

WCB Manitoba Update

○ **Psychological Injuries**

Claim volumes for this population of claims has increased by 4% in the last 12 rolling months. However, the average duration of these claims has increased by 50% over the same period. Compared to physical injuries average duration of these claim There are three large employers which are the drivers of these claims and the duration of same.

A review of 273 psychological claims incurring over 34 days of time loss was conducted and the following is noted:

55% had comorbid or pre-existing conditions delaying or prolonging recovery.

A number of claims have been overturned at our appeal levels resulting in significant retroactive wage loss being paid (there is no time limit for appealing a claim decision).

COVID-19 impacts which had or may have had an effect leading to an increase in claim duration were noted on 24% of claims that were manually reviewed. COVID-19 impacts included the following:

- Treatment
 - Delays in accessing
 - Impact of sessions via telephone or video
 - Unable to complete in-person exposure therapy
- Delay in return to work
 - Employers unable to accommodate restrictions leading to continuation of full wage loss benefits, rather than no or partial wage loss
 - Graduated return to work delayed due to difficulty with requirement for job shadowing in accommodated position and social distancing
- Increase in symptoms
 - Due to provincial public health orders and restrictions
 - i.e. isolation, not leaving home leading to increased hypervigilance
 - As a result of seeing people in masks
 - General aggravation of psychological symptoms related to pandemic
 - Coping strategies inaccessible

Challenges continue with the availability of psychologists and timely reporting; limited structure to our approvals/funding of treatment, goal setting/outcomes and lack of reporting standards.

Recent brainstorm session with claims leaders and our Healthcare department for improved oversight of approvals and funding for treatment resulted in some ideas for setting case management and treatment best practices and benchmarks, reporting standards, etc. Early stages of discussion...

- **COVID-19**

See attached COVID stats that are updated and posted to our website periodically.

Durations for COVID claims are relatively short – only about 10% of the COVID claim are transferred from our short term claims area (area that makes initial adjudication decision and manages claim up to 8 weeks) to our case management area. To the end of September the transfers to case management is approx. 161 COVID claims since March 2020. Of these, 76 remain active with a case manager.

Reassurance and education is provided for those having subjective post-viral symptoms with a focus on supportive measures for increasing activity tolerances and a RTW. It should be noted that the return to work process for many of these claims is quite protracted compared to our usual return to work plans. In some cases many months of a gradual return to work before achieving return to pre-injury work/schedules.

Overall average duration has increased slightly with some industry sectors more affected than others, wjem broken down.

- **Working from Home**

- As September 7, all staff are working 50% in the office and 50% at home. This will continue until November 15 when a return to pre-pandemic in office schedules will resume. This coincides with our vaccine mandate policy coming into effect.
- A more broad telecommuting organizational policy and structure is being considered. Pre-pandemic some areas had the option to work from home on a limited basis (1-2 days per week) and was based on individual requests and operational needs.

- Our building remains closed to the general public. This is being revisited along with our vaccine mandate for those that attend our buildings.
- Field staff are conducting worker or employer visits in only critical situations and as approved by their manager.
- Challenges with remote work (full time) are:
 - inability to effectively collaborate with colleagues and the natural learning that occurs by being around others.
 - Some newer staff do not know their team members/have never met. Getting the appropriate tools/technology in place has been an issue.
 - Increasing performance, service and/or disrespectful workplace concerns (some staff appear worn down, less motivated, this is in some cases this is coming across in communication with their leaders, customers and the work they do in general)