

Spring AWCBC Submission – WSIB

What are the current claim volumes in your jurisdiction?

Registered Claim volumes for 2021 are 225,760 claims.

95,078 Lost time claims

130,682 No Lost Time claims

Have there been changes in recent years? What do you attribute this to?

The overall volume of 2021 claims registered is higher in comparison to 2020 (increase of 25,130) but is lower than pre-pandemic volumes in 2019 of 257,407. We are trending towards pre-pandemic levels as businesses continue to re-open and COVID-19 cases decrease.

Our overall volume of Lost Time claims has increased in comparison to 2019, this can be attributed to COVID-19 claims, which are predominantly Lost Time.

Have there been any recent significant legislation or policy changes? Any coming up this year?

The WSIB, in collaboration with Ontario's Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, added Parkinson's disease and exposure to McIntyre Powder in the mining industry as a new occupational disease to Schedule 3 of the General Regulation under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*, effective January 27, 2022.

The WSIB has developed an Occupational Disease Strategy which will help us achieve a more responsive and sustainable approach to occupational disease policy and decision-making. Recent activities under the new Strategy include the following:

- The WSIB recently concluded a consultation on our draft Occupational Disease Policy Framework. The Framework is intended to guide future policy development and scheduling. We are currently reviewing the submissions and will finalize the Framework later this year.
- The WSIB has set up a new Scientific Advisory Table on Occupational Disease which will have its initial meeting this spring. The Table will provide expert scientific advice to the WSIB to support policy development and scheduling.
- Leveraging the WSIB's Research and Grants Program to ensure the collection of up-to-date scientific evidence to support evidence-based decision-making. Two systematic reviews are currently underway.

At the end of 2021, the Ontario government passed legislative and regulatory amendments enabling a rebate of surplus funds to eligible employers.

The WSIB has announced that it is implementing these amendments by issuing a discretionary rebate of surplus funds totaling up to \$1.5 billion to eligible employers starting in April 2022.

What are the current challenges your organization is experiencing?

The changing landscape of COVID-19 continues to be a challenge for our organization. With increases in claim volumes during the Omicron wave, changes to public health mandates and access to testing, we are continually adjusting our practices to meet the needs of our customers.

Resourcing and Return to Office are also challenges as we plan for a transition back to office this spring. Employees hired over the past 2 years have not yet accessed our offices and those returning have mixed reactions. There are opportunities for improvement and WSIB has made a commitment to work collaboratively and gradually return to our new work model.

We continue to see a trend in poor recovery and return to work outcomes in our Mental Stress Injury Program. We are implementing changes and we continue to research different ways to provide the appropriate care and service to this population of injured/ill people.

Improving our customer satisfaction results is a continued goal for our organization in 2022. Increasing our digital solutions and information sharing, extending our business hours and finding ways to address our customer's needs with payment solutions is a focus for 2022.

Are there any new initiatives your jurisdiction is undertaking?

- Foreign Payments – We are working on a solution to ensure that payments to all injured persons are timely and equitable, regardless of geographic location. This initiative is a priority for us given the number of migrant workers employed in Ontario and the challenges they experience receiving benefits outside of Canada.
- Online Services for Businesses with Claims – our new Employer Portal will go live in mid-April providing further online services for Employers. Services will include information on entitlement, health care benefits, payment, and will also include a two-way messaging feature.
- WSIB & Service Canada Sharing Agreement – A project is underway to enable the digital expansion of information sharing as per our legislated duties. This initiative will have a positive impact on our decision timelines and accuracy of payments, but will also improve the customer experience by reducing administrative burden.
- Extended Hours Pilot – In order to make it easier to do business with us, we are working on a pilot to offer service outside of our standard business hours. The focus will be on customer service roles and pharmacy services. Business benefits include improved reputation due to greater service availability.
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) – Our focus this year is to provide EDI training for executive leadership in Operations & Service Excellence to build on improvements made in 2020/21, foster an inclusive environment, and ensure an engaged workforce that is representative of our community.

COVID-19 update: volume, claim management, impact on RTW, treatment, other challenges?

Data as of March 15, 2022

Total claims registered 57,155

Allowed 39,582 Denied 2,444 Withdrawn/NFA 6,085/6,213 Pending 2,831

WSIB saw a significant increase in claims registered with the wave of Omicron at the end of 2021 and into the first quarter of 2022. The peak average was 631 claims per day in mid-January but we have seen a steady decrease from this point. We are not back to pre-Omicron levels but our average is now approximately 128 claims per day. The majority of cases return to work in 3-4 days with a high-end of 10 days.

Claim Management/Treatment:

- We continue to have dedicated teams making initial entitlement decisions and case managing our COVID-19 claims.
- Through our COVID Assessment Program (CAP) reassurance and education is provided from medical experts with a focus on RTW in cases at 4-6 weeks where the ill person was not hospitalized and we have conflicting information regarding RTW or no concrete medical to substantiate no RTW.

Challenges:

- Changes from Public Health limiting access to PCR testing required a shift in what we accepted as proof of injury/illness. In order to manage the increased volume of incoming claims, and assist in gathering additional information required for initial entitlement decisions, a questionnaire was developed and sent out on claims that met a specific set of criteria.
- Secondary psychological issues continue to be a factor impacting recovery and return to work for long COVID claims.

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

Claim volumes for 2021: 7,147 – 3.2% of total claims volume

Challenges:

- Poor recovery & RTW outcomes resulting in high claim duration
- Psychological injuries do not have well defined recovery timelines. There is variability of evidence-informed care, typically longer duration of treatment and recovery is not linear
- PTSD cases often involve entrenched symptoms, maladaptive coping behaviours, comorbid conditions and issues related to moral injury that pose significant barriers for recovery and RTW
- Existing tools are insufficient to assess the suitability of potential modified work options with respect to psychological job demands and a person's symptoms, abilities and limitations
- Many employers do not have the workplace culture required to prevent mental stress injuries or to support those with mental stress injuries who are returning to work

Treatment:

- In November 2021 WSIB introduced a First Responder Program in partnership with Trillium Health Partners. It is the first Ontario based First Responder specific Comprehensive Mental Health Pilot program with services ranging from prevention to care. It is an evidence-based and experienced approach to care with partnerships

having significant experience in trauma assessment and treatment. We continue to monitor learnings from the introduction of this program.

- Through our grants program we continue to support research to inform our program design in Mental Stress Injuries. The Community of Practice fosters community-based discussions with first responders, employers and providers, with a focus on improving the quality of our mental health care.

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

- The majority of our staff continue to work from home.
- Volunteer Return to Office process still in place for staff who prefer to work from the office.
- Overall plan is to transition gradually to a model where we work in a mix of home, office and in the field.
- Leaders and staff from other clusters / business areas will begin accessing the office in April.
- For our Operations & Service Excellence cluster, return to office plans are currently being re-evaluated. There will be a series of sessions with people from customer-facing roles across our cluster who will look at opportunities for improvement and define future business requirements (i.e. in-person requirements).
- Leaders from the Operations and Service Excellence cluster continue to provide on-site coverage to meet walk-in customer needs.
- Regular OSE Senior Leadership meetings (COO, VPs, EDs) are now conducted in person