

ITF (Industry Task Force) Association

Effecting positive change and ensuring sustainability of the workers' compensation system through the views of Alberta employers

Government Engagement

The ITF Association has written to Minister Jean, Jobs, Economy & Northern Development requesting a meeting with the ITF Executive and inviting him to attend one of our 2023 quarterly membership meetings. We are awaiting a response. Assistant Deputy Minister Suzanne Harbottle will be attending our November 30th meeting on behalf of the Ministry as was previously scheduled.

Psychological Injury Working Group

The group met on November 28th to discuss the revised process for management of secondary psychological claims. The process has evolved considerably in the past few months. One of the key changes has been to more clearly differentiate services based on relationship to the compensable issue (related, non-related or unclear). WCB has proposed the employer will be contacted to discuss available services (e.g. EAP) where barriers are not work related and there will be greater reliance on referral to community resources. If the barriers are non-compensable services will be limited to 5 sessions. After five sessions, it becomes an entitlement question (i.e. confirming a diagnosis and work relatedness).

There was considerable discussion regarding the need to better define "barrier", information that will be disclosed to the employer, the extent to which WCB should be paying for psychological counselling for non-compensable issues and the way the process is managed when a labour relations issue or workplace relationship are the reason for a delay in return to work planning. Another meeting of the working group will be scheduled in January, after the WCB has had time to consider ITF feedback and make additional changes to their claim owner tools and resources.

Access to Information

In follow-up to discussion at the June 1st meeting ITF wrote to Trevor Alexander about the discrepancies in information shared with employers by the WCB and Appeals Commission. We noted the information available to an employer as part of the appeal process under legislation includes requests internal to the WCB and expressed concern that legislative and policy requirements regarding employer access are not being met by the WCB.

WCB and the Appeals Commission subsequently compared disclosure practices. We received a verbal update on November 21st indicating WCB remains comfortable with their current practices and will not be making any changes despite the different practices followed by the Appeals Commission. There were no details provided and this will be discussed in greater detail with the WCB at the November 30th meeting.

Duration of Disability Working Group

The ITF subcommittee met with WCB on November 21st to discuss action items arising from the last meeting and identify additional issues that could be effective in reducing the average claim duration (now 62 days). The weighing of medical information from different practitioners was reviewed. Specific examples were discussed and WCB will be providing us with a copy of their procedure. The process for resolving conflicting medical opinion was also reviewed. Placing priority on timely return to work is being discussed with all WCB teams and WCB plans to engage larger employers in discussions in January to identify gaps in process.

Of the 37 long term claims identified for detailed review, 16 claimants have since returned to work. WCB will be providing a summary of key learnings from this exercise. WCB is also in the early stages of designing an improved employer dashboard and members of the subcommittee will be participating in user testing on December 6th. Enhancements to the Worker App are also being planned which are intended to engage workers in return to work planning at an earlier stage. A meeting will be scheduled early in the new year to continue discussion of additional issues within the control of the WCB that could support a reduction in average duration.

Upcoming ITF Association meetings

The first quarterly membership meeting of 2023 is on Wednesday March 15th. This is expected to be a hybrid in-person and virtual meeting. The in-person meeting will be held at Genesis Place in Airdrie (800 East Lake Blvd NE). The closest hotel is the Ramada by Wyndham Hotel & Suites Airdrie (191 East Lake Crescent NE). The Holiday Inn Express is also a short drive away.

If you have any suggestions for guest presentation webinar topics or speakers please let Melanie know.

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