

AWCBC Comp. & Benefits Comm.

Spring 2022 Update – WCB Alberta

1) What are the current claim volumes in your jurisdiction? Have there been changes in recent years/ what do you attribute this to?

Incoming LTC volume is up significantly in the first few months of 2022 compared to last year, driven primarily by covid claims (over 7000 received in the first few months; at our peak in mid-January, we were receiving over 1000 per week). Acceptance rate continues to be the same at around 84%.

We've reassigned staff across the organization to help adjudicate these claims. Volumes have decreased significantly in the past few weeks. Our 'long covid' caseload has also declined in the past several months as we are seeing good outcomes from our treatment program at Millard.

We're also seeing an increase in our general LTC claim population. We've adjusted our 2022 LTC forecast upwards by 7% for non-covid claims (32% including covid claims). Assignments to adjudicators (not including covid) have increased by about 13% compared to Q1, 2021. So far, we are not seeing a significant increase in assignments for case managers, but we are expecting that to happen over the next several weeks. We have also added new processes to offset/ minimize certain types of assignments to CMs, which has helped.

2) Have there been any recent significant legislation or policy changes? Or any coming up this year?

We implemented new legislation in 2021. The biggest changes were replacing Obligation to Reinstate with Duty to Cooperate; and the addition of legislation to review a worker's entitlement to benefits for egregious conduct. The change management for egregious conduction has been challenging and we continue to work with staff on ensuring decision-making is correct.

3) What are the current challenges your organization is experiencing?

- Duration – we've seen our duration number increase to over 60 days in the past few years. While we were starting to see duration grow before the pandemic due to a depressed economy, it increased significantly in 2020 and to a lesser degree, last year (it would have been higher but the volume of covid claims had the impact of bringing it down). The pandemic restriction changes impacted the ability for employers to bring their workers back to modified duties, and some surgeries or other treatment was delayed. With the economy starting to look a little better for this year, we're very focused on improving outcomes.
- CM workload and turnover – we've seen an increase in turnover over the past year that has been challenging to manage. We're constantly hiring and training new staff, and our average service time has decreased significantly. We've made several changes to improve workload, however there are other factors contributing to this.
- The number of claims where workers are in VR services continues to be elevated, however we are starting to see some improvements. Costs associated with ELPs have also been elevated over the past several months.
- We continue to see an increase in primary psychological injury cases. We also have increases in secondary psychological injury cases, but we've implemented a number of process changes that have had the impact of reducing duration, including a machine learning model.

4) Are there any new initiatives your jurisdiction is undertaking?

- We are focused on reducing administrative tasks and taking a comprehensive review of our claims systems and business processes to improve workload for staff so they can spend more time collaborating with workers and employers.
- We're adding more service offerings to our Worker and Employer Mobile Apps to improve the experience for them, and to help us get better/faster information. Injury reporting can now be done on both apps, and our next iteration for the worker app will be improved experience and outcome for receipts.
- Working with Blue Cross on direct approval/payment for prescriptions.
- Working with partners across the province to research, develop and implement new treatment programs to address mental health concerns related to covid.
- Respond to the rapid growth of remote work by exploring policy coverage options with stakeholders that ensure workers and employers have the coverage and protection they need.
- Develop an ML model for new employer account registration.

5) Psychological injury update: volume, claim management, impact on RTW, treatment, other challenges?



Psychological Injury
Dashboards 2018 to

6) Working from home: are you continuing to WFH? What is your jurisdiction's short term/long term plans?

While we were considering bringing most staff back to the office 2-3 days per week last fall, this has changed and we're looking at most staff likely spending most of their time working at home. We are planning on bringing staff back to the office slowly in April. Our focus has been on bringing people into the office for purpose, which is primarily focused on engagement, learning, and getting to know other people across the organization.

We have hired a lot of people in the past year, and we don't have enough office space for everyone, so this will continue to be a challenge until we make longer-term decisions on our 'office of the future'.

We implemented a vaccine mandate program last fall, however this came to an end in March.

We're hearing from most staff that they are looking forward to coming into the office to re-connect with their peers, especially with our new hires.