

# ITF (Industry Task Force) Association

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

## Government Engagement

Darren Ferleyko and Boris Makale met with Minister Matt Jones, Deputy Minister Christopher McPherson, Chief of Staff Jerry Bellikka and ED Training & Employment Services Noelle Baker on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. Minister Jones will be invited to attend our December 6<sup>th</sup> quarterly meeting.

Following a brief overview of the ITF Association, the following topics were discussed.

- Egregious conduct - while this component of Bill 47 was in response to employer feedback, the use of the term egregious by WCB is problematic as the bar is high and does not allow employers to actively manage HR issues (e.g. A&D policy violations).
- AIMCO management of the Accident Fund, investment returns and the critical importance of the Fund to the long-term stability of the WC system
- WCB Funding Policy and the disconnect between the green zone and the legislated requirement for being 100% funded. A lower funding range would provide additional funds Alberta employers could use for job creation and investment.
- Concerns over the claim duration increase from 34 to 62 days. Reasons are multifactorial including employer challenges providing modified work, physician shortages, physician advocacy to remain off work, physician education gap on importance of modified work, psychological claim acceptance and WCB staffing challenges.

In closing, the importance of continued collaboration between all stakeholders was highlighted. It was also noted that although there is always room for improvement, overall the ITF Association is pleased with WCB - Alberta and the overall compensation system.

## Psychological Injury Working Group (PIWG)

The PIWG met on August 16<sup>th</sup>. Members discussed the Q2 Psych Injury Data Dashboard. Changes since the Q1 report are insignificant and no new trends were identified. The majority of psych injury claims are traumatic in nature and volume remains relatively low in the context of overall reported claims. WCB was asked to provide some additional data regarding the impact of the move from an initial 10 counselling sessions to 5 sessions.

Current initiatives involve review of the WCB's bullying and harassment scenarios, defining a "threat to one's

personal integrity" and determining entitlements where there is a pre-existing condition. The group also discussed concerns regarding potential liability where the WCB is aware of information regarding a non-compensable condition that may pose a safety concern or impact fitness for work (e.g. an addiction) but does not disclose this to the employer.

A follow-up meeting is being scheduled in September.

## WCB Follow-up re: Shoulder Injuries

At our June meeting WCB was asked to provide an update on the current process for managing shoulder injuries. Dr. Cho mentioned the shoulder medical examiner screening in her March overview.

An eConsult process (which replaced the "shoulders" exams process) was introduced earlier this year. Initial results are positive with the eConsult process reducing time to access specialty opinion from 95 calendar days in May 2022 to 26 calendar days in May 2023. In 2023, the average days for a worker to move from the Shoulders Medical Exam (SME) to their initial consultation in the Visiting Specialist Clinic (VSC) has also reduced significantly from 83 days in 2023 to 42 days in 2023.

Other results WCB is seeing include:

- The average days a worker is in receipt of TD01 benefits for shoulder surgery cases decreased from 204 days in 2021 to 159 days in 2022.
- Workers returned to modified employment and TD02 benefits sooner post shoulder surgery in 2022 at 123 days compared to 138 days in 2019.
- The average length of time a worker is in receipt of TD02 benefits has also steadily reduced since 2020 (103 days in 2020 to 76 days in 2022).

## Upcoming ITF Association meetings

The guest presentation webinar is scheduled for Wednesday August 30<sup>th</sup> starting at 1:00. The agenda includes an update from the Appeals Commission team and presentations from WCB on managing longer duration claims and Dr. Doug Gross on models of care for soft-tissue injuries in Alberta and their effectiveness.

The next quarterly meeting and AGM is on Wednesday September 6<sup>th</sup> at the MHSA offices in Rocky View.

August 2023