FWA Implementation in the
Healthcare Sector

Trends, Learnings and Recommended Strategies

Produced by:

Tripartite Alliance for
Fair & Progressive Employment Practices

tafep.sg

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have rapidly gained popularity in recent years, with more organisations recognising the value of supporting a flexible work culture where employees have autonomy over their time and place of work and can effectively manage their careers and personal lives - forming a more motivated, engaged and committed workforce overall.

FWAs are known to contribute to talent attraction and retention, increased productivity, and improved manpower deployment. In a locally commissioned study by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP), organisations that offered FWAs observed the following positive results from employees:

85% were motivated to return to their companies after a career break.

83% were attracted to join the organisation.

81% would recommend their company as a place of work to friends/relatives.

70% were motivated to go above and beyond at work.

Organisations with positive work-life practices were also found to have higher talent attraction as well as lower attrition, absenteeism and healthcare costs as compared to the national average.

As more employers consider how to successfully adopt FWAs, it is important to recognise the sector-specific challenges they will need to address, as well as the strengths they can leverage for the sustainable implementation of flexible work options.
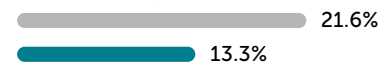
BENCHMARK FIGURES
*N is based on the number of companies who have, and are able to provide figures

Annual Unfilled Positions (%) | N = 23
33.3%
6.0%

Annual Resignations (%) | N = 25
21.6%
13.3%

Absenteeism & Sick Leave (Days/employee) | N = 24
3.70
3.59

Healthcare Cost/employee ($) | N = 25
$946.00
$844.40

● Singapore Benchmark 2016　● Average of Participating Companies 2016

TAFEP has commissioned aAdvantage Consulting to develop modular sector-specific resources on the implementation of FWAs; to understand the work-life landscape and considerations for individual sectors, as well as identify sectoral success stories and best practices that will help employers to accelerate the flexible working culture in their own organisations.

This module focuses on the healthcare sector and will provide pertinent answers to these common questions from employers:

- How have key sectoral trends affected FWA adoption for the healthcare sector? Are FWAs better suited to certain roles than others?

- What are the challenges to FWA implementation for the sector?

- What are the best practices and proven solutions from other progressive employers in the sector?

Through insights gleaned through research and interviews within the sector, this resource aims to help employers gain a better understanding of the current state of FWAs in the healthcare sector and how to implement them effectively and sustainably in their own organisations.

KEY TRENDS SHAPING FLEXIBLE WORK IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR

Work trends in Singapore's healthcare sector have been largely influenced by the on-going manpower shortage and demand especially for roles in Allied Health and Nursing. According to SkillsFuture Singapore, Healthcare is among the largest and fastest growing sectors in Singapore. An ageing population, changing disease patterns and a growing chronic disease burden is fuelling strong demand for medical practitioners as well as healthcare administrators.

Although healthcare is largely seen as a sector which interacts with patients face-to-face, a growing trend of applying technology to transform operations has been observed.   Pre-pandemic, there was interest and innovation to employ AI and the internet of medical things (IoMT) for real-time, continuous, and remote monitoring of patients. During the pandemic, many healthcare providers pivoted to offering telemedicine solutions to ensure accessibility to clinical services for patients unable to visit hospitals or clinics frequently.
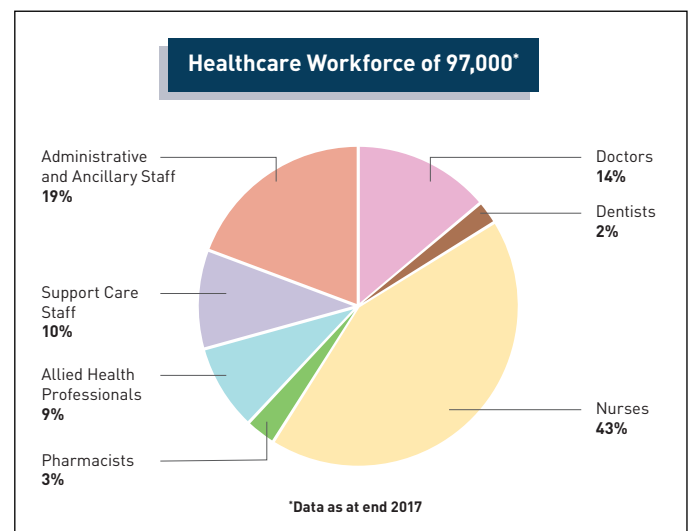
The trend of digital adoption is observed to continue post-pandemic, and continue to transform processes, job roles and services, and also shape the way healthcare professionals interact with colleagues, patients and their families.   There are also opportunities for the sector to consider how job roles, such as those of frontliners, can be executed more efficiently by leveraging on technology as well as flexible work arrangements (FWAs) in service delivery.

ACHIEVING FLEXIBILITY ACROSS JOB ROLES

The local healthcare landscape is supported by an estimated 97,000-strong workforce, spanning various roles such as nurses, doctors, administrative staff, allied health professionals, ancillary staff, support care staff, pharmacists and dentists.

Healthcare job roles can be broadly categorised as customer-facing and back-end corporate support roles.

This range of roles can be found in all three sub-sectors: Primary Care comprising polyclinics, general practitioners and dental clinics, Acute Care comprising the hospitals, and Community Care, consisting of community hospitals, nursing homes, day care centres and home care providers. Depending on the services, the Acute Care and Community Care sectors typically operate 24/7.

Healthcare Workforce of 97,000*

- Doctors **14%**
- Dentists **2%**
- Nurses **43%**
- Pharmacists **3%**
- Allied Health Professionals **9%**
- Support Care Staff **10%**
- Administrative and Ancillary Staff **19%**

*Data as at end 2017

Source: SkillsFuture Singapore

Healthcare job roles can be broadly categorised as customer-facing and back-end corporate support roles.

This range of roles can be found in all three sub-sectors: Primary Care comprising polyclinics, general practitioners and dental clinics, Acute Care comprising the hospitals, and Community Care, consisting of community hospitals, nursing homes, day care centres and home care providers. Depending on the services, the Acute Care and Community Care sectors typically operate 24/7.

Job Role
Customer Facing

Description
Involves various degrees of interaction with customers

Examples
- Health Professionals (e.g. Doctors, Dentists, Nurses)
- Allied Health Professionals (e.g., Audiologist, Diagnostic Radiographer, Dietitian, Medical Social Worker, Medical Technologist, Occupational Therapist, Orthoptist, Physiotherapist, Podiatrist, Prosthetist & Orthotist, Clinical Psychologist, Radiation Therapist, Respiratory Therapist, Speech Therapist)
- Healthcare Support (e.g., Healthcare Assistant, Basic Care Assistant, Nursing Aide, Therapy Assistant, Therapy Support Associate)
- Frontline Operations (e.g., Patient Service Associate, Patient Service Executive, Patient Service Supervisor, Pharmacy Technician, Pharmacy Technician Executive)

Job Role
Back-end Corporate Support

Description
Provides support for the internal running of the organisation

Examples
Human Resource, Training & Education, Marketing, IT, Procurement

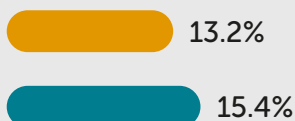# A SNAPSHOT OF FWA IMPLEMENTATION IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR

Part-Time

73.7%

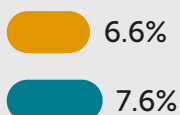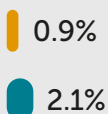48.3%

Staggered Hours

72.7%

68.1%

Tele-Working

50.5%

56.5%

Job Sharing

13.2%

15.4%

Compressed Work Week

6.6%

7.6%

Home Working

0.9%

2.1%

● Healthcare   ● Overall

Source: Condition of Employment 2021, Ministry of Manpower,
https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Employment-Conditions-Tables2021.aspx

From the Ministry of Manpower's Conditions of Employment 2021 report, 92.5% of organisations in the Health and Social Services sector offer at least one type of FWA. This is at similar levels to overall FWA adoption across the public and private sectors (90.5%).

Part-time work and Flexi-time/Staggered Hours continue to be the most popular FWAs in Healthcare and are implemented more widely than in the average public and private sector organisations. This is also reflected in the anecdotal evidence from interviews with organisations in the Acute and Community Care sub-sectors, where nursing roles, which comprise 43% of the healthcare workforce, have shift patterns and a significant proportion of these employees are on a part-time work arrangement.

In particular, part-time work options are now part of the overall talent attraction and retention strategy and has helped to alleviate the sector's manpower supply shortage. From interviews, there is an indication that employers also became more open to this FWA due to the additional manpower requirements of the pandemic.

Employers in the healthcare sector could continue extending these following FWA options post-Covid:

FLEXI-PLACE

Telecommuting may still be adopted for backend corporate roles and is typically viewed as an option for roles that have little or no direct interface with internal and/or external customers, or those that do not require access to equipment on-site. However, with the deployment of technology, employers can explore ways in which these interfaces can still be maintained, as well as provide remote access to necessary equipment. More organisations are formalising this option to specify the number of days per week or month that employees can opt to work remotely.

This is in response to requests from employees to continue in a hybrid working arrangement to enjoy the flexibility that they had in the pandemic period. Supervisors across various sectors are generally open to this option, especially when productivity is not compromised. However, many organisations have also devised and communicated clear guidelines and protocols on work from home scenarios, to ensure employees know how to utilise this with maximum efficiency.

FLEXI-LOAD

Job sharing may be adopted on a regular and structured basis, even as part-time work becomes more prevalent. A redesigned job can have employees having shared or divided responsibilities, or a combination of both. While the implementation of Job Sharing in the sector has increased from 3% to 13.2% from 2018 to 2021, there is still room to explore how it can be implemented to support transformation efforts and be a factor in organisations' talent attraction and retention strategies.

Interviews in the sector have provided some examples of how job sharing is implemented. One organisation in the community care sector redesigned job roles and leveraged freelancers as drivers in order to support the transport of patients for medical appointments. Another hospital with a flexible workforce engaged freelance nurses to complement their full-time nursing workforce during peak operational periods.

FLEXI-TIME

Compressed work schedules or Longer Shift Patterns on Shorter Work Week may be suitable for those who support 24 hr operations. With this flex option, employees may work on 12-hour shifts and take more rest days to ensure sufficient down time. Traditionally, such work patterns are common in the manufacturing, engineering & hospitality sectors and could be adapted for this sector. Implementation may be based on staff request as concerns would be how the longer hours would impact employee health and quality of work.

This FWA is garnering slightly more interest, with implementation at 6.6% in 2021 compared to 3.4% in 2018. From interviews, various organisations indicate that this has been implemented for some nursing and pharmacy roles. One hospital successfully piloted the compressed work week FWA for a team of nursing staff, in response to feedback from the ground. The organisation is now considering how to scale this scheme across various nursing roles.

Another organisation in the community care sector also shared that it implements longer shift patterns with more rest days. This option is likely to continue being popular as those with such preferences. Providing various shift options to suit different staff needs will likely be more popular.

Employers will need to review the existing job roles and determine the suitability of the different FWAs for each role.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The Covid-19 global pandemic held unique challenges and stressors for the healthcare sector which was at the frontlines in containing and managing the situation. Safe distancing measures and other pandemic management protocols significantly altered work processes. Employees faced an increase in workload, and some, including those in back-end roles, had to temporarily take on new frontline roles.

An estimated 50% of the job roles in Healthcare are in nursing (about 40%) and care support (about 10%), which were commonly characterised by longer working hours, limited local talent supply, and challenges in talent retention. As this group provided essential services during the peak of the pandemic, employers in this sector needed to urgently consider ways to alleviate stress, protect employee well-being and also ensure retention of these employees. FWAs were introduced and extended to a wider group: part-time work and flexible shift patterns enabled some organisations to retain staff, whilst others opted to hire temporary staff to supplement the permanent workforce during peak periods. This flexibility enabled healthcare organisations to meet the operational requirements especially for the Acute care sector.

From interviews, it was observed that even for organisations which had an FWA policy in place, utilisation rates were low pre-pandemic, but were accelerated during the Covid-19 situation. This is also reflected in statistics from MOM showed that adoption of tele-working increased from 10% in 2018 to 50% in 2021 in the wider Healthcare and Social Services sector.

Employees in corporate back-end roles, such as Human Resource, Finance and IT, were observed to quickly adapt to the pandemic through hybrid working or work-from-home arrangements, as they had the appropriate infrastructure setup, especially shifting from in-person to virtual video communication platforms such as MS Teams and Zoom between teams.

Some organisations have also taken the opportunity to formalise their FWA policies, particularly policies and guidelines on remote working (work-from-home). These guidelines include various protocols and expectations of staff including the code of conduct when working remotely and during virtual meetings. This clear communication of expectations is key to ensuring the sustainability of FWAs for the long term.

KEY LEARNINGS, RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND SECTORAL BEST PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE FWA IMPLEMENTATION

Even as the implementation of FWAs has accelerated in recent years within the Healthcare sector, some organisations have adapted more effectively to new ways of working. These are the lessons and best practices gleaned from the sector.

1 KEY LEARNING: SENIOR MANAGEMENT ALIGNMENT & BUY-IN IS CRUCIAL FOR CONSISTENT FWA IMPLEMENTATION.

Having a high level of support from the senior management ensures efficient FWA implementation. In larger organisations within the healthcare sector, co-ordination and alignment amongst the senior leaders was critical in ensuring the appropriate commitment of resources, and to speedily implement FWAs across the organisation.

BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR

- An established structure was created for group level HR leaders to facilitate alignment and consistent implementation of FWA policies across the organisation.

- Senior Leaders are personally involved in communicating the business case and benefits of FWAs through a variety of platforms (e.g., virtual townhalls, emails, meetings).

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- The desired goals of FWA implementation should be discussed at the highest level in the organisation by Senior Leaders, and not just driven by HR, to ensure alignment and consistent implementation across the organisation.

- Appointment of a Senior Leader in the organisation as an advocate of flexibility and work-life harmony, as an important signal that FWAs are a priority for the leadership team. These leaders will need to:

  — Be visible and active role models to build trust in the system, by practicing the articulated FWA guidelines and policies.

  — Regularly communicate the organisation's beliefs on FWAs to direct reports and teams.

2 KEY LEARNING: OFFERING DIFFERENT TYPES OF FWAS CAN BOOST AN STRATEGY FOR TALENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION.

Implementing FWAs offers a valuable opportunity to retain experienced healthcare professionals (especially those in nursing and care support roles), who may otherwise leave the sector due to work stress and longer working hours. Beyond the commonly known part-time work, greater flexibility in the work/shift patterns and hybrid work arrangements are also sought after.

However, clear guidelines need to be established in the initial implementation period until new cultural norms are established to ensure seamless implementation and effective use of these FWAs.

BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Some organisations implement less common forms of flexible work to successfully attract talent. These include:
  — part-time work with flexible shift patterns,
  — compressed work week (shift patterns) for front line roles, and
  — tapping on a flexible pool of talent to supplement the permanent workforce during operational peak periods.

- Organisations should carry out a review of job roles and a job redesign initiative to effectively support new forms of flexibility (e.g., leveraging a flexible talent pool, job sharing etc).

- Organisations can concurrently introduce technology to support the rollout of FWAs, e.g. virtual communication tools, online planning tools to monitor and plan shift pattern etc.

- FWA policies, particularly those on remote work, have been formalised to clearly articulate expected behaviours and conduct whilst working remotely. This includes guidelines on communication and engagement with colleagues as well as expectations on being present on-site/in the office.

- Senior Leaders should set clear FWA guidelines, especially on how engagement with staff may change and what are the desired behaviours expected of both leaders and staff, e.g. how frequently staff are required to be on-site, pre-arranged core hours or core days etc.

3 KEY LEARNING:
INCLUDING EMPLOYEES IN THE FWA POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS PROVIDES IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVES.

Involving employees during the FWA policy development process helps to ensure that the policies are effective and relevant, addressing real-world challenges faced by the workforce. Thus, it is vital to identify the key internal stakeholders and involve them in the holistic design of any FWA policy.

BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR	RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES
• Cross-functional task force comprising HR, IT, Corporate Communications, Facilities Management was formed to ensure various perspectives were included in the FWA implementation process.	• Set up a cross-functional committee (beyond HR) in the development and roll-out of FWA policies. This is to ensure that necessary expertise and input is sought for a more effective and sustainable FWA rollout, e.g., identifying appropriate technologies, infrastructure, equipment, communications, office space layout design and workplace safety and health considerations, amongst others.
• Use of established task forces or work groups to engage employees on FWA policies more efficiently.	• Identify existing committees/task forces that can be used for employee engagement during the FWA development and rollout phases. These groups can be leveraged to: — gather feedback from employees and supervisors at all levels, to understand perspectives and challenges, and address possible inhibitors to the implementation process. — Communicate the rollout of FWA policies effectively; the team would have the experience and members will the competencies/know-now on how to best communicate the policies.
• Targeted communication and engagement efforts for specific employee groups: — Feedback from supervisors was gathered to understand their perspectives on implementing FWAs (e.g. impact on productivity, staff engagement), in order to identify appropriate support to overcome challenges. — Communication 'roadshows' by HR to cascade policies. HR ensures clarity of information and was also available to answer queries.	• Leaders may also choose to be more deliberate in engagement activities to facilitate team bonding and set guidelines to support supervisors.

4 KEY LEARNING:
LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AS A KEY ENABLER IN THE FWA IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS.

Employers should explore the feasibility of technological tools such as Cloud-based services and remote access to operational systems. This can help to improve productivity and work efficiency by enabling employees to work flexibly at different times and/or locations.

Security controls are also needed to ensure flexible working can be carried out without compromising the organisation's compliance posture.

BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR	RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES
• Adoption of technologies for virtual meetings, collaborative work.	• Review and setup the technology infrastructure to facilitate remote work (e.g. setup of VPN, utilisation of cloud services applications such as Skype, Teams, Zoom) • Organisations should consider utilising collaborative tools to enhance the employee experience and maintain team dynamics (e.g. Microsoft SharePoint, OneDrive etc.) • Provide training and upskilling for employees on the use of new technologies.
• Adoption of technologies to safely access data/information for remote work.	• Formalise policies and processes on how to address cybersecurity concerns, compliance and governance matters. • Provide support to ensure cyber safety and mitigate cybersecurity challenges by: — Creating greater awareness and providing training on cybersecurity across all levels of the organisation. This should include the individual employees' role and responsibility in safeguarding against potential cyber security risks. — Investing in cybersecurity tools such as firewalls and anti-virus software to facilitate remote working.

5 KEY LEARNING: REDESIGNING OF WORKSPACE FOR COLLABORATION AND SAFE DISTANCE MANAGEMENT

As organisations increasingly enable flexible working in this sector, there are more opportunities to rethink the design and use of workspaces in relation to its purpose. A trend observed is that more collaborative workspaces are being designed to facilitate discussions, larger group engagement or hybrid meetings. A review of the equipment and technology requirements will need to be reassessed.

There is also potential for organisations to benefit from reduced overhead costs with more efficient design (e.g., hot desks rather than personal workstations).

BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR

- Redesign of workspaces to enable more common spaces for collaboration and engagement.

- Integration of video conferencing technologies into meeting spaces to support hybrid work.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Identify the objective and type of workspace requirements for planning purposes and allocate resources (e.g., equipment, technology) to meet organisational and employee needs. For example:

  — Identify how workspaces can be utilised for multi-functional purposes and re-configured easily and flexibly (e.g., large spaces for townhalls or team bonding can be easily re-configured to smaller meeting spaces or small group sharing).

  — Identify equipping spaces that can support hybrid meetings and engagement sessions.

  — Design workspaces to facilitate quiet time vs fun activities.

6 KEY LEARNING:
IMPLEMENT MENTAL WELL-BEING PRACTICES TO COMPLEMENT FWA PRACTICES.

The healthcare sector faces unique challenges in terms of work stress and burnout experienced by employees; the nature of work and long hours for those in frontline roles attending to patients contribute to turnover.

Healthcare organisations are implementing various initiatives to address retention challenges including reviewing compensation packages, refining job scopes to reduce administrative workload, implementing technology to ease the load of non-clinical tasks, as well as FWAs to support better work-life harmony. As part of a more holistic approach, employers may consider introducing mental wellness support initiatives for a more positive employee experience which ultimately supports employee retention.

BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR

- Work Groups/committees established to look into stress management across key roles in frontline services; these work groups also functioned as effective communication networks and played a key role in communicating new FWA policies.

- Activities, campaigns organised to support mental health and wellness e.g., virtual talks and exercise sessions, distribution of care packs, providing weekly time-off (60minutes) for exercise.

- Provision of counselling services to employees for psychological support.

- Guidelines on meeting protocols and after office hours communications to lessen the "always on" culture and alleviate workplace stress.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Form a work group with representatives across levels and roles to identify needs on the ground and possible plan of action to be shared with Senior Leaders and incorporated as part of a wider work-life strategy.

- Establish behavioural norms on what are acceptable practices on work-related communications, i.e. after-hours and on off-days, meetings protocols etc as part of FWA policy development. This will help employees adjust to FWAs, and utilise them more effectively while also reducing stress levels.

THE FUTURE OF FWAS IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR

Manpower attraction and retention continues to be a key agenda for the Healthcare sector as organisations continue to transform to meet the healthcare needs of Singapore's aging population. Digital transformation will continue to evolve both the patient and employee experience as technology is leveraged as key enabler to execute work processes and practices with greater ease. Even as the work landscape evolves, employees are also observed to be re-evaluating priorities, placing greater value personal aspirations and goals, and seeking better work-life harmony.

Looking ahead, FWAs are likely to become further entrenched as the 'new norm' of work in the sector. Over the past two years, more organisations have embarked on flexible working and experienced the benefits. A YouGov survey conducted for Channel News Asia, reported in April 2021, found that 60 per cent of the workers who took part in the survey want a hybrid working arrangement. As such, employers in the Healthcare sector will need to continue exploring new forms of flexibility and implementing FWAs to stay competitive in the war for talent.

REFERENCES

Chew, H.M. (2021, April 17). IN FOCUS: Thinking out of the cubicle – what lies ahead for hybrid working? Retrieved from CNA: https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/office-home-future-hybrid-work-flexible-wfh-in-focus-225656

Lim, J. (2021, February 4). 5 shifts in Singapore healthcare in 2021 and beyond. Retrieved from Today: https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/5-shifts-singapore-healthcare-2021-and-beyond

Ong, B. (2016, September 9). The future of Singapore healthcare. National University of Singapore. Retrieved from: https://medicine.nus.edu.sg/newsletters/issue-20/insights/the-future-of-singapore-healthcare/

Sharma, R., & Hani, A. (2021, October 6). Transformational shifts in Singapore's healthcare Industry. Retrieved from OpenGov: https://opengovasia.com/transformational-shifts-in-singapores-healthcare-industry/

Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices

80 Jurong East Street 21, #02-05,
Devan Nair Institute for Employment and Employability,
Singapore 609607

tafep.sg

in tafepsg

f tafepsg

◎ tafepsg

About Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) was set up in 2006 by the tripartite partners (Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress, and Singapore National Employers Federation), to promote the adoption of fair, responsible and progressive employment practices.

TAFEP is one of three agencies under TAL, along with the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) and the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council.

TAFEP helps employers build workplaces where employees are respected, valued and able to achieve their fullest potential, for the success of the organisation. Employers can approach TAFEP for tools, resource materials and assistance to implement fair and progressive practices at their workplaces. Employees or individuals who encounter workplace discrimination or harassment can seek assistance and advice from TAFEP.