

Researchers count the costs of sick days

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Credit: Monash University

A report released today sheds light on the enormous impact of injury and illness in Australia's working population.

The report, led by Monash Professor Alex Collie, shows that 786,000 workers accessed [income support](#) from a private or government source in the 2015/16 financial year, in addition to at least 6.5 million workers

who used sick leave. The total direct costs amounted to \$37.2 billion for the year.

The report was commissioned by the Collaborative Partnership, a national effort by government, private and not-for-profit organisations to improve [work](#) participation by investigating the link between work and health.

Professor Collie mapped Australia's systems of income support for people with health conditions that affect their ability to work.

"Ill health and injury has an enormous impact on society and on the productivity of Australia's workforce. For the first time, this project has allowed us to calculate both the number of people whose health affects their ability to work, and the costs to employers, insurers and government," Professor Collie said.

"Australia has a complex and fragmented approach to supporting workers with illness. This includes employer provided [sick leave](#), workers compensation, life insurance, our social security system and a range of other stand-alone income support systems. There are literally hundreds of regulatory authorities, government agencies and private insurers involved, as well as tens of thousands of employers."

The project was conducted by Monash University's Insurance Work and Health Group. The team also mapped the services provided to workers through the support systems, and identified opportunities to improve both participation in work and health.

CEO of Comcare Jennifer Taylor said the report described the enormous scale of [health](#)-related lost productivity in Australia.

"There are opportunities to reduce this burden, but they require

cooperation between the many systems," Ms Taylor said.

"These include better aligning approaches to service delivery, greater information and data sharing, earlier intervention and support, and focusing on more efficient transition between systems of people with long periods off work."

The report shows that while the majority of people return to paid employment following a period of temporary incapacity, a significant minority experience longer periods of work incapacity and access income support from multiple systems.

"There is a big discrepancy in the type and extent of support provided through these systems," Professor Collie said.

Professor Collie said personal and family resources such as personal savings and partner income were also important.

"These personal resources are essential for many people with long periods off work, as there are multiple gaps and waiting periods where our formal systems don't provide income support," Professor Collie said.

Provided by Monash University

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