

Psychological injuries from traumatic event(s) at work

Experiencing traumatic event(s) at work can result in a psychological injury or stress that can be personally devastating and require treatment to resolve. A claim for a psychological injury can be accepted when the condition develops following exposure to a traumatic event(s) at work.

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

How does WCB make a decision to accept a claim?

We accept a confirmed psychological injury when it developed as a result of exposure to a traumatic event(s) at work.

A confirmed psychological or psychiatric injury is one that has been diagnosed by a physician, psychiatrist or psychologist as defined in the most current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders (DSM).

What is a traumatic event?

A traumatic event is direct personal experience of an event or directly witnessing an event that is sudden, frightening, shocking, specific and involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or others or threat to one's physical integrity.

During the period of April 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020, a traumatic event can 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, clear and confirmed harassing behaviour at the 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.

For events that occur on or on or after January 1, 2021, interpersonal relations between a worker and co-workers, management, or customers are only considered to be

traumatic, when they result in behaviours that are aggressive, threatening, or abusive.

What type of work events could result in a psychological injury?

WCB accepts psychological injuries arising out of a variety of work-related incidents or events such as:

- A store clerk who is the victim of a robbery.
- A warehouse worker who witnesses the death or severe injury of a co-worker.
- A truck driver who is involved in a motor vehicle accident involving fatalities.
- A social worker who was exposed to a series of cases involving severe child abuse.

What you can expect

When we receive information indicating a worker may have a psychological injury as a result of stressors at work, we may first help start treatment (if necessary).

Next, we will review the information, ensuring:

- the incidents or event(s) are confirmed and occurred in the course of employment,
- the psychological injury diagnosis is confirmed using the criteria established in the most current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM),
- there is medical information to support the incident(s) caused the diagnosed condition (cause and effect).

As every worker responds to their injury differently, treatment needs will be diverse. However, most workers will begin with counselling from a community psychologist, along with any medication management provided by their family doctor. Some workers may be referred to a psychiatrist. In either case, injured workers may select their treatment provider.

How could a psychological injury impact your employee?

Due to their nature, work-related psychological injuries require unique treatment methods and approaches. Awareness of and sensitivity to your employee'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.

Psychological injuries can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- anxiety disorders,
- acute stress reactions,
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),
- adjustment disorders, or
- depression.

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

This [fact sheet](#) discusses how you can support your employee during this difficult time.

More information for you

You can find information about psychological injuries [here](#).

Information about modified work is found [here](#).

When in doubt, please call us

Your WCB adjudicator or case manager is a great resource for helping you navigate a psychological injury claim and coordinating a safe return to work for your employee.

We care about your employee's wellbeing and will work with them, the treatment provider and you throughout the recovery process.

