

In-depth study supports new solutions for health care workers

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A major study has shown that health care and social assistance workers are twice as likely to file a workplace compensation claim for psychological injuries, compared to a similar data-set of workers in all

non-health care industries, including construction, retail and law-enforcement services.

The in-depth study of deidentified data from more than 200,000 workers is supported by three leading Australian universities—Monash University, Curtin University, and the University of Sydney—and is launched today as part of the Design for Care consortium—a solutions-focused research project.

The data provides an insight of how psychological injury claims have grown rapidly in the health care and social assistance industries in NSW over the past nine years, with nurses, midwives, ambulance officers and [social workers](#) revealed as highly impacted jobs.

Stress and anxiety were found to be the most common type of psychological injuries, accounting for two-thirds of cases, while [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) was most common among ambulance officers.

Report lead author Professor Alex Collie, from Monash University, said the data emphasizes why evidence-informed prevention and early intervention strategies should be reinforced in health and social care settings.

"The research team reviewed work injury claims data from the NSW workers' compensation system to better understand the frequency, nature and duration of injuries reported by health care and social assistance workers," Professor Collie said.

"We found that workers' compensation claims for psychological injury are nearly twice as common in the NSW health care and social assistance industry than compared to a similar data-set of workers in all non-health care industries. We also found that workers with these injuries have prolonged periods of work disability, with half requiring more than 13

weeks off work."

Professor Sharon Parker, from Curtin's Future of Work Institute, said the data will also enrich understanding of mental health issues across the wider health care sector.

"The Design for Care project aims to provide workplaces with work design resources, well-being benchmarks and a [digital platform](#) to help prevent psychological injury amongst care workers. Our highly [collaborative approach](#) focuses on finding new ways to improve workers' autonomy, reduce their job pressure, and enhance supportive relationships," Professor Parker said.

Associate Professor Anya Johnson, Head of Work and Organizational Studies at the University of Sydney Business School, believes the industry is now eager to be involved.

"The solutions are informed by research and evidence but co-designed with our industry partners, and that's crucial. We're not just throwing literature at the problem—we're working to understand the particulars of each organization and sector, produce work design strategies that can be scaled up to help the entire industry, and ultimately create mentally healthier workplaces," Associate Professor Johnson said.

Richard Harding, icare's CEO said Design for Care is a key part of a mental health strategy that is already sharing more prevention focused insights and solutions—like mental health first aid training—with workplaces.

"This important study confirms other recent academic research that reveals the major demographic shift from physical labor to more mentally demanding jobs in service industries that's occurred over the last two decades," Mr. Harding said.

"Today's findings will enable us develop new solutions for our health care sector, adding to icare's suite of existing early prevention and intervention programs that already support frontline staff. We look forward to working closely with employers and [government agencies](#) on the next phase of research, as we test work design solutions in their workplaces."

The report and its findings were launched at the State of Affairs event hosted in Sydney today (Nov. 15).

The full report is titled "Psychological injury in the New South Wales Healthcare and Social Assistance Industry: A retrospective cohort study," and further information can be found [here](#).

Provided by Curtin University

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