

## Chapter 29

# Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board— Administering Psychological Injury Claims

### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

By July 2025, the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) fully implemented the five outstanding audit recommendations we first made in 2022 to strengthen its processes to administer compensation claims for psychological injury (e.g., anxiety, acute trauma). In 2024, WCB processed 995 psychological injury claims.

WCB developed a dashboard to help staff monitor whether they administer claims in accordance with expectations. WCB expects staff to communicate an initial decision within 14 days of receiving a psychological injury claim application and regularly communicate with claimants at least every three weeks. In 2024, the dashboard showed WCB communicated its decisions within 14 days for 60% of the psychological injury claim applications processed, up from 33% in 2022. It also showed WCB contacted claimants every three weeks for 79% of claims in 2024.

We found WCB also developed appropriate guidance for staff involved in assessing appeals. Staff followed this guidance when deciding what worker information to provide to employers, when requested during appeals. Staff also followed this guidance when communicating appeal decisions to workers and employers.

WCB implemented several different quality reviews for all claims (e.g., reviewed samples of claims at various stages) and developed appropriate review templates. We found WCB conducted quality reviews for a reasonable amount of psychological injury claims. Additionally, we found the Appeals Manager sufficiently reviewed a sample of claim appeal files, including appropriateness of decisions, support, and communication of appeal results.

Effective processes to administer and monitor psychological injury claims minimize delays in taking necessary steps for injured workers to receive appropriate support to improve their mental health, and return to work.

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 2.1 Background

The Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board operates under the authority of *The Workers' Compensation Act, 2013*, and is responsible for administering workers' compensation claims, including psychological injury claims. Psychological injuries (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder, depression) are often complex, generally more difficult to administer as a claim, and require more judgment than some other injuries (e.g., broken bone).



The Act gives the WCB sole authority to decide whether an injury caused a condition or death, whether it occurred during employment, and the extent of impairment.<sup>1</sup> It also presumes psychological injuries are work-related unless proven otherwise.<sup>2</sup> WCB is also responsible for determining and managing compensation provided to workers (e.g., employee unable to work due to injury) for accepted claims.

WCB protects registered employers from lawsuits when a workplace injury happens. It provides guaranteed benefits and programs to injured workers from different industries (e.g., healthcare, hospitality, transportation) as covered by the Act.

WCB has received a significant increase in psychological injury claims. In 2024, WCB processed 995 psychological injury claims compared to 455 claims in 2016. Of the 995 claims in 2024, WCB accepted 41% (2016: accepted 31%) of claims. The total cost of psychological injury claims during 2024 was approximately \$24.6 million. Although the duration of psychological injury claims are longer than for other types of injuries, the average claim cost is less.

WCB has a Psychological Injuries Unit that is responsible for assessing and overseeing psychological injury claims. The Unit consists of the Unit Manager and several case workers.

## 2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our first follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2022.

We concluded, for the 12-month period ended December 31, 2021, the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board had effective processes to administer compensation claims for psychological injury except for areas in our five recommendations.<sup>3</sup>

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

To carry out our follow-up audit, we interviewed WCB management and staff to discuss key actions taken since our 2022 audit to implement the recommendations. We reviewed policies, templates, and guidance. We tested samples of psychological injury claims and psychological injury claim appeal files.

## 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 July 31, 2025, and the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board's actions up to that date.

<sup>1</sup> *The Workers' Compensation Act, 2013*, s.20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, s.28.1(2).

<sup>3</sup> *2022 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 7*, pp. 105–124.

### 3.1 Claim Decisions Conveyed Timely and Ongoing Communication with Claimants Improved

***We recommended the Workers' Compensation Board make decisions on psychological injury claim applications consistent with its established target (i.e., within 14 business days).*** (2022 Report – Volume 1, p. 121, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 6, 2023)

**Status**—Implemented

***We recommended the Workers' Compensation Board regularly communicate with psychological injury claimants consistent with its established timeframe (i.e., at least every three weeks).*** (2022 Report – Volume 1, p. 121, Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 6, 2023)

**Status**—Implemented

The Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board developed tools to help monitor its key performance measures (e.g., time to process claims) and take action to meet its established targets. During 2024, WCB improved the timeliness of communicating an initial psychological injury claim decision within 14 days of receiving an application and regularly communicated with claimants (i.e., at least every three weeks).

WCB developed a dashboard for its Psychological Injuries Unit Manager to actively monitor key measures, including time to communicate claim decisions and ongoing communication with claimants, and to assess on a monthly basis why measures may not be met. The Unit Manager also meets with staff weekly to monitor the status of ongoing psychological injury claims.

For 30 psychological injury claims tested, we found WCB made its decision to accept or deny claim applications within 14 days for 26 claims, representing an 87% target achievement (2022 audit: 43%).

In 2024, the dashboard showed WCB communicated its decisions timely for 60% of psychological injury claim applications, up from 33% in 2022. It also reduced the number of claims taking over 30 days for a decision from 41% in 2022 to 16% in 2024. These improvements show reasonable progress toward WCB making timely decisions on psychological injury claim applications.

WCB expects staff to contact claimants every three weeks for 80% of ongoing claims; it achieved this for 79% of claims in 2024 (2022 audit: 68% target achievement).

Following established decision and communication timeframes help to reduce delays in injured workers receiving benefits and treatment. Actively monitoring established performance targets help WCB to improve its administration of compensation claims for psychological injuries and support workers and employers.



## 3.2 Quality Reviews Occurring for Psychological Injury Claims and Appeals

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***We recommended the Workers' Compensation Board implement ongoing quality reviews for psychological injury claim and appeal files.*** (2022 Report –

*Volume 1*, p. 123, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 6, 2023).

### **Status**—Implemented

The Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board completed reasonable quality reviews for both psychological claim and appeal files.

WCB conducts three separate reviews on a sample of psychological injury claim files, which includes:

- Claims ongoing for six weeks are subject to review by the Psychological Injuries Unit Manager (target of three per month)
- Claims ongoing for 12 weeks are subject to review by Work Disability Prevention and Mitigation program area staff<sup>4</sup>
- Claim files are subject to review by the Service Excellence Branch<sup>5</sup>

From July 1, 2024, to July 31, 2025, the Psychological Injuries Unit Manager completed 10 reviews on psychological injury claim files ongoing for six weeks. We tested one of these reviews and found the Unit Manager appropriately documented their review results, including whether staff appropriately followed expectations. For example, the reviews identified some gaps where staff did not regularly communicate (i.e., every three weeks) with claimants.

From July 1, 2024, to July 31, 2025, the Work Disability Prevention and Mitigation program area staff conducted 44 reviews of psychological injury claim files ongoing for 12-weeks. We tested two of these reviews and found staff appropriately completed and documented their review results. The reviews tested did not identify any claims where staff made an incorrect acceptance decision (e.g., denied a claim that should be accepted).

The Service Excellence Branch performs quality reviews for all claims and does not report findings by each unit (i.e., psychological injury claim findings are not reported separately). It reviewed 25 psychological injury claims from July 1, 2024, to July 31, 2025, assessing whether staff follow policies when making an initial claim decision (e.g., obtain complete information). We tested three of these reviews and found Branch staff appropriately completed the review template and communicated results to staff. All three reviews found areas for improvement such as referencing correct policy and identifying incomplete information.

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<sup>4</sup> The Work Disability Prevention and Mitigation program area reviews a sample of all injury claims to assess whether staff make appropriate claim decisions (i.e., acceptance) and follow expected processes.

<sup>5</sup> Service Excellence Branch staff conduct quality reviews across the Workers' Compensation Board and assess whether staff obtained sufficient information, made appropriate decisions, and followed expected processes.

While 12-week and Service Excellence reviews are not exclusive to psychological injury claims, and WCB completed less six-week reviews than expected, we found that, overall, psychological injury claims are sufficiently subject to quality reviews and staff reviewed a reasonable amount of psychological injury claim files for service quality.

For appeal files, we found WCB developed an appropriate template for the Appeals Manager to utilize as part of their quality review. This template included three areas (jurisdiction, adjudication, and communication) to help assess whether appeals staff appropriately assess and communicate appeal results to interested parties (e.g., injured worker, employer). At July 2025, the Appeals Manager focused their reviews on appeals administered by probationary appeals staff as they are new to assessing appeals. However, the Appeals Manager plans to review files of other appeals staff in the future.

Of the nine appeals we tested, the Appeals Manager reviewed one appeal. We found they appropriately documented and communicated their review results (e.g., assess whether appropriate decision made) to an appeal officer. The Appeals Manager started documenting their appeals in June 2025 and completed approximately six reviews per month.

Having effective quality review processes reduce the risk that instances of non-compliance with WCB policies occur. This helps to reduce delays in injured workers receiving appropriate treatment, as well as may decrease the risk of appeals occurring.

### 3.3 Appropriate Appeal Decision Guidance Provided

***We recommended the Workers' Compensation Board develop formal guidance about key information appeals officers need to support and communicate psychological injury claim appeal decisions to stakeholders.***

*(2022 Report – Volume 1, p. 119, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 6, 2023)*

**Status**—Implemented

The Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board developed additional guidance for staff assessing appeals. We found staff appropriately followed this guidance.

Appeals officers use their background and knowledge of claim files to know when to request additional information. They also use the new quality review template (discussed in **Section 3.2**) as guidance for what information should be included in an appeal file. WCB trains its appeals staff on how to identify key information and communicate appeal results. Some examples of the training WCB provided included a review of guidelines and Q&A sessions with staff.

Where an appeals officer identifies missing key information required to assess a claim decision, they request additional information. We tested three appeal files where an appeal officer requested additional information to make their decision and found all three were reasonable and appropriate based on the appealable matter and existing information in the claim files.



Only requesting necessary information to support an appeal decision reduces the risk that appeals officers request information irrelevant to an appealable matter, which may delay an appeal decision by taking additional time and resources.

WCB also uses a template to help appeals officers communicate their decisions to claimants (e.g., injured worker, employer). This decision template and the quality review template provide guidance (e.g., appropriate language) on how to properly communicate decisions. We found both documents provide adequate guidance for appeals officers to understand what information to include and how to communicate appeal decisions and rationale appropriately.

We tested nine appeals and found appeals officers appropriately communicated results to claimants, as well as used the templates to include key information (e.g., reference relevant policy, decision result).

Consistently and clearly communicating results of appeals to claimants reduce the risk of additional appeals as claimants will be able to understand the basis for the decision and its alignment with policy and legislation.

### 3.4 Guidance Developed for Releasing Claim Information

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***We recommended the Workers' Compensation Board develop formal guidance for staff on what file information for psychological injury claims to release when an employer requests information during an appeal.***

(2022 Report – Volume 1, p. 120, Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 6, 2023)

**Status**—Implemented

The Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board developed sufficient guidance for staff on what information to release to employers from a workers' psychological injury claim file during an appeal.

The guidance includes the process from when an employer requests a claim file to when WCB releases the documents to the employer. It also includes what type of information should be withheld as part of this process such as personal medical history of the worker not applicable to the psychological injury claim, medications, and family information or family medical history.

WCB staff use guidance and on-the-job training to decide which information to include or remove when preparing file packages for employers.

We tested two appeal files where an employer requested worker information and found WCB only provided appropriate information to the employer for both appeals.

Having guidance for staff on which file information WCB expects to provide to employers decreases the risk that staff may provide confidential worker information while still allowing for necessary information to be shared with an employer to assist in their decision making.