

**Alberta WCB  
Policies &  
Information**

Chapter:

**INJURIES**

Subject:

**AGGRAVATION OF A PRE-EXISTING CONDITION**

Authorization:

**BoD Resolution 96/10/53**

Date:

**November 26, 1996**

**APPLICATION 1: AGGRAVATION OF A PRE-EXISTING CONDITION**

1. ***When are claims adjudicated under this policy?*** For a claim to be considered under this policy there must be the confirmed presence of a pre-existing condition and evidence it was aggravated by a compensable accident.

The fact that a worker has a pre-existing condition does not necessarily mean it was aggravated by the compensable injury. If the clinical diagnosis of a pre-existing condition is incidental to the nature of the disability, the claim is not subject to this policy.

WCB does not extend coverage under this policy or under Policy 02-01 (*Arises Out of and Occurs in the Course of Employment*) if the need for treatment or lay-off from work is due solely to a pre-existing, non-compensable condition.

2. ***How does WCB determine if a pre-existing condition has been aggravated?*** There must be clear documentation of a pre-existing condition and it must be apparent from the objective medical information available that the compensable accident caused some worsening of this condition, at least on a temporary basis.

WCB will consider the relationship between the pre-existing condition and the accident, including the mechanism of injury (for example, twisting, lifting heavy objects), the extent or severity of the underlying condition, and the degree to which the injury may have affected the condition.

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**3. *How long are temporary benefits payable?***

Temporary benefits will be paid until:

- the aggravation has ended and the weight of evidence shows that ongoing temporary disability is solely due to the pre-existing condition or some other unrelated, non-compensable health problem, or
- the compensable aggravation reaches a medical plateau, at which time WCB will evaluate whether there is any permanent impairment caused by the compensable accident.

**4. *What medical costs does WCB cover?***

When a claim is adjudicated under the aggravation policy WCB authorizes all necessary medical treatment to help the worker recover from the effects of the work injury. Surgery required solely for the non-compensable pre-existing condition may be accepted on a limited basis under the Rehabilitation Surgery Program (see Application 2).

**5. *When a claim is adjudicated under this policy, how does WCB determine its responsibility for permanent disability?***

If the aggravation was temporary and the worker recovers to a pre-accident state there is no compensable permanent disability.

When the pre-existing condition is permanently affected by the work injury, WCB uses the following formula to determine the proportion of the clinical impairment reasonably attributable to the aggravation and to prorate the permanent disability award:

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*Permanent Disability  
(continued)*

- the value of the total post-accident clinical impairment less
- the value of the total pre-aggravation clinical impairment,

established in accordance with WCB’s approved rating schedule or by medical assessment.

WCB does not prorate the permanent disability award when the compensable accident and its immediate consequences are so severe that the permanent disability would have resulted regardless of the pre-existing condition.

Although WCB prorates awards which are based on clinical impairment, it accepts full responsibility for permanent loss of earning capacity if, despite a pre-existing condition, a worker was able to perform the job duties prior to the compensable accident and is no longer able to do so because of the compensable injury.

**6. Does the accident employer receive cost relief on aggravation claims?**

Cost relief may be granted for claims adjudicated under this policy. Refer to Policy 05-02, *Cost Relief*, for details.

**7. When is this policy application effective?**

This policy application (Application 1 – Aggravation of a Pre-Existing Condition) is effective February 15, 1997, except when noted otherwise in a specific policy section(s).

**Previous versions**

- [Policy 0302 Part II - August 2015](#)
- [Policy 0302 Part II - January 2004](#)
- [Policy 0302 Part II - October 1997](#)
- [Policy 0302 Part II \(consolidated manual 1st Issue\) - February 1997](#)