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**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **Government agency mental stress claims cost the Insurance Commission \$34.5 million in 2019**

- **Work pressure, harassment, trauma and violence main factors**
- **Psychological claims are twice the cost of physical injury claims**
- **14,583 psychologist and psychiatrist appointments paid for last year**

During [Mental Health Week](#) (6-12 October), the Insurance Commission has released statistics on public sector mental stress claims.

The State's insurer, which provides workers' compensation for almost 120,000 public sector employees in WA, received 454 new mental stress claims in 2019, up 6% since 2018 (427), at an estimated total cost of \$34.5 million.

Its [annual results](#) show the estimated average cost of a new mental stress claim in 2019 was \$76,000, a 27% increase since 2015, compared to \$33,700 for physical injury claims. Mental stress claims constituted 22% of the cost of total workers' compensation claims but represented only 10% of new claims received.

Psychological claims also have longer durations due to the complexities of the injury and of returning an individual to the work environment. To help claimants, the Insurance Commission funded 14,583 psychologist and psychiatrist appointments in 2019 among a range of services.

Public sector workers across Australia continue to lodge mental stress workers' compensation claims at rates well above the private sector. In WA, more than half (56%) of mental stress claims are lodged with the Insurance Commission despite public sector employees only accounting for 10% of the state's workforce.

### **Absence from work**

In 2019, injured employees with mental stress claims across the public sector took an average of 123 days off work compared to 67 days for all other lost-time injury claims.

In total, the equivalent of 192 full-time employees were absent from work for the full 2019 year due to mental stress.

### **Workplace incidents**

Pressure at work contributed to around a third (30%) of mental stress claims in 2019, costing over \$8 million. Harassment and exposure to trauma each accounted for around a quarter (23%) and over \$6 million in costs. A tenth of claims were linked to exposure to violence (\$2.7m).

The contributory factors behind these claims are reflective of the many complex and challenging frontline services delivered to the community by public sector employees.

### **Ways to look after your mental health and wellbeing**

*Where you live:*

1. **Invest time in relationships.** Engage with people who you trust.
2. **Eat well.** Nutrition can make a difference to the way you feel.
3. **Sleep well.** Sleep helps to repair and restore the body and mind.

*Where you learn and work:*

4. **Focus on strengths.** Have positive thoughts.
5. **Take time out.** Rest provides space to recover from stress.

*Where you play:*

6. **Do things with others.** Spend time with family and friends.
7. **Do something creative.** Activities can positively impact your mental health.
8. **Keep active.** Being physically active can reduce stress.

Visit <http://www.thinkmentalhealthwa.com.au> for more information.

**For support call beyondblue on 1300 224 636 for 24/7 free counselling or Lifeline in a crisis situation on 13 11 14.**

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### **Media contact**

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## Workers' Compensation Mental Stress Claims in 2019

- Men: 188 new claims, \$14.4m estimated cost;
- Women: 266 new claims, \$20.1m estimated cost;
  - The most common mental stress claim causes were exposure to trauma (men) and harassment (women);
- Ages 30 and under: \$71,600 average cost per claim; and
- Ages 41-50: \$84,900 average cost per claim.

Cost Breakdown	Cost	%
Work Pressure	\$8.1m	30%
Exposure to Trauma	\$6.2m	23%
Exposure to Violence	\$2.7m	10%
Harassment	\$6.4m	23%
Other Factors	\$4.0m	14%

2019 Profile Comparison		
	All New Claims	New Mental Stress Claims
Number of claims	4,747	454 (9.6%)
Lost Time Injury claims	3,157	374 (11.8%)
Severe* claims	1,121	235 (21.0%)
Estimated average claim cost^	\$33,700	\$76,000
Estimated total claims cost^	\$160.0m	\$34.5m (21.6%)
Full-time equivalent absent from work	875	192
Average days lost per Lost Time Injury	66.5	123.2

\*Severe is greater than 60 days

^Based on finalised claim costs

Further information on the Insurance Commission's performance and activities in the last year is available in its [2019 annual report](#).

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