

Psychological injuries—frequently asked questions

Does WCB only accept cases of PTSD?

WCB-Alberta covers a variety of psychological injuries that are shown to have occurred at work, including PTSD.

Do you have to be a first responder to have a psychological injury claim accepted?

The *Workers' Compensation Act* covers all workers in Alberta in any covered occupation.

What is considered to be a psychological injury?

The *Act* defines a psychological injury as: “any psychological disorder or condition that meets the diagnostic criteria for a disease or condition that is described in the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association.”

What is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)?

Often known by its acronym, DSM, this manual is used by health care professionals to diagnose and evaluate mental disorders. The DSM is published by the American Psychiatric Association and is used throughout the Canadian health care system.

Does WCB always require a DSM diagnosis before they will accept a claim?

Yes. The *Act* requires that a worker is diagnosed with a psychological injury in order to accept the claim. The diagnosis can be from a family physician, psychologist, or other specialist such as a psychiatrist. However, if a worker is experiencing symptoms following a traumatic event at work, and needs help having their symptoms diagnosed, WCB can assist in arranging an assessment.

How does WCB make a decision to accept a claim?

Psychological injuries can be accepted when a worker has been formally diagnosed with a psychological injury due, at least in part, to exposure to a traumatic event at work. We will also accept psychological injuries when a worker has

experienced an accumulation of stressors at work/a significant stressor that occurs over time and this is the main cause of the injury.

For event(s)/stressors that occurred prior to January 1, 2021, different policies were in effect that may impact how we make decisions on your claim. Please contact your adjudicator or case manager to obtain more information.

What is a traumatic event?

A traumatic event at work is defined as direct personal experience of an event or directly witnessing an event that is:

- sudden/unexpected,
- frightening or shocking,
- having a specific time and place, and
- involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or others or threat to one's physical integrity (i.e. assault).

Interpersonal relations between a worker and co-workers, management or customers may be traumatic when they result in behaviours that are aggressive, threatening or abusive and satisfy the overall definition as listed above.

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 victim of a robbery or hostage-taking event.
- Witnessing the death or severe injury of a co-worker.
- Being in a motor vehicle accident involving severe injuries and/or fatalities.
- Clear and confirmable 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.

Are there a certain number of incidents that I have to be exposed to before WCB will consider my claim?

A work event can involve a single incident (acute) or series of incidents (cumulative). The importance is not placed on the number of incidents, but on the impact of the incident(s) on the individual worker.

If my injury did not occur right away, but came about after many years of exposure, will WCB still consider my case?

There is no right or wrong reaction to traumatic events or stressors at work. Everyone will experience stress and trauma differently. We will consider your case based on your individual circumstances.

For workers who are exposed to multiple events over the course of their employment, a claim will be considered even if the worker was able to tolerate past traumatic events.

For example, a first responder who has attended the scene of numerous emergencies/accidents, or a correctional worker exposed to a series of critical incidents while working in a correctional centre who develops a psychological injury as a result of the combined impact of those events.

How long will it take to decide if my claim is accepted?

It depends on the complexity of your claim and the availability of information. For example, in cases where there is an obvious and undeniable connection between the work event or incidents and the worker's injury, the decisions regarding the acceptance of the claim can be made quickly. Complex cases, such as those involving many months or years of events, may take longer.

What information does WCB need to decide my claim?

Typically, we will gather information that will help clarify the diagnosis and confirm the injury is work related. Information needed may include: medical assessments including mental health assessments, information from your employer, job descriptions or statements from co-workers.

If we need additional information, our customer service staff will let you know what information they need and the reason(s) why.

What is the purpose of a mental health assessment?

Mental health assessments fulfil several functions in managing your WCB claim. First, the assessment confirms the diagnosis of a psychological injury. Second, the assessment can recommend needed treatment. Finally, an assessment can help to identify any work restrictions that should be taken into consideration when contemplating return to work.

I have recently been diagnosed with a work-related psychological injury, but also have a preexisting psychological condition. Will my pre-existing condition affect my current claim?

A pre-existing psychological condition does not affect your ability to receive WCB benefits for a work-related psychological injury.

I filed a WCB claim for a psychological injury and I'm already working with a psychologist. Do I have to switch to a WCB accredited provider?

If you have started treatment with a non-WCB accredited psychologist, we will make every effort to support this arrangement. However, if progress towards returning to work has not occurred within the first ten weeks, you may be required to move to a WCB-accredited psychologist. This will be arranged in consultation with you and your current provider.

Depending on your situation and unique treatment needs, you may be referred to a psychological injury program, which may involve a WCB-approved psychologist. Psychological injury programs include counselling, team-based therapy, exposure therapy and return-to-work (RTW) supports.

Where can I find more information about psychological injuries and the available supports?

Find more information here: [Psychological injuries - WCB Alberta](#)