

Psychological Injury Resource for Employers

Traumatic onset psychological injury or stress can be personally devastating and is compensable when it is an emotional reaction to a single or cumulative series of traumatic work-related incidents experienced by a worker.

Because we understand the impact of such events on your worker, the following provides information on how we can help through the workers' compensation system.

Presumptive coverage for workers

The Workers' Compensation Act, 2013 provides coverage for psychological injuries ([Section 28.1](#)). This presumption coverage was legislated in Saskatchewan effective December 20, 2016.

Presumptive coverage means that when a worker is formally diagnosed with a psychological injury after exposure to a traumatic incident(s) at work or while working, the WCB will presume the diagnosis is related to their job, unless the contrary is proven. This means the WCB may review information to ensure there is a reasonable cause and effect relationship.

A traumatic incident(s) is defined as:

- Direct personal experience of a work-related event;
- Directly witnessing a work-related event that, reasonably and objectively assessed, is specific, sudden, frightening or horrific;
- An actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or others or threat to one's physical integrity.

Examples include: a victim of a robbery or hostage-taking incident; witnessing the death or severe injury of a co-worker; or providing assistance to victims of severe physical trauma or fatalities.

Traumatic incident(s) may also include workload or work-related interpersonal incidents that are excessive and unusual in comparison to the pressures and tensions experienced in normal employment.

These must be beyond the normal scope of maintaining employment from a reasonable person's perspective. For example, a workplace where a worker has been subjected to threats of harm, violations of personal privacy, public shaming or baseless threats to his or her employment status.

Incidents can also be cumulative. For example, a social worker may be exposed to a series of cases involving severe child abuse, and develop a psychological injury as a result of the cumulative impact of those events.

Psychological injuries can include, but are not limited to, anxiety disorders, acute stress reactions, PTSD, adjustment disorders, or depression.

What can you expect?

When the WCB receives information indicating a worker may have experienced a traumatic incident at work and may have a psychological injury, the WCB will first help start treatment with a WCB [accredited psychologist](#) (if necessary). Next, the WCB will proceed to gather information to determine if the worker has been exposed to a traumatic incident, or series of traumatic incidents, that occurred during work and if it is acceptable under the WCB's legislation.

As every worker responds to a traumatic event differently, treatment needs will vary. However, most workers will begin counselling with a psychologist, typically on a weekly basis.

If a worker requires more support in order to recover and return to work, he/she may be referred to a Mental Health Program (MHP), which will include:

- Regular therapy/counselling by a clinical psychologist.
- Attendance at a treatment centre for:
 - Structure, socialization and personal goal setting with the treatment team.
 - An exercise program designed to have a therapeutic effect on mood and well-being.
- Exposure therapy to or near the worksite, as needed, to begin to incorporate the coping strategies taught in the counselling sessions.
- A guided return-to-work plan, which may involve graduated hours of work, temporary modified duties, etc.

How you can help your worker

Due to their nature, work-related psychological injuries require unique treatment methods and approaches. Awareness of, and sensitivity to, your worker's condition throughout the recovery process will enhance their likelihood of safely recovering and returning to work, while minimizing risks for regression or delayed recovery.

Psychological trauma affects everyone differently. What may cause one person to develop a psychological injury may not necessarily affect another person the same way.

Similarly, an effective treatment plan for one worker may not produce the same results in another worker.

How to support your worker as they recover from a psychological injury

1. Find out what will help your worker feel supported.

Talk to your worker as soon as possible (in person, if appropriate) and let them know you are there for support. Listen openly to how they feel. Be reassuring and answer any questions they have. Direct them to the WCB for questions about the claim process.

Establish a frequency and preferred method of contact that works for all of you. If you can, provide your worker choices that will help them take control over their environment (for example, when and where to meet, whether to fill out claim forms at the office or at home, who they choose to be their point of contact at work, etc.).

2. Secure resources and information to assist your worker.

Provide your worker with information about your organization's sick leave policy and/or position on paying medical costs, in order to help plan for the financial impact of the situation.

3. Avoid discussing your perspective of the claim with your worker or the worker's co-workers.

Psychological injuries carry a false stigma suggesting personal weakness. Discussing your opinion of the claim or promoting discussion among co-workers can perpetuate the stigma. Discussions such as these can also damage the employer/worker relationship, which is a significant factor in a successful recovery and return to work.

4. Contact the assigned WCB claims manager to receive regular updates.

Stay connected with the claims manager to ensure you understand how you can help and how you should prepare to return your worker to work. However, the claims manager cannot share private medical information. To find out who the claims manager is, you can contact our inquiry line at 1.800.667.7590.

Return to work

Consider the following to support your worker to prepare for the return to work:

1. Participate in all return-to-work planning discussions/meetings with your care providers and, when necessary, with the WCB to help facilitate a return to work.

A care provider may arrange a meeting with you, and, if appropriate, your worker to discuss ideas for modified duties. They will document the return-to-work plan for all involved. The care providers arrange the return to work with the primary care provider.

2. Offer work with modified hours and/or duties.

After a psychological injury, some workers have less stamina to cope with their job on a full-time basis. By offering modified hours or duties, you help your worker have time to seek medical support for their symptoms, which may help decrease the probability of a recurrence.

Some workers may not be able to work in the same environment or perform the same duties. Modified duties can assist your worker to stay at work. Think about alternate work locations or duties to accommodate a safe and early return.

3. Prepare co-workers for the worker's return to work.

Many people don't know how to interact with a co-worker who is dealing with a psychological injury. Talk to your Human Resources Department about ways to help your worker manage this transition.

4. Follow-up with your worker after they return to work.

Pay attention to changes in work behaviour. For instance, if your worker was never late prior to the incident, but is now frequently late, they could be struggling with their injury. Other

signs can include avoiding contact with people, absenteeism, sleep deprivation or memory issues.

5. Know who to call in a crisis.

To manage psychological injuries effectively, your worker should be followed by a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and/or a family physician.

Available community resources, including family/friends and your local community distress line numbers, are all important numbers to have on hand. This is especially important once the worker is back at work.

6. Help the worker be prepared with a contingency plan.

The anniversary of an incident can bring on the same feelings that occurred when the incident first happened. There can also be “trauma triggers.”

Triggers can be diverse, such as people, places, images, sensory perception, incidents or circumstances that remind your worker of their incident.

Understanding potential triggers can help you and your worker develop a contingency plan to help your worker deal with a difficult time.

When in doubt, please call us

Your WCB representative is a great resource for helping you navigate a psychological injury claim and co-ordinating a safe return to work for your worker. Your WCB representative can be reached at 1.800.667.7590.

We care about your worker’s well-being and will work with him/her, the treatment provider and you throughout the recovery process.

More information

**Crisis Services Canada
Suicide Prevention and Support**

**1.833.456.4566
24/7 hours**

The Life Line

<https://thelifelinecanada.ca/>

or download the app for free