



Start with a more accurate picture of worker injury, illness and death. Consider worker mental injury and illness too.

Claims allowed by Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) have become the default statistics shared by many when discussing the number of workers killed, made ill, or injured each year by workplace hazards left unchecked.

THIS PRACTICE MUST STOP.

WSIB data does not even begin to represent the true toll of worker disability, disease, and death. Most worker suffering caused by workplace inaction is never reported to or recognized by the WSIB. This is especially the case for cancer and other occupational illnesses. And the same is likely true of mental injuries caused or worsened by work factors and hazards such as harassment, unmanageable job demands, limited say in how work gets done, lack of role clarity, technology misuse, poor work-life balance and other psychosocial hazards. In fact, the daily experiences of workers and a growing body of research evidence leave no doubt, we as a society are facing a mental health crisis and work is a prominent cause.

Failure to shed light on the true toll of worker suffering serves to downplay the collective need to pursue safer, healthier work. This pursuit must be led by committed employers and competent supervisors and supported by well-trained joint health and safety committee members, health and safety representatives in smaller workplaces, members of worker trades committees and workers empowered to act on their right to participate in health and safety matters. Though enhanced regulations and stronger enforcement are also critical. For the art of the possible, we need only look to recent legislation in all five Australian states enacted in an effort to promote psychologically health workplaces. The best of these includes measures to help ensure workers and their representatives actively participate in prevention programs.

A TRUER TOLL

Conservative
Estimates of Ontario
Worker Suffering

ESTIMATED 2024 WORKER DEATHS RESULTING FROM HAZARDOUS WORK.

▶ **2,430**

*WSIB-allowed 2024 worker death claims: **243**

ESTIMATED 2024 WORKER INJURIES AND ILLNESSES RESULTING FROM HAZARDOUS WORK.

▶ **359,222**

*WSIB-allowed 2024 worker injury and illness claims: **179,611**

(WSIB 2024 data, the last year for which a more complete data set is available, was accessed March 17, 2026.)

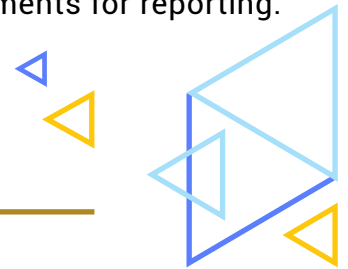
THE EVIDENCE

WORKER DEATHS: In a 2018 study, University of Ottawa researchers suggest a more accurate picture of worker deaths would number between 9,800 and 13,200 Canadians – or 10 to 13 times higher than fatalities reported by provincial and territorial compensation boards. Although, whether one multiplies by 10 or 13, the report concludes, even these are conservative estimates.

Other research has long supported this truth. A report by Dr. Annalee Yassi prepared in 1983 for a study of the then Workers' Compensation Board in Ontario estimated 6,000 work-related deaths annually in Ontario from cancer, cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases alone. A [government-commissioned study](#) by Dr. Paul Demers, Occupational Cancer Research Centre director, published in 2020 found less than 10 per cent of Ontarians with occupational cancer are ever compensated. Additional research evidence suggests between five and 16 per cent of cancers are work-related. Based on this, and estimates provided by the [Canadian Cancer Society](#), between 1,620 and 5,184 Ontarians died in 2025 from work-related cancer.

WORKER INJURIES AND ILLNESSES: In 2020, Ontario's [Institute for Work and Health \(IWH\)](#) published research finding 64 per cent of injuries go unreported to a workers' compensation board. In 2022, [IWH researchers](#) published an Ontario study suggesting upwards of 40 per cent of emergency department visits for the treatment of work-related injuries or illnesses also go unreported to the WSIB.

The literature on factors explaining underreporting and under recognition of injury and illness claims is just as rich. A [qualitative study](#) conducted in 2009 and funded by the WSIB Research Advisory Council found several factors such as a lack of education linking workplace hazards with occupational disease, “tensions” between the science and adjudication policy, fear of employer reprisals, and financial incentives. A subsequent 2023 [landscape review of occupational disease in Ontario](#) among other things reminded us of legal requirements for reporting.



MENTAL INJURIES AND ILLNESSES: According to an [April 2023 Statistics Canada survey](#), more than one in five Canadians indicated they experienced high or very high levels of work-related stress. Over time, stress left unaddressed can lead to mental health issues including burnout, depression, anxiety and even trigger or contribute to bipolar disorder.

This suffering is also having a direct impact on work. More than 60 per cent of missed workdays are attributed to poor mental health, according to the [Health Outcomes Report published by GreenShield in June 2024](#). Statistics Canada has also investigated this same issue [surveying workers in April 2023](#) and found 7.5 per cent of employed Canadians (or approximately 1.2 million) took time off work because of work-related stress or for mental health reasons in the previous 12 months.

A report published in [2025 by the CSA Public Policy Centre](#) offered that employers can and must play a crucial role in addressing the many workplace psychosocial hazards responsible for this epidemic. A [2019 study published by the IWH](#) came to a similar conclusion with the researchers explaining better workplace conditions are linked not only with lower risks of mental illnesses, but also much improved worker mental health.

Without more emphasis on identifying and addressing psychosocial hazards in the workplace, according to the authors of the 2025 CSA report and many others, the mental health crisis will have severe repercussions for individuals, businesses, and the economy. They note the annual cost of mental illnesses currently exceeds \$200 billion, and is projected to reach \$2.5 trillion by 2041.