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Mental illness, fastest growing workplace hazard, costs hundreds of billions per year

The Productivity Commission's draft report illustrates the immense cost of mental illness, which independent research shows is the fastest growing type of workplace injury in Australia.

The ACTU welcomes some of the Productivity Commission's recommendations around workers' compensation including no-liability treatment for mental health injuries and claims and improving the role of the workers' compensation system in rehabilitation and return-to-work for psychological injury across industries.

The draft report broadly mirrors some of the recommendations made in the recent review into Australia's model work health safety laws, which the ACTU supports.

Psychological health and safety should be given the same importance as physical health and safety in workplace health and safety (WHS) laws. It is clear that a significant step could be taken towards addressing this issue by ensuring that Workers' Compensation is available to every worker who suffers mental ill-health as a result of stress or hazards at work.

A survey conducted by the ACTU this year found that more than 60 per cent of respondents had experienced mental ill-health because their employer had failed to manage psycho-social hazards in their workplace.

The same survey found that almost half of respondents felt their employer was unprepared to support workers experiencing mental health issues in the workplace.

The report recognises that there are unique challenges facing young people, Indigenous people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living in social isolation (including in remote parts of Australia), and those in the LGBTIQ community.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

"Work is a significant contributing factor, both positively and negatively, to people's mental health. It must be at the centre of our efforts to reduce the incidence of mental ill-health.

"A huge number of Australians suffer mental health issues every year because of stressors and other hazards they encounter in their workplace, and the evidence indicates that these people rarely receive support or compensation in the way that would be routine for physical injuries. This has to change.

"Mental health hazards at work should be treated the same as physical hazards. We need strong laws that protect people at work"

“Ensuring that all instances of workplace-related mental health are captured by the Workers’ Compensation system would be a huge step towards ensuring that no one in Australia suffering mental illness is without support.

“The report also correctly identifies that young people, women, Indigenous Australians, members of the LGBTIQ community as well as those living in social isolation in remote Australia are at increased risk of mental ill health. Any response to this issue must start with these communities.

“We welcome the findings of the draft report, and call on the Morrison Government to act swiftly to address this issue.”

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