

ITF (Industry Task Force) Association

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

Policy Consultation

Consultation is now open on the Occupational Hearing Loss Policy (Policy 03-01, Part II, Application 5). The WCB's focus is on providing additional guidance in policy for adjudicating hearing loss claims. Their preliminary review identified opportunities to make this policy more transparent and easier to understand and apply.

The ITF Policy Consultation Subcommittee is meeting on August 12th to discuss member feedback on the consultation document and draft recommendations for discussion at our quarterly meeting on September 11th. Thanks to members who have already provided comments. If you missed the July 31st response request, feel free to send additional comments to Melanie.

There has been no additional data provided with respect to cost relief for non-compensable psychological injury claims. We are also still awaiting a response to our request for data regarding WCB's assertion that claims where cost relief is applied have poorer outcomes and are more costly. The subcommittee will reconvene to discuss the cost relief policy recommendations once the additional data is received.

Appeals Commission AGM

The Appeals Commission Annual General Meeting was held virtually on July 31st. A copy of the 2023-2024 Annual Report has been posted on their website and is being circulated with this newsletter.

Much of the information presented during the AGM was discussed at the June 5th ITF guest presentation webinar. The annual number of new appeals has been steadily increasing for the past four years, and the Appeals Commission is monitoring this trend and balancing resources to meet the growing volume. Returning hearing timelines to the target of 150 days and addressing current delays in accessing a worker Advisor from the Advisor Office are priorities for this year. Onboarding of new Advisors and recruitment of additional Commissioners are ongoing strategies.

With respect to the Tribunal, the Decision Review target (98% of decisions are not challenged or if challenged to be upheld) was exceeded. The actual was 99% with two decisions being changed on reconsideration. There were no external challenges.

With respect to the overall Appeals Commission budget, the annual spend at fiscal year end was 98% (\$16.5m). The Tribunal accounted for 41% of the total expenditures, the shared Secretariat for 29%, the Advisor Office for 24% and Medical Panels Program for 4%. Work on implementation of a new case management system continues and is currently at the procurement stage.

Additional priorities for this fiscal year include enhanced client touch points for the Tribunal, development of additional client facing educational material and client information, and development of measures to align with the Access to Justice Index.

Industry Custom Pricing (ICP)

Repolling is rolling out for participating employers in the Construction and Oil & Gas sectors. Two ICP Fact Sheets were updated, and copies are attached to this newsletter. ITF has requested clarification regarding polling options specific to the ability for a group to change the cost relief option (e.g. opt out of waiving cost relief) but still continue in ICP.

Upcoming ITF Association meetings

The next guest presentation webinar is on Wednesday September 4th starting at 1:00.

Dr Peter Smith with the Institute of Work & Health will discuss his research on how return to work differs for psychological injury claims. Dr. Vennala Thumula with the Workers' Compensation Research Institute will then present her research on Psychological Risk Factors and Functional Recovery. WCB will provide an overview of the DRDRB role and current processes as the third topic. The Claims Management Roundtable will close the webinar.

If you have any suggestions for Roundtable topics please let Melanie know.

The next quarterly meeting and ITF Annual General Meeting is on Wednesday September 11th. The quarterly meeting starts at 8:30 am and the AGM will begin shortly after. The in-person meeting is at the Manufacturers Health & Safety Association in Rocky View.

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