

Chapter 43

Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board—Co-ordinating Injured Workers' Return to Work

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) is in the early stages of addressing the six recommendations we made in our 2016 audit related to co-ordinating workers' return to work. Return-to-work programs are essential to get the injured worker back to suitable and productive employment.

At August 2019, the WCB not only revised its training manual, but it was also working with stakeholders (e.g., health care providers, employers) to increase the timely submission of reports on the recovery of injured workers. The WCB continued to assess ways to standardize the process to promote consistent documentation of injured workers' recovery and return-to-work plans, as well as measure progress in executing those plans. The WCB had not yet identified metrics to monitor the program's success.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes our follow-up of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2016.

In 2016, we assessed the Workers' Compensation Board's processes to co-ordinate injured workers' return to work. Our *2016 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 31, concluded that for the 12-month period ended August 31, 2016, other than in the areas of the six recommendations we made, the WCB had effective processes to effectively co-ordinate workers' return to work.

WCB refers to claims resulting from reported workplace injuries where the injured workers cannot work as time-loss claims. In 2018, WCB reported it accepted 8,151 time-loss claims (2017: 7,888).¹

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the WCB's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The WCB's management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

We tested 30 injured employees' files requiring recovery and return-to-work plans to assess whether required communication occurred, and within expected timeframes. We assessed the timeliness of the WCB's return-to-work plans and completeness of information in the plans. We also assessed education provided to staff and stakeholders regarding the WCB's return-to-work program.

¹ Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board Stakeholders Report.



3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at August 31, 2019, and the WCB's actions up to that date.

3.1 Active Pursuit of Missing Initial Injury Reports Needed

We recommended, for claims requiring recovery and return-to-work plans, Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board consistently record its communications with injured workers, employers, and health care professionals. (2016 Report – Volume 2, p. 225, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 10, 2018)

Status—Partially Implemented

We recommended, for claims requiring recovery and return-to-work plans, Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board actively obtain requested reports (e.g., injury and recovery progress reports) from injured workers, employers, and health care professionals. (2016 Report – Volume 2, p. 226, Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 10, 2018)

Status—Partially Implemented

Contact with injured workers improved more than contact with employers and health care providers, however, more work remains for all.

The WCB changed its expectations for initial contact with injured workers from 10 business days to five business days of assigning cases to its Case Management Unit. The WCB piloted this change in April 2018 for its North Unit and implemented it for all units in June 2019. Regardless of the standard used, five or 10 business days, initial communication with injured workers occurred for 83% of cases tested within the standard timeframe.

For one instance where communication was not within the expected timeframe, there was no evidence of WCB staff attempting to make the required initial contact with the injured worker.

The WCB expects its staff to request an update from injured workers every 28 days if workers themselves have not communicated with the WCB during that period. The WCB consistently requested updates from workers through an automated request process. This resulted in consistent requests for contact from injured workers in all files tested.

The WCB also changed its expectation for initial contact with employers from 10 business days to five business days of assigning cases to its Case Management Unit. The WCB made this change in the same manner and timing as it did for injured workers' communications.

Similar to initial contact for injured workers, contact with employers occurred within the standard timeframe in 97% of the files tested; initial communication with and from employers met both the 10 and five day timeframes.

The WCB also expects its staff to request an update every 28 days if employers have not communicated with the WCB during that period. Communications for an employers' update request is not automated, so WCB staff must directly request communication from employers. Thirty percent of files tested contained consistent requests for communication while some files included sporadic requests while still others had no requests for communication to the employer. The WCB either did not receive ongoing employer reports on time or at all in 70% of the files tested.

The WCB set expectations regarding the receipt of medical reports for some health care providers, including chiropractors and physiotherapists who are expected to submit the following reports to the WCB:

- Assessment report within three business days following the injured worker's initial appointment.
- Progress reports within three days after a block of treatments, six days for chiropractors and five days for physiotherapists, unless the worker is discharged from their care prior to the completion of a block.

Physicians are expected to submit the following reports to WCB:

- Expedited appointments require assessment report submissions within five business days of the appointment date; however, the WCB has not communicated their expectations with physicians regarding the submission of a medical report following a regular medical appointment.

Testing of initial reporting from health care providers found 97% of the files tested included contact with a health care provider within five business days of the cases' assignment to Case Management.

However, testing of subsequent reporting from health care providers (e.g., progress reports) in the files tested dropped to 60% within five business days and 77% within 10 business days.

In May 2019, WCB revised and distributed its training manual to its staff to help address some of the concerns from the reduction in time expected to submit assessment reports. The WCB continues to meet with health care providers to further educate them about the program, and its submission requirements.

The WCB has not yet developed any reporting tools for its management to assess overall timeliness of the information received. Moreover, management has neither evaluated the impact of these changes nor completed a root cause assessment as to why it cannot consistently receive timely reporting.



3.2 Return-to-Work Plans Not Always Complete or Done

We recommended, for claims requiring recovery and return-to-work plans, Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board verify the completeness and currency of those plans and the agreement of injured worker and related employer with the plan. (2016 Report – Volume 2, p. 228, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 10, 2018)

Status—Not Implemented

At August 2019, management continued to assess how to standardize its recovery and return-to-work plans to promote consistency in creating and completing the plans. Thirty percent of the tested files lacked a documented plan. Of the 21 files that included plans, five lacked a return-to-work date or further updates after a particular health care event, even though a health care provider indicated a course of action in their progress report.

Maintaining a summary document for each claim throughout the return-to-work process would help ensure completed documentation and quick assessment of plan execution.

Incomplete or missing plans increase the risk of the WCB not knowing whether injured workers receive appropriate support (e.g., WCB staff may not know they need to arrange for alternate health care appointments thereby delaying rehabilitation and the employee's return to work).

3.3 Referrals to Secondary Assessment Not Clear

We recommended, for claims with recovery and return-to-work plans, Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board identify and address impediments to timely recovery of injured workers within a reasonable timeframe. (2016 Report – Volume 2, p. 230, Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 10, 2018)

Status—Not Implemented

The WCB outlines when it needs to conduct a secondary assessment based on set criteria. However, with inconsistent documentation in the recovery and return-to-work plans (see **Section 3.2**), it was not always clear when secondary assessment is required.

The WCB continues to identify improvements in its recovery and return-to-work plans to ensure completion and consistency. Better recovery and return-to-work plans should make it clearer when secondary assessments are required. A secondary assessment is intended to address impediments to timely recovery of injured workers within a reasonable timeframe.

3.4 Stakeholders Need Further Education on Their Responsibilities

We recommended Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board educate injured workers, employers, and health care professionals to increase their submission of properly completed injury and progress reports for the return-to-work program. (2016 Report – Volume 2, p. 231, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 10, 2018)

Status—Partially Implemented

The WCB continues to provide information (e.g., presentations, brochures) regarding their return-to-work program to various stakeholders. Additionally, the WCB provides information on its website for stakeholders identifying the importance of each party's role in the program and the expected report submission times and frequency.

Some of the documents provided to stakeholders outline report submission timing while others discuss the need for timely report submissions, but do not define what the WCB considers timely.

3.5 WCB Needs to Better Monitor the Success of the Return-to-Work Program

We recommended Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board track and analyze key information about the quality and timeliness of its return-to-work program. (2016 Report – Volume 2, p. 232, Recommendation 6; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 10, 2018)

Status—Not Implemented

At August 31, 2019, WCB indicated it is still in the early stages of identifying the analytic tools it needs to evaluate the return-to-work program.

