Safer Care in Canada:

Building better safety management systems to protect workers in Canadian healthcare

Presented to AWCBC Board of Directors by
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Introduction and Background

Across Canada, injuries to healthcare workers are increasing at a time when our population needs its healthcare workers the most.

For a number of years, improving safety within healthcare, particularly in long-term care and home care, has been a focus at AWCBC meetings. The increasing trends of injury in this sector have been noted in nearly all jurisdictions – of concern to the AWCBC Board of Directors, working committees and the healthcare industry.

HURT CARING FOR OTHERS

Time-loss claims where injury source is another person
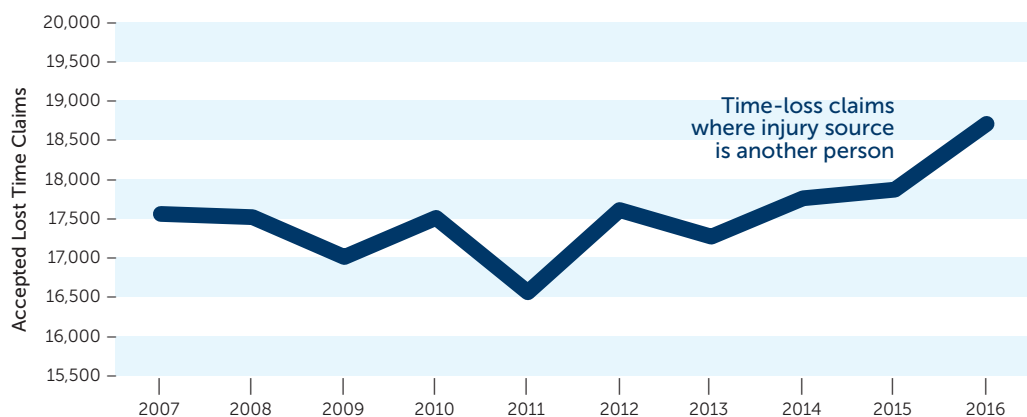
SOURCE: AWCBC DATA

For all their jurisdictional diversity in mandates and approaches, the members of AWCBC all share the commonality of being interested stakeholders in workplace health and safety outcomes.

Regardless of their specific role within their provincial or territorial system of workplace safety and insurance, Canada's workers compensation organizations have unique perspectives on the evolution of safety cultures within industries, and a shared interest in their outcome.

While AWCBC members have differing mandates in the prevention of workplace injuries, there is a widely held belief in the potential for learning from others and leveraging what has worked in other jurisdictions.

The Board of Directors of AWCBC believes a national perspective on the foundations of industry-led cultural change in workplace safety is valuable input to the conversation happening from coast to coast about how we can better care for those who care for others.

This paper outlines common elements of industry-specific safety success stories observed in various industries and jurisdictions, with the hope of inspiring and informing work in Canada's healthcare sector.

Perspectives in Culture Change

Across Canada, the systems of workers' compensation and injury prevention vary significantly. But, at the same time, they have many things in common.

Setting aside issues of jurisdiction, of mandates for prevention, and of differences in compensation acts, there are certain truths about the way Canadians across this country successfully work together in the prevention of workplace injury. And all jurisdictions share the belief that the best workplace injury is the one that does not occur.

Safety culture is multi-faceted and change can occur from the employer level to the system level. Industry can influence improvement at many levels and industry involvement in the injury prevention conversation can result in significant behaviour change. Healthcare is a unique industry — the traditional image of workplace safety as hard hats and steel-toed-boots is replaced with images of patient safety but perhaps not always worker safety. Of course, workplace safety is critical in an industry whose primary work is the care of others. While safety in the healthcare sector may look different, it shares many of the same principles as in other industries — especially when it comes to engaging government, stakeholders, leaders and workers in the need for real change. It must be emphasized that healthcare organizations have the same duty of care to their workers — to protect them from workplace hazards and manage safety and health risks.

CANADIANS HURT CARING FOR OTHERS

Since 2011, lost time claims have grown by nearly 10 per cent.

About 85 per cent of Canadians hurt are women.

Most injuries are to muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints — more particularly, to the back or shoulder.

Most injuries are caused by over-exertion, falls, or bodily reactions.

Claims due to violence have grown by 65 per cent since 2007.

A healthcare worker is injured every 12 minutes in Canada

Healthcare workers include those working in long term, acute and community care and for either public or private employers.

SOURCE: AWCBC DATA

Across Canada, several jurisdictions have noted commonalities with regard to cultural change at the industry level:

Newfoundland and Labrador

In 1997, WorkplaceNL supported the development of the Newfoundland and Labrador Construction Safety Association (NLCSA), and since its formation, the lost-time incidence rate has decreased by 68%. WorkplaceNL has worked extensively with the NLCSA to promote COR certification, certification training, the institution of an industry levy, and recognizing COR certification for PRIME (a financial incentives program). In 2018, the injury rate in construction in NL dipped below the provincial rate for the first time in history.

Manitoba

Manitoba has seen recent success in the Manufacturing sector. In 2014 a new safety association was established that has grown to offer training, consulting services and the new SAFE Work Certified program. Over 17% of the payroll in this sector has achieved certification in the past three years and employers in the sector received $466,961 in the first year of the new Prevention Rebate. In the past five years, the time loss injury rate has dropped 38.1% from 4.2 in 2014 to 2.6 in 2018.

British Columbia

BC has recently seen success with its first responder mental health initiatives, which focus on industry engagement and leadership. In 2015, a steering committee of first responders was created, facilitated/chaired by WorkSafeBC and representing labour and management, paid and volunteer professionals. This committee has developed a successful anti stigma campaign – Share It. Don't Wear It. To accompany the campaign, the BC First Responder Mental Health Committee developed a website, bcfirstrespondermentalhealth.com, that houses resources for people "looking for help" and "looking to help". In January of 2019 the Committee hosted its first mental health conference, to a sold out audience of over 350 first responder delegates.

The success of this initiative can be attributed in part to the extent of engagement from the industry, the level of support provided by WorkSafeBC, and the collaborative, consensus based nature of the decision making process.

The details differ from one province or territory to the next, but within all of these industry success stories are elements which healthcare sector employers and stakeholders across Canada can learn. Each jurisdiction has worked to address, in the way that is right for them, the safety & health challenges in their sectors.

The Six Foundational Elements of a Positive Industry Safety Culture

AWCBC has observed six core elements of industry-based culture change. These have been noted to be in place across multiple jurisdictions, when industries have seen significant progress in their workplace safety cultures.

Leadership

1

Leadership is fundamental. There must be strong voices for change within an industry, and they must fundamentally believe that the industry needs to improve its safety performance. In most cases, these leadership voices will be prominent business figures within an industry. Chances are they already know about the importance of safety – the challenge is to create an environment where they truly care about it, on a human level. In the case of healthcare, leaders may be found in government, industry associations and in unions. It is important that partnerships be established with each of these important stakeholder groups. These leaders are champions for change, and able to continually reinforce the importance of safety in all conversations. From their demonstrated leadership, safety as a mindset begins to take root at all levels.

Industry-Based Partnerships

2

Strong, active safety associations have proven valuable in a number of industries, across the country. Safety associations are well established in traditional industries like trucking and construction in many jurisdictions, and seven jurisdictions have now established them in parts of healthcare. They are a powerful resource that can be leveraged to create better outcomes over the long term. Regardless of the industry, safety associations are almost always a powerful driver for industry-led culture change. Properly established, as early as possible, and with a sustainable funding model, they can be fundamental in establishing long-term safety culture within an industry.

Systems Approach

3

Best practices have been proven within the safety field and can be observed in the safety management system or safety and health program of mature organizations. Safety associations that set industry standards in health and safety propel change even faster. Adopting a systematic approach to health and safety based on the hazards within the industry leads to better outcomes. Introducing a program of certification at an industry level extends this consistency of best practice within an entire sector. Certification programs are proven in reducing injuries and result in industry-wide culture shifts. They provide a roadmap for what it means to be a best-practice organization, providing something to work toward. The Certificate of Recognition offered in construction across the country is an excellent example of a national culture change in an industry. Certification programs, particularly when linked to premium reductions, offer powerful incentives for workplaces to improve safety outcomes. This remains an opportunity in healthcare.

Linked to certification is the importance of considering safety as a requirement for major procurement, particularly government purchasing. When certification in safety standards is made a mandatory element for government tenders, compliance and commitment to safety increases significantly. As a major public procurer, in many cases, government often is in a strong position to make safety a requirement in funding contracts with the providers, for example, of long-term care and home care.

Compelling Business Case

4

Successful employers and industries understand that their success includes a strong, positive safety culture. They understand that their moral imperative to reduce harm is aligned with their business imperative to reduce costs and improve productivity. Several jurisdictions use incentive programs to highlight this alignment and enable more employers to adopt this perspective and realize the return of their investment in safety and health. Healthcare budgets face many challenges, and lower rates for workers' compensation can be helpful. In many cases, millions of dollars are being paid for workers' compensation costs that could be funding beds, medical equipment or additional healthcare workers.

With the increased focus on business intelligence, more and more evidence is available to create the compelling stories that are specific to healthcare.

Enforcement

5

Commonplace in more traditional industries like construction, where safety inspectors can easily spot a missing fall arrest harness or staging improperly installed, enforcement does not always play the same role in an industry like healthcare. For example, the worksite is not nearly as accessible to inspectors, when it is a private home, in the case of home care. But, whatever form it takes, it's a fundamental element. Inspection and enforcement must tailor an approach that works for healthcare, which is very different from other sectors. Using enforcement resources to drive accountability and systems change rather than compliance on individual issues at individual sites may have benefits in the healthcare sector. Regardless of a jurisdiction's structure, a strong and coordinated partnership between enforcement and other prevention activities is important.

Working to Well

6

Prevention is only part of the conversation. As a safety culture establishes itself within an industry, hand-in-hand with that conversation should be the creation of commitment to stay-at-work or return-to-work, when injuries do occur. It is well established in medical literature that some level of work can play a healthy role in recovery from injury. This element, while sometimes slower to appear than a more traditional safety focus, is important over the long term. Benefits may include lower claim costs, improved productivity (more time at work), and positive workplace culture metrics such as employee retention and job satisfaction. Particularly in a sector facing workforce challenges such as healthcare, the importance of strong commitment to return to work cannot be over-stated.

Example of an Emerging Model in Healthcare

These six elements form the core of a safety culture in any industry. When executed within that industry, different tactics will take shape around the core. Across the healthcare sector, tactics are likely to vary at the jurisdictional level significantly – but the core is likely to remain largely similar, and a strong starting place for industry-based conversation.

As an example, Nova Scotia recently embarked on a strategic initiative to improve the safety and health in their healthcare industry. With sponsorship from executive leadership within the industry, healthcare in Nova Scotia is implementing a seven part strategy that uses each of the six foundational elements.

Other jurisdictions use some or all of the six foundational elements in healthcare to different degrees.

Safe lift and transfer

Homes as workspace

Board education

Foundational Elements
Leadership
Industry Partnership
Systems Approach
Business Case
Enforcement
Working to Well

Violence

Slips, trips and falls

Mental health

Staffing & workforce

Next Steps

The role of the AWCBC is to facilitate the exchange of information between Workers' Compensation Boards and Commissions. This paper has shared common elements of safety culture success, which have been noted across Canada.

Across jurisdictions, healthcare involves a wide range of stakeholders, and there is significant government involvement at all levels. While the issue and the actions needed to address it are vastly different, the principles of what has worked across sectors remain consistent. The people involved and the process to engage them will clearly be very different in every jurisdiction, but, we believe that it holds many similar principles.

The six elements outlined in this document are a strong place to start as the members of AWCBC and the healthcare industry have conversations in their jurisdictions about what approaches to safer healthcare could look like.

Recommendation:

That this be adopted as an AWCBC paper with the following actions:

- AWCBC members be permitted to use this paper to enhance the conversations within jurisdictions about the importance of partnering with government, employers and unions to reduce workplace injuries and illnesses in healthcare.

- AWCBC members be permitted to use this paper to emphasize the importance of enabling alignment of enforcement efforts with other prevention activities and, where appropriate, include the CAALL-OHS (Canadian Association of Administrators of Labour Legislation - Occupational Health & Safety) Committee on national conversations.

- That the Board direct the Communications Committee to recommend whether this paper should be shared widely and if so, how and to what extent.

- That the Board direct the Safety & Prevention Committee to consider other actions that can be taken at a national level.

The challenge is at once very different from each jurisdiction to the next, and yet, also very much the same. As our population continues to age, as the need for healthcare and long-term care workers grows, it's more important than ever to take care of our workers in this critical sector. Patient safety is important, but it's only one part of the conversation – we need to be talking more about safety for all.