

# Workplace interventions required to keep rapidly expanding aging workforce safe

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With the burden of work-related injuries in older employees only set to increase, more needs to be done to keep them safe, a University of Otago study has found.

Researchers, with funding from the Dunedin School of Medicine Dean's Bequest Fund, studied the incidence, nature and cause of work-related injuries in older New Zealanders. Their findings have just been published in the journal *Accident Analysis & Prevention*.

Associate Professor Chrys Jaye, of the University's Department of General Practice and Rural Health, said increasing numbers of people were working beyond retirement age.

The number of [older workers](#) in the workforce is predicted to double by 2036, which could result in escalated costs to the ACC [injury](#) rehabilitation and compensation scheme.

"Employers and policy makers need to consider the impact of work activities on older workers while continuing to value their productivity," Associate Professor Jaye says.

Employers need to work to make workplaces as safe and hazard free as possible.

"This means taking into account risks related to age-related impairments such as declining vision, hearing, physical capacity and balance. This

might include re-designing workplaces to meet the needs of older workers, and [worker](#) training and health promotion in the [workplace](#).

"A workplace that is safer for older workers is likely to be safer for all workers."

The study found older workers represented a significant burden on ACC with just over one in five accepted claims for all traumatic work injuries being made by workers aged 55–79 years, from 2009 to 2013.

Overall, 70–79 year olds had the highest rate of work injury entitlement claims, and the highest percentage (five per cent) of fatal injury, among 55–79 year olds.

Regardless of age, the highest claim rates were for males. Claim rates for both males and females rose steadily with increasing age, and were highest for the oldest group of workers aged between 70 and 79 years.

The researchers believe factors behind the increased rate of injury include the decline of physical and cognitive function with age, workplace safety culture of those employing older workers, the self-perception of invulnerability of older workers, underestimation of risk when overly familiar with a hazard, and age-related job segregation leading to different job hazard exposures.

**More information:** Rebecca Lilley et al. Age-related patterns in work-related injury claims from older New Zealanders, 2009–2013: Implications of injury for an aging workforce, *Accident Analysis & Prevention* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.aap.2017.10.022](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2017.10.022)

Provided by University of Otago

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