concern and issues, OIRO can make recommendations to senior leaders about addressing workplace issues.

THE FIVE CORE PUBLIC SECTOR VALUES

When helping employees deal with difficult workplace situations, OIRO guides them according to the five core public sector values:

- * Respect for Democracy
- * Respect for People
- * Integrity
- * Stewardship
- * Excellence

These are values that all Government of Canada employees are expected to model in the work that they do and in the way that they behave.

OIRO uses these values to light the path towards a workplace culture of resolution that is anchored in values and ethics.



WHAT WE DO

OIRO is a safe place for employees at all levels, and across all regions, to raise and discuss workplace issues. Mandated by the *Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act* and the *Public Service Employment Act*, OIRO offers four services: an Ombudsman, Internal Disclosure, Informal Conflict Management and Values and Ethics.

OIRO's services are aimed at empowering individuals and fostering a culture of resolution that is anchored in public sector values.



OMBUDSMAN

An Ombudsman is an impartial person designated to assist in resolving workplace concerns raised by employees and management. The Ombudsman also identifies and reports systemic problems and makes recommendations on how they could be addressed.

INTERNAL DISCLOSURE

Internal Disclosure provides training, advice, and information on the legislated mechanism for disclosing wrongdoing, and on the protection of employees from reprisal under the *Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act*. They also conduct investigations on allegations of wrongdoing under the Act.



INFORMAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Informal Conflict Management provides voluntary services to prevent, manage, and resolve workplace conflicts. These services are complementary to formal processes and aim to find mutually agreeable solutions.

VALUES AND ETHICS

Values and Ethics provides informal advice to employees on ethical and workplace issues, as well as on the interpretation of *Health Canada's Values and Ethics Code*.



You can contact us in confidence by email at hc.ombudsman.sc@canada.ca or by phone at **613-948-7816** (National Capital Region) or **1-888-490-2753** (regions).
We will respond to you within two business days.

OIRO CAN

- discuss workplace-related issues informally and confidentially with employees at all levels;
- equip employees with the tools, information and resources they need to address issues themselves in a constructive way;
- explore options for constructively raising a workplace issue with the appropriate individual(s) or group(s);
- deliver coaching and training related to conflict prevention, informal conflict management and values and ethics;
- assist work units in identifying underlying issues and with developing strategies for creating a more effective and efficient team;
- assist employees in resolving workplace issues through facilitated discussions and/or mediations;
- help employees navigate the system to find the services they need;
- refer employees to alternative recourse and support mechanisms;
- provide information, informal advice and guidance to employees who are considering making a disclosure of wrongdoing under the *Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act* (PSDPA), and investigate allegations of wrongdoing under the Act;
- build awareness and provide education, information and informal recommendations on ethical issues, public sector values and *Health Canada's Values and Ethics Code*;
- provide upward feedback to senior management on trends and broad issues that are being observed;
- make recommendations to senior management on how to address potential systemic issues; and
- advocate for fair process.

OIRO CANNOT

- resolve issues for employees;
- take sides;
- act as an advocate for an employee;
- make disclosures of wrongdoing on behalf of employees;
- serve in any other organizational role that would compromise the impartiality of the Office;
- mandate policies or any other type of official documents;
- make binding decisions; or
- share confidential information with others without the consent of those involved.

HOW WE WORK

OIRO's staff are professionally trained to bring empathy, emotional intelligence and strong interpersonal skills to the services they provide to employees at all levels of the organization. They are also experts on policies and directives related to conflict resolution and ethical decision making.



INITIAL CONSULTATION

Each individual who comes to OIRO can expect service that is customized to their unique needs. An OIRO professional will listen to what an employee has to say and then link them to the information, tools, resources and services they need for dealing with their situation.



EARLY RESOLUTION

OIRO's goal is to help employees resolve workplace-related issues as early as possible, at the lowest appropriate level. Employees are encouraged to contact OIRO early, before a situation escalates.



REFERRALS

OIRO is not always the right channel to help an employee resolve an issue. After carefully assessing each unique situation, OIRO may refer an employee to other resources that are better placed to provide assistance.



QUESTIONS

Not sure where to go for help? OIRO professionals can answer general questions and guide employees in the right direction.



INVESTIGATION

In internal disclosure cases where there are allegations of wrongdoing under the *Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act*, it may be necessary for OIRO's Internal Disclosure Services to carry out an investigation.

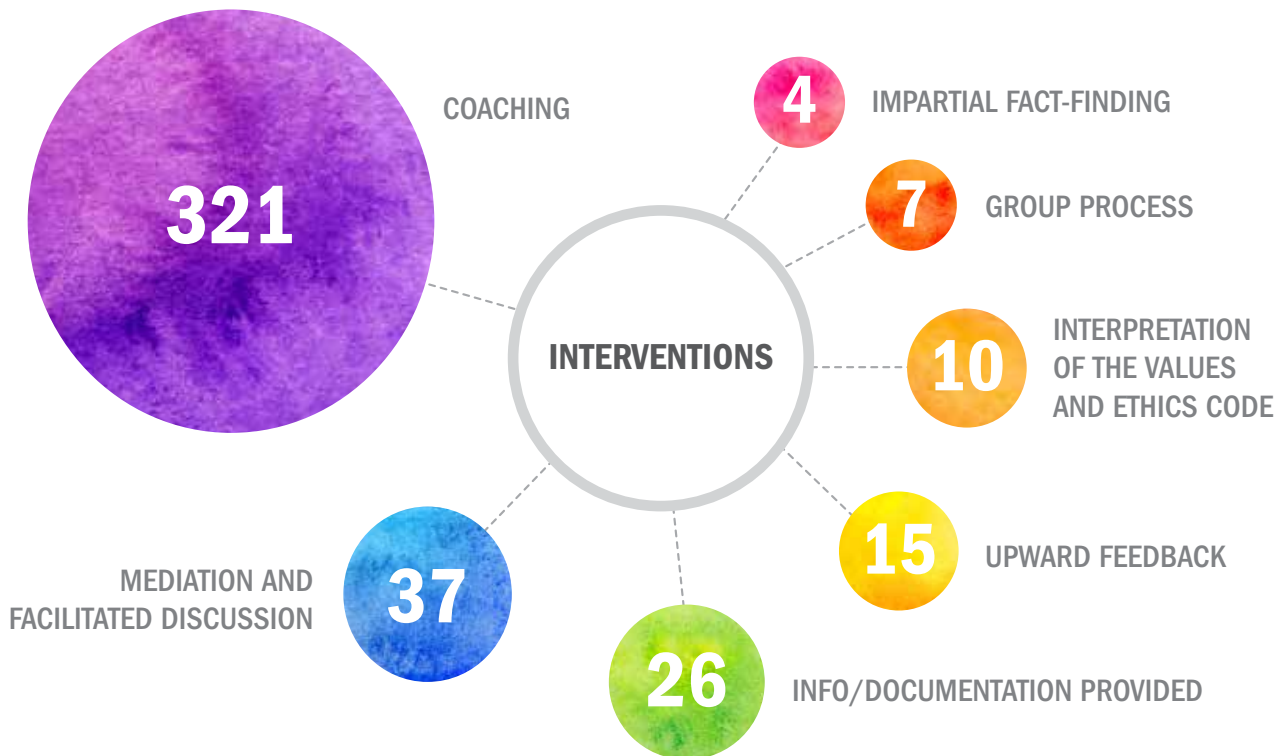


INTERVENTION

OIRO's services are designed to empower employees to address work-related problems themselves. In certain situations, however, OIRO may assist employees through interventions such as coaching and facilitated discussion with a third party.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2018–19

In 2018–19, OIRO provided a variety of services to employees at all levels across the country. Each client who came to OIRO received individualized service which, in many cases, involved speaking with more than one OIRO professional and more than one intervention. These services and how they benefit employees are explained in detail in the coming pages.



REPORTED CONFLICT



Of those who came to OIRO for help in resolving a workplace conflict, 25% reported being in conflict with a colleague, 34% reported being in conflict with a subordinate, and 41% reported being in conflict with a supervisor. In a year over year comparison, conflict with supervisors has been the most cited of the three conflict categories (see table below for this breakdown).

In 2018–19, OIRO observed a growing trend of employees seeking OIRO’s services to deal with conflicts with their supervisor or manager. OIRO is encouraged by this as it suggests that Health Canada is becoming a more conflict competent organization where employees at all levels are taking responsibility for constructively addressing workplace conflict.

REPORTED CONFLICT	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
Conflict with colleague	33%	27%	25%
Conflict with subordinate	28%	27%	34%
Conflict with supervisor	39%	46%	41%

TOP ISSUES

Harassment and incivility, breakdowns in communication, leadership/management style and performance management were among the top reasons that employees visited the Office. The vast majority of cases that OIRO received in 2018–19 involved more than one of these issues. All of these top themes have been consistently noted as trends over the last three fiscal years.

OBSERVATIONS

Issues related to working within a virtual team were observed in discussions with regional employees during 2018–19. Employees working in virtual teams commonly reported a loss of a sense of community, and feelings of isolation. Managing a team from a distance can present challenges in the areas of building and maintaining trust and effectively dealing with interpersonal conflicts.

Another issue that was raised with OIRO, by employees and bargaining agents, was related to fear of reprisal for bringing forward workplace issues. We’ve also heard that this is something that concerns managers who are striving to foster an environment in which employees feel safe in coming forward to discuss work-related problems.

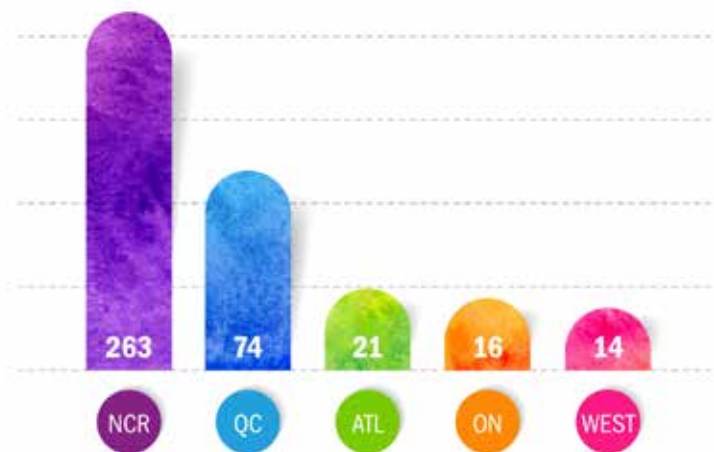
Performance management was an area of ongoing focus and concern. In 2018–19, employees and managers continued to look for training or coaching to help prepare for performance management discussions. Our hope is that this is an indication that employees at all levels are interested in having constructive dialogues about performance and setting expectations.

In 2019–20, the Ombudsman would like to explore these issues further with employees, managers and partners. Once she gains a better sense of what factors are at play in these situations, she will provide recommendations to senior leaders on how these issues could be addressed.

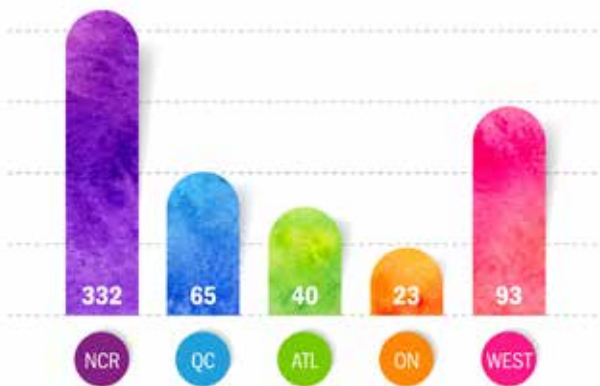
REGIONAL CASELOAD

Approximately 67% of the cases that OIRO worked on in 2018–19 were in the National Capital Region and 33% were from other regions. The total number of cases were down from previous years. One possible explanation for the reduction in the number of cases is the departure of more than 2,300 First Nations and Inuit Health Branch employees from Health Canada in 2018.

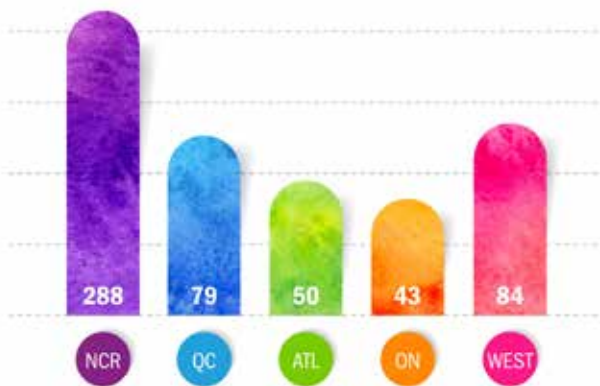
In 2018–19, the Ombudsman visited a number of regional offices across the country to speak with employees individually and in groups. As well, OIRO professionals, including those stationed in Eastern and Western regions traveled 14 times to provide in-person services to regional employees. When there was an immediate need for Ombudsman and other OIRO services in the regions, one-to-one telephone sessions were organized to ensure that all employees had access to the help they needed.



CASELOAD BY REGION 2018–19



CASELOAD BY REGION 2017–18



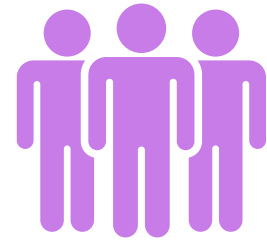
CASELOAD BY REGION 2016–17

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2018-19



382
CASES
RECEIVED

694
CLIENTS
SERVED



TOP 5 ISSUES [!]

HARASSMENT
AND INCIVILITY



COMMUNICATION
BREAKDOWN



LEADERSHIP/
MANAGEMENT STYLE



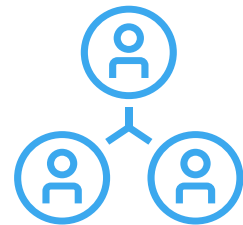
PERFORMANCE
MANAGEMENT



UNHEALTHY
WORKPLACE CLIMATE



321
COACHING
SESSIONS
DELIVERED



37
FACILITATED
DISCUSSIONS/
MEDIATIONS

**TOP INTERVENTION
METHOD USED**



COACHING

HOW WE SPENT TIME WITH YOU IN 2018–19

CONSULTATION

All visits to OIRO begin with an initial consultation. During the consultation, we listen to the employee's story and help them to explore all options for resolving their situation. When discussing options, OIRO will assist them in weighing the pros and cons based on the specific situation and help employees navigate a way forward.

A consultation may be the first step in a longer intervention with OIRO, or it may be a one-time meeting. Sometimes just speaking to an OIRO professional will give an employee a clear picture of how to best resolve a situation.

COACHING

Coaching is used to help employees, on a one-on-one basis, develop or enhance their interpersonal skills. It is a voluntary, confidential service that focuses on each individual's goals.

Coaching can be helpful in many different situations, including in circumstances where a communications breakdown has occurred; an employee needs help preparing for a difficult conversation; and when an employee wants to take measures to improve working relationships. Coaching can also be useful when an individual would like to understand their triggers and patterns of behaviour to develop strategies for handling situations differently in the future.

CASE STUDY

NIPPING A CONFLICT IN THE BUD

Note: the case study below is fictional but based on components from different cases.

A supervisor has been experiencing a very difficult time in her work environment. She is new to the role and has felt belittled by one of the employees on her team recently. When the employee questions her management skills and role in the organization in a loud and angry tone in front of the entire team, she decides enough is enough.

The supervisor makes an appointment with OIRO to figure out what she can do to change this situation. She has a consultation to explore her options. After talking it through, she realizes that, as a first crucial step, she needs to let the employee know the negative impact her words and tone have had on her personally. After receiving coaching, she is clear about:

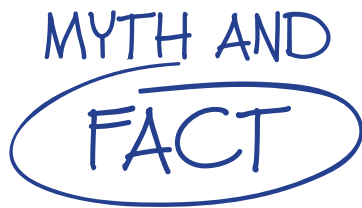
- how she would like to invite the employee to have a conversation;
 - how to state what her intention is succinctly and powerfully;
 - what the main points are she would like to express; and
 - key questions and requests she would like to make.
-

FACILITATED DISCUSSION AND MEDIATION

Challenging workplace situations come in many different shapes, sizes and forms. Sometimes the individuals involved in the situation benefit from the assistance of an impartial facilitator to help ensure a fruitful conversation. In both a facilitated discussion and mediation, the facilitator is responsible for guiding the conversation, while the participants determine the content of the discussions. Facilitated discussion and mediation both provide a process of collaborative problem-solving in which an impartial third party assists participants in working together to identify their respective interests, explore options and seek mutually agreeable solutions.

Mediation is a more structured process used in cases where a conflict has escalated. Successful mediations generally result in a written agreement or settlement on how those involved will resolve a dispute, a grievance or complaint.

The most common reason that employees move forward with a facilitated discussion or mediation through OIRO is to address perceived harassment. There are often other elements and issues involved, such as leadership style, conflict, communication and trust.



MYTH: Facilitated discussion and mediation related to harassment are used to determine right and wrong.

FACT: Facilitated discussion and mediation are not about determining who was right or wrong or whether or not harassment has occurred. The focus of these discussions is on the impact of the action and on understanding the perspectives of others. The overall goal is for the parties involved to work together so that future interactions can be improved, and to prevent the situation from escalating or repeating.

GROUP INTERVENTION PROCESS

A group intervention is a structured process that involves a facilitator guiding a group in identifying its issues and establishing an action plan to reach a desired outcome. This type of service can be used when a group is affected by conflict and needs to address interpersonal and communication issues. The focus of group intervention is on getting people back to talking with each other so that they can move on to address substantive issues. For the process to be effective, group members need to be committed to actively and wholeheartedly participating and creating positive results.

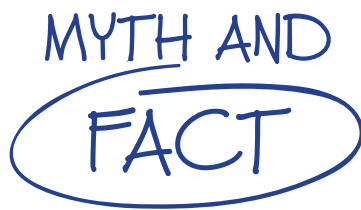
The best people to find the best solutions are the people who are directly involved in the situation. A group process harnesses the wisdom of the team to come up with options to move forward.



FACT-FINDING AND UPWARD FEEDBACK

One of OIRO's functions is to identify trends that may have a negative impact on the health of employees and the organization, so that the Ombudsman can make recommendations to decision-makers with the authority to act. OIRO does this through fact-finding and tracking information on workplace-related issues. This work is done while protecting the anonymity of individuals involved, and striving to understand the situation from as many angles as possible. OIRO further engages with partners as necessary and follows up in a timely manner to verify that the situation is improving.

In 2019–20, while continuing to protect the confidentiality of individuals, OIRO will be endeavouring to provide more detailed, timely and meaningful information to the organization about systemic issues. By examining trends, the Ombudsman can better report on issues related to organizational health.



MYTH: When a concern is raised on my behalf, the Ombudsman will report back about her findings and provide information about who is at fault.

FACT: When situations are raised by the Ombudsman, it is with the aim of restoring a healthy and productive workplace, not with laying blame. As such, reporting back may not be appropriate. While this may be frustrating to some people, it is important to understand the mandate of the Office is to help improve the overall workplace, while protecting confidentiality.

TRAINING/AWARENESS SESSIONS

Throughout the year, OIRO offered a variety of training and awareness sessions to employees in the areas of conflict management, values and ethics, and the internal disclosure of wrongdoing.

OIRO offers the following courses **free of charge** to employees:

- ◆ Collaboration to Manage Conflict and Work Better Together
- ◆ Communication to Prevent Conflict
- ◆ Effective Coaching Skills for Managers and Aspiring Managers
- ◆ Flexing your Coaching Muscles
- ◆ Values and Ethics in the Workplace for Employees
- ◆ Values and Ethics in the Workplace for Managers
- ◆ Whistleblowing or Quiet Advocacy?

Customized workshops are also arranged for teams and groups on request.

In 2018–19, OIRO delivered training sessions to 716 Health Canada employees and managers on values and ethics in the workplace. The public sector values are embedded in an employee's day to day activities, in the decisions they make and the way they carry themselves at work. These values also guide employees when they are faced with an ethical dilemma.

WRONGDOING: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The *Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act* (PSDPA) defines wrongdoing as:

- ◆ a contravention of any Act of Parliament or of the legislature of a province, or of any regulations made under any such Act;
- ◆ a misuse of public funds or a public asset;
- ◆ a gross mismanagement;
- ◆ an act or omission that creates a substantial and specific danger to the life, health and safety of persons, or to the environment;
- ◆ a serious breach of a code of conduct; and/or
- ◆ knowingly directing or counselling a person to commit a wrongdoing.

If you are aware of wrongdoing, it is important that you report it to someone who is in a position to do something about it. For more information, contact Internal Disclosure Services (IDS) by email at hc.ids-sdi.sc@canada.ca or by phone at 613-941-2028 or toll-free at 1-866-299-9114.

Under the PSDPA, the confidentiality of information obtained during a disclosure process is safeguarded, including the identity of disclosers, witnesses and alleged wrongdoers.

INTERNAL DISCLOSURES AT HEALTH CANADA IN 2018-19

In 2018-19, IDS received 11 new allegations of wrongdoing under the PSDPA, including three resulting from a disclosure made in another public sector organization involving Health Canada employees. All of the disclosures were acted upon, without the need for a formal investigation. Eight of the 11 disclosures were resolved informally or referred to a more appropriate recourse mechanism. Three disclosures have carried over into 2019-20.

DISCLOSURES RECEIVED BY TYPE UNDER THE PSDPA

Violation of any law or regulations	2
Misuse of public funds/assets	2
Gross mismanagement	3
Danger to human health or environment	0
Serious breach of a code of conduct	4
Directing or counselling a person to commit an act of wrongdoing as defined above	0
Total	11

CASE STUDY

USE OF GOVERNMENT EQUIPMENT AND TIME FOR PERSONAL REASONS

Note: the case study below is fictional.

An employee suspects that his colleague is using government equipment for personal reasons during office hours. Outside of work, the colleague in question is a popular blogger who often receives payments from companies to write reviews of their products and services. The employee has noticed that his colleague's blog is often up on her computer screen during work hours. While he's not certain, he suspects that she spends several hours each day writing blog posts when she should be working on her files. The employee has also overheard his colleague having conversations on her work cell phone about the rates she charges for writing reviews on her blog. In reading her blog, he has noticed that a review of a holiday resort in Florida was posted on a day that she called in sick. He also suspects that she is using the mail room and Government of Canada envelopes to ship invoices to her clients.

The employee discloses information about the suspected wrongdoing to his immediate supervisor who, in turn, contacts Health Canada's Internal Disclosure Services (IDS) for assistance. After gathering more information, IDS finds that the reported misconduct meets the definition of wrongdoing (a misuse of public funds or a public asset; a serious breach of a code of conduct) under the *Public Service Disclosure Protection Act*. The Departmental Senior Integrity Officer decides to move forward with a formal investigation into the alleged wrongdoing.

MYTH AND FACT

MYTH: I will be punished for coming forward with an allegation of wrongdoing.

FACT: The PSDPA has provisions to protect against reprisal. Health Canada employees can make a protected disclosure under the Act through one of the following channels: their immediate supervisor; the Senior Integrity Officer (SIO) for Health Canada; or the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada. The SIO for Health Canada is also the Ombudsman and Executive Director of OIRO.

13 PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

One of the ways that Health Canada is promoting a safe and positive work environment for all employees is through our implementation of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard). Championed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the Standard consists of the 13 factors that any organization requires to create a healthy and effective workplace:

- * Organizational Culture
- * Psychological and Social Support
- * Clear Leadership and Expectations
- * Civility and Respect
- * Psychological Demands
- * Growth and Development
- * Recognition and Reward
- * Involvement and Influence
- * Workload Management
- * Engagement
- * Balance
- * Psychological Protection
- * Protection of Physical Safety

OIRO is committed to helping the Department implement the Standard by supporting the psychological health and wellbeing of employees who are dealing with difficult workplace situations. The issues that OIRO assists with are categorized according to these 13 factors.

CASE STUDY

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD

Note: the case study below is fictional.

A new Health Canada employee who is active on social media is wondering what the rules are with respect to expressing her political opinions on Facebook and Twitter around the upcoming federal election. She calls OIRO to get more information. It is explained to her that, while every individual has their own beliefs and opinions, public servants must remain impartial and adhere to the *Values and Ethics Code*—even outside of work. She is advised not to make public comments against Government of Canada programs, policies, acts or regulations and to add the disclaimer “opinions are my own” to her personal social media profile.



WHY YOU SHOULD VISIT OIRO

One of the key principles of conflict resolution is dealing with issues sooner rather than later. This notion is important to preserve relationships, to prevent conflict from escalating and to minimize stress.

OIRO would like to assist employees in building their competence in preventing and managing conflict, while harnessing the beneficial elements of workplace conflict.

While early intervention is often best, no matter where an employee is in the process of dealing with a workplace situation, they can come to OIRO for the assistance they need, either within or outside of our office.

Employees should also consider visiting OIRO if they have questions related to *Health Canada's Values and Ethics Code* or wrongdoing under the *Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act*, or are in need of training related to our service areas.

No matter where you are in the process of dealing with a workplace issue, it's never too late to contact OIRO for assistance.

CASE STUDY

OMBUDSMAN FACT-FINDING AND UPWARD FEEDBACK

Note: the case study below is fictional.

A supervisor from a branch that is in the midst of transition comes to OIRO for support and to raise concerns. The Ombudsman hears several common elements between this case and others, including a lack of understanding by Branch employees about the roles and layers of management. The Ombudsman has also noted that new managers are feeling unequipped for their roles, and that negative reactions and outbursts are becoming common in the workplace. The Ombudsman decides to schedule a one-on-one meeting with the Assistant Deputy Minister to see what actions are being taken to manage the transition, and to determine if senior management is aware of the negative experiences that individuals are having during this time of change.



HOW WE WORK WITH OUR PARTNERS

Throughout 2018–19, OIRO worked collaboratively with a number of internal and external partners, including the Respect in the Workplace Office, Labour Relations, Workplace Wellness and Workforce Development, the Centre for People Management Excellence, bargaining agents and other federal departments and agencies. In keeping with our guiding principles of independence, impartiality, confidentiality and informality, we:

- * participated in consultations around the implementation of Bill C-65;
- * met regularly with interdepartmental committees linked to our service areas;
- * worked with a number of communities of practice;
- * shared best practices and lessons learned with internal and external stakeholders;
- * delivered presentations on OIRO's services at employee orientation sessions, meetings and events;
- * tracked how we collaborated with our partners to better serve clients and the organization;
- * provided referrals to visitors on alternate internal and external resolution mechanisms; and
- * committed to meeting with bargaining agents on a quarterly basis.

Health Canada's Ombudsman, Karen Shepherd, is a member of the Interdepartmental Committee of Organizational Ombudsmen. Engaging with other ombudsman offices allows the community to learn from each other and share best practices.

"We really enjoy working with the conflict resolution practitioners from OIRO and appreciate how their holistic approach to workplace conflict respects both the well-being of the employee and the well-being of the workplace environment as well."

—Respect in the Workplace Office

"Labour Relations and Occupational Health and Safety sought the assistance of OIRO to resolve a difficult complaint during the summer of 2018. The facilitated discussion resulted in the resolution of the complaint, and a positive outcome for the parties involved. We would seek the services of the OIRO regarding other disputes in the future."

—Labour Relations

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO A HEALTHY WORKPLACE

All employees have a shared responsibility for contributing to a healthy workplace. Here are some tips to follow for creating a positive work environment:

- ◆ Be accountable for your own contributions towards creating a positive workplace.
- ◆ Through your words and actions, always uphold the core public sector values.
- ◆ When faced with complex or sensitive workplace situations, make use of organizational tools and supports. If you aren't sure what resources are available to you, contact OIRO for guidance.
- ◆ Openly communicate and have meaningful conversations with staff and colleagues.
- ◆ If you are a manager, openly discuss how your team deals with conflict. If team dynamics are causing workplace issues, consult OIRO for assistance.

BEST PRACTICES

Building better “virtual” relationships

Many employees work on “virtual” teams and do not physically work in the same location as their colleagues, which can cause employees to feel isolated and without a sense of community. Here are some tips for building relationships with your virtual colleagues, published on MySource by the Regulatory Operations and Enforcement Branch:

- ◆ Schedule one-on-one ‘virtual coffees’ and ‘virtual lunches’.
- ◆ Schedule regular one-on-one discussions with your direct reports by phone or WebEx.
- ◆ Connect throughout the day to say hello or to ask a quick question using Instant Messaging (Sametime), the phone or WebEx—rather than relying on email only.
- ◆ Build in a few minutes of social time into all interactions.
- ◆ Schedule face-to-face meetings when possible.

Supporting employee performance

One of the ways managers can contribute to a healthy workplace is through providing ongoing feedback, training and support to employees throughout the year. In doing so, managers can help employees to successfully meet their performance objectives.



OMBUDSMAN, INTEGRITY AND RESOLUTION OFFICE

1600 Scott Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

OIRO's Prescription for Managing Conflict

- Develop habits of mind that foster growth and self-awareness
 - Listen between the lines of what people are and are not saying
 - Treat others the way they would like to be treated
 - Breathe through your own reactions—count to 10
 - Be accountable for your own actions
 - Get coached on how to address conflict if you are stuck
- Be mindful and make conscious choices
 - Engage in conversation when conflicts arise
 - Address emerging conflicts before they become complex
 - Make time for dealing with conflict


A regular commitment and affirmation of these concepts will ensure that they are truly realized and lived within the workplace.

Signature: _____




MYTHS AND FACTS

 **MYTH:** I should only speak to OIRO as a last resort.

 **FACT:** When faced with a workplace issue, you should speak to OIRO early. OIRO professionals can assist employees at all levels to identify issues, explore options for resolution and to navigate the system.


 **MYTH:** All conflicts are bad and should be avoided.

 **FACT:** Conflict is not inherently good or bad—it is merely a perceived difference between what is important to one person and what is important to someone else. What complicates conflict is what we do (or do not do) with it. Unmanaged conflict can lead to harmed relationships, diminished productivity and morale, and can negatively impact our physical and mental health. When handled constructively, however, conflict can provide an opportunity for creativity, connection, improvement and a deeper understanding of ourselves and others.

 **MYTH:** I will be billed for accessing OIRO's services.

 **FACT:** All of OIRO's services are free of charge.

 **MYTH:** My manager will find out if I seek assistance from OIRO

 **FACT:** Interactions with OIRO are confidential. The Office will not disclose your identity or any information that could identify you without your consent.



OMBUDSMAN'S CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Throughout 2018–19, OIRO continued to play a vital role within the organization as an impartial, confidential, independent and informal resource for all employees. Like a lighthouse, my Office acted as a **safe place** for employees; provided **guidance** and **direction** to employees on resolving work-related issues; helped them to **navigate through the system**; acted as an **early warning system** for systemic issues; and **lit a path forward** toward understanding and resolution.

Looking ahead, OIRO is committed to:

- ◆ continuously providing professional quality services to clients;
- ◆ working to reduce financial and human costs by helping to resolve conflicts;
- ◆ improving our data collection and reporting methodology to provide early warning to senior leaders about new and potentially disruptive problems in the organization;
- ◆ working in partnership with additional support services, such as bargaining agents, human resources, and employment equity groups; and
- ◆ building trust and fostering an ethical, values-driven work environment.

My Office will also further explore trends we are observing and work with our partners to identify possible recommendations and solutions. As outlined in the Highlight of 2018–19 section, OIRO will focus on issues related to managing virtual teams, fear of reprisal and performance management.

In carrying out these activities, my goal for OIRO is to contribute to a healthy and conflict competent workplace.

OIRO is able to conduct evidence-based research on workplace-related issues and provide recommendations on ways they could be addressed.

“After the workshop, I can see how much our daily job involves conflict management.”

—Workshop participant

“Please accept our sincere appreciation for the outstanding presentation you gave at our all-staff meeting. It was very interesting to learn more and understand values and ethics in the workplace.”

—All-staff organizer

“I received a copy of your toolkit in preparation for a difficult discussion. I read it from page to page and found it very useful. While many of the topics were a review of common-sense approaches, it was so good to have it all laid out together especially at a time where a conflict needed to be resolved... I highly recommend using the tools described in the toolkit and the services of OIRO in a conflict situation.”

—Coaching client



OMBUDSMAN, INTEGRITY AND RESOLUTION OFFICE