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New data reveals a third of jobs driving Australia's serious injury claims

A third of jobs accounted for over half of all serious work injury claims over the past year, with healthcare and social assistance the most common industries, according to new data released by Safe Work Australia.

The Key Work Health and Safety Statistics 2025 report shows that Australia recorded 146,700 serious workers' compensation claims over the past 12 months. Of those claims, the four most common industries were health care and social assistance (19.9 per cent), construction (12 per cent), manufacturing (10.1 per cent), and public administration and safety (9.2 per cent).

Collectively, the four sectors made up over half of all serious claims – despite only representing just 36.3 per cent of filled jobs covered by a workers' compensation scheme.

According to Safe Work Australia's report, in 2024, 188 workers lost their lives to traumatic injuries - a rate of 1.3 deaths per 100,000 workers, down 24 per cent since 2014, but still far too high. Vehicle incidents remain the leading cause of death.

Concerningly, the data exposes a large gap between injury and compensation. Only 3 in 10 injured workers report receiving workers' compensation, meaning 7 in 10 do not lodge or receive a claim – commonly because the injury is seen as minor or 'not necessary,' but uncertainty about eligibility and lack of awareness also play a significant role. However, 40 per cent of workers who did not make a workers' compensation claim needed time off work, highlighting that many unclaimed injuries have a real impact on workers' lives and livelihoods.

Over the past decade, serious claims for mental health conditions experienced the largest change of any major injury group, up by 161 per cent. Mental stress is now the fourth most common mechanism behind serious claims at 11.5 per cent of all serious claims, after body stressing (musculoskeletal disorders), falls, trips and slips, and being hit by moving objects.

The median time lost from mental health serious claims is about five times the median time lost across all serious claims. Mental health claims represent the costliest form of workplace injury, leading to significantly more time off work and more than four times the median compensation paid across all serious claims.

Safe Work Australia is currently undertaking a review of Australia's model WHS laws. In response, unions are advocating for stronger legislative protections for workers exposed to psychosocial hazards, including violence and aggression, sexual harassment, and discrimination. These calls reflect growing concern about the need for clear, enforceable standards to safeguard mental health and wellbeing at work.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary, Liam O'Brien:

"These new figures show exactly where prevention, enforcement and resourcing will save the most injuries and lives. Health and care workers, tradies, factory workers and the people who keep our communities safe are at the greatest risk.

"A 24 per cent fall in the fatality rate since 2014 is welcome, but 188 families lost a loved one last year. One death at work is one too many, and our job is far from done.

"Unions are alarmed that seven in ten injured workers don't receive workers' compensation. That points to barriers and under-reporting that hide the real cost of workplace injuries on Australian workers.

"Mental stress is now the fourth biggest cause of serious injury. Employers must treat work stress and intensification with the same seriousness as any other health and safety consideration."

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