

WorkSafeNB Report to AWCBC

Date: March 24, 2022

What are the current claim volumes in your jurisdiction?

Accepted claims volumes from 2020 and 2021 are outlined below.

Claims Volumes	2020	2021
Lost Time	3,941	2,449
No Lost Time	3,577	1,876
Fatalities	4	7

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

In 2021, WorkSafeNB and the Government of New Brunswick completed a comprehensive review of the workers' compensation legislation which identified key issues to consider for legislative change. As a result, our board is consulting on two key benefit improvements through a 90-day stakeholder consultation initiated on March 15, 2022 exploring:

1. Increasing the percentage paid for loss of earnings benefits from 85% to 90%.
2. Increasing the maximum annual earnings threshold.

In addition, a comprehensive review of WorkSafeNB's return to work policies has been completed to ensure both alignment with legislative changes brought about by *Bill 27 – An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act*, and to identify any gaps or redundancies in our return to work process. The more significant policy revisions are summarized below:

- Consolidation of *Policy 21-400 Rehabilitation*. The policy revision now contains a distinction between "suitable work" with the accident employer and "suitable occupation" in relation to workforce re-entry services and determining estimated capable earnings.
- *Policy 21-413 Return to Work – Responsibilities and Re-employment Obligations*. The policy has been updated to include and clarify re-employment obligations for the employer as well as claims of undue hardship.
- *Policy 21-417 Suitable Work and Suitable Occupation*. The policy now creates a clear distinction between "suitable work" (for re-employment with the pre-accident employer) and "suitable occupation" (for workforce re-entry planning and estimating capable earnings). Other areas of clarification and update included:

estimating capable earnings, occupational category unit groups and the test of reasonably exists.

What are the current challenges your organization is experiencing?

Recognizing that COVID-19 continues to provide challenges for both our employees and our stakeholders, many of our key performance indicators remained steady in 2021 compared to 2020. Furthermore, our strong investment returns had a positive impact on our funding level, and our employee engagement scores are trending upwards.

However, some challenges include:

- We continue to experience significant issues with respect to the adjudication, management, volume and duration of claims related to traumatic psychological injuries. This challenge is one cause of our continued increase in open claim duration.
- Another challenge in 2021 was time-to-first cheque. Root cause analysis indicates that resourcing challenges in our adjudication contributed to the delay. Strategies are underway to address staffing, training, operational effectiveness and a rebound plan to eliminate the backlog of decisions and position us for better results moving forward.

Are there any new initiatives your jurisdiction is undertaking?

In February 2022, WorkSafeNB launched our 2022-2024 Strategic Plan focused on achieving our Vision: *Making New Brunswick the safest place to work*. This 2022-2024 strategic plan has three focus areas: People, Prevention and Integrity. WorkSafeNB published a microsite for our employees and all stakeholders located at **people-prevention-integrity.ca / gens-prevention-integrite.ca**

As well, since Q4 of 2021, WorkSafeNB is working alongside our strategic partner to create a business and technology modernization plan. Key elements under development include: creating a people first culture, leveraging digital and automation technology, innovating, using data as a driver and exploring the integrating/coordinating of our services.

Specific to Claims Management and Rehabilitation, WorkSafeNB is evolving our service delivery models to include prioritization, customization and early intervention for no lost time claims and to provide an early intervention approach for lost time clients at-risk for prolonged work disability.

- Stay at Work Recovery (Modified RTW / No Lost Time claims) is a model in development using a step care method assessing and supporting injured workers and/or employer needs as it relates to the current modified work duties and potentially developing a rehabilitation plan to progress at-work recovery.
- Early Intervention to Prevent Work Disability for “At-Risk” Clients is under development to build a customized approach for the management and support of

injured workers at-risk for prolonged work disability. The focus is to use evidence and best practice in the build of a client centric approach including early intervention case management, integration of education in the client experience on normal recovery, alignment with the GP and service providers as well as the active participation of the injured worker in the return to work planning process.

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

Claims filed for COVID-19:

COVID 19 Volumes	2020	2021	2022*
COVID 19 claims filed (exposure and diagnosis)	35	150	250
Accepted	25	90	81
Denied	9	60	88
Pending	1	0	81
Other	0	0	0
Total	35	150	250

**To date March 18, 2022*

Some high-level trends include:

- In 2020 and 2021, the claim experience was relatively low in New Brunswick and approximately 75% of COVID -19 claims reported involved the Healthcare Sector.
- In 2022, claims have increased and involve an equal distribution across multiple sectors such as Healthcare and Public Administration (including Public Safety and Corrections).

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

Claim volumes have been relatively steady over the past 3 years where the primary Nature of Injury is Traumatic Psychological Injury (TPI)

- 2019, 173 accepted claims
- 2020, 118 accepted claims
- 2021, 128 accepted claims
- 2022 to March 4, 2022, 48 accepted claims

A Summary of Challenges and Improvements Underway:

Service Provider Access

- A network of rapid access psychology assessment providers is now in place and has reduced the time to adjudicate new TPI claims in 2022 allowing for a shorter application to decision timeline (approximately 5 weeks).
- However, we continue to experience delays in accessing service providers for treatment after adjudication as well as delays receiving provider reports for effective management.
- In regard to treatment, under development with planned roll out Q3 2022, is a structured, 6-week trauma-focused intervention treatment program. This will be delivered by an approved network of social workers/licenced counselling therapists. In this new service model, Injured workers will be referred to the program by Intake & Adjudication for early intervention while the claim is in the adjudication process.

Continuum of Care

- Currently, our structured case management processes rely on limited disciplines (i.e., psychologists) with embedded practices/care models relying on same. Our intention is to review the existing Continuum of Care with an aim to leverage the expertise of other disciplines such as occupational therapists and licensed clinical social workers/counselling therapists.

Employee Support and Care.

- This is a priority to ensure our employees have the necessary skill development to support management of these claims, as well as the necessary organizational support for their own well-being and psychological safety.
- Recently, Case Managers working with TPI attended a Case Management for Trauma Workshop to improve their understanding of psychological trauma. We are also exploring staff training on topics such as suicide awareness for 2022.
- We are developing a Divisional Psychological Health & Safety Strategy for all our employees.

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

Approximately 90 % of our staff continue to work remotely and this is expected to continue for the short-term future as we explore long term business requirements of our services and in person presence. Our *Workplace Reimagined* initiative continues leveraging technology and exploring a different approach to better serve our clients. The next step is to understand how to best support our staff with a more customized approach focusing on current ergonomic supports, technology, and access needs.

Submitted by:

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