

ITF (Industry Task Force) Association

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

Government Engagement

Minister Jones has been invited to attend our December 6th ITF quarterly membership meeting. We are still awaiting confirmation of his attendance as the current Session is scheduled to end December 7th.

On November 7th the NDP presented a petition from the United Nurses of Alberta calling on the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to introduce legislation to amend the Workers' Compensation Act to extend presumptive coverage for workplace injuries related to posttraumatic stress disorder and other traumatic mental health injuries to all nurses who hold a practice permit or who are registered with a College of a regulated profession under the Health Professions Act.

WCB Board of Director Recruitment

Recruitment is underway for 4 members of the Board of Directors (there are 7 members on the Board). There is one vacancy representing the interests of workers, and Brian Frank's appointment (representing the interests of the general public) is expiring in December. All other Board members were appointed to terms ending in 2026.

Psychological Injury Working Group (PIWG)

The ITF subcommittee met on November 15th in preparation for the November 21st PIWG meeting. The focus was on whether there are opportunities for the PIWG to influence and support further enhancements to the processes for management of these claims.

WCB confirmed a change was made late last year to verify whether return to work barriers are work related. If not the worker is to be referred to an EAP or community provider. Since 2022 psychological counselling is not provided on a claim if the issue is non-compensable. Reference to offering counselling on adjudicator and case manager checklists has been revised to confirm this intention. WCB is still reviewing letter templates to ensure these align. WCB also confirmed if the issue that is preventing a return to work is non-compensable, the claim should be ended because the compensable injury has resolved. If you are seeing claims where this is not happening the claim should be escalated within the WCB.

Discussion of barriers and restrictions, and the perception WCB is communicating accommodation measures rather

than restrictions was discussed. The lack of clarification regarding work restrictions, non-compensable barriers, and preferences by providers was recognized as an ongoing challenge. WCB has had success in recent months in reducing program admission wait times.

A process for determining priorities and action items for 2024 was then discussed. WCB will summarize the suggestions and the PIWG will meet early in the new year to develop a 2024 work plan.

Duration of Disability Working Group

The Working Group met on November 22nd. Average claim duration growth has stabilized, however the average for Q3 was 65 days. The NTL/MW percentages are at 40% which is starting to approach pre-pandemic levels of 45% of disabling claim volume.

The Employer Confirmation of Modified Work pilot was discussed. A form has been designed to communicate to the treating physician the employer has modified work available immediately that is within the worker's current physical and psychosocial abilities. Between now and February, the form will be used for new claims and an assessment will be made as to whether this tool shortens duration and increases modified work. Information on typical limitations for physical injuries to support modified work has also been developed. If you are interested in more information on the pilot contact Melanie.

The group then discussed priorities and potential action items for 2024. This will be discussed in greater detail once 2023 year-end data is available, but a focus on improving supports for psychological injuries, managing "diagnosis creep", aggravation claims, file closure and processes for managing return to work of workers over the age of 50 were all suggested.

Upcoming ITF Association meetings

The guest presentation webinar is scheduled for Wednesday November 30th starting at 1:00. If you have not received the link and are interested let Melanie know.

The next quarterly meeting is on Wednesday December 6th at the Holiday Inn Edmonton Airport in Nisku. This will include the 2024 WCB premium rate presentation.

November 2023