

# ITF (Industry Task Force) Association

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

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## **Government Engagement**

Minister Jones office has indicated he is not available to attend the March 6<sup>th</sup> meeting but will join us on June 12<sup>th</sup>.

## **Access to Information**

Following up on the January 18<sup>th</sup> meeting with WCB and CACE, members of the ITF Executive met with Dale Wispinski and Jay Williamson on February 6<sup>th</sup> to discuss the Appeals Commission pilot with WCB. Additional information is included in the March 6<sup>th</sup> agenda package and will be discussed in greater detail at the meeting.

## **Psych Injury Working Group (PIWG)**

The ITF subcommittee met on February 1<sup>st</sup> and the PIWG met on February 5<sup>th</sup>. The PIWG reviewed updated Terms of Reference. Discussion then focused on metrics that could be introduced in 2024 to better assess whether strategies are having an impact on improving claims experience and management of psychological injury claims. There will be additional data introduced in future reporting. WCB is gathering baseline data to support development of new metrics related to referral wait times, return to work for psych injuries, and timelines for registration to entitlement decision.

An action plan for 2024 was also discussed. Several action items intended to bring clarity to restrictions and limitations, and to improve utilization of cognitive demands analysis information were identified.

The Q4 Data Dashboard was reviewed. Incidence of workers returning to a new employer is higher than in previous years. Traumatic injuries make up the majority of the claim volume. Increases in claim costs have also been noted but this is not out of line with increasing health care costs being seen across all injury types.

## **Duration of Disability Working Group**

The Working Group met on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. The 2023 year-end average duration statistics were discussed. Although the average duration remains high (65.1 days), it appears to have plateaued. The group had a focused discussion on drivers and strategies to impact average duration. It was acknowledged in recent years the disability management infrastructure for the WCB as well as employers has been eroded. WCB outlined their focused

strategy in 2024 to address causation decision making and care planning that should positively impact claim duration. Additional strategies will focus on workers over the age of 50, return of site visits and weighing of evidence. Feedback on the modified work form pilot was discussed. Additional material is being developed and this will be rolled out to all ITF members at the June meeting.

## **Policy Consultation Advisory Group(PCAG)**

The Policy Consultation Advisory Group met on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Darren, Boris, Craig and Michael represented ITF. The 2024-2026 policy plan was reviewed. Open consultations close March 11<sup>th</sup> and WCB advised a 90-day consultation will commence on the Permanent Total Disability policy in April. The financial impact of proposed changes is estimated to be \$2.3 million. ITF asked that experience data and cost implications be included in the consultation material. The group also discussed terms of reference and PCAG goals. An updated document will be discussed at the next PCAG meeting.

## **Tip for Employers from the Employer Advisor Branch (EAB)**

Recently, Employer Advisors have represented a number of employers appealing acceptance of COVID-19 claims. Several appeals have been returned to WCB by the Appeals Commission for further investigation and adjudication due to lack of a medical opinion confirming the source of infection. If employers encounter COVID claims, the EAB recommends reviewing the file for a medical opinion verifying that work exposure was the source of infection. If this is not on file an appeal should be considered.

The Advisor Office is available to consult on and assist employers in any appeals at no cost. Learn more at <https://advisoroffice.alberta.ca>

## **Upcoming ITF Association meetings**

The next guest presentation webinar is on Thursday February 29<sup>th</sup> starting at 1:00. If you would like to attend and have not received the Zoom link let Melanie know.

The next quarterly meeting is on Wednesday March 6<sup>th</sup> starting at 8:30 am. The in-person meeting is at the Manufacturers Health & Safety Association in Rocky View  
February 2024

Additional information can be found on the ITF website - <http://www.itfassociation.ca>