

Workplace injury and illness costs tens of thousands of work years, Australian study finds

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Australia loses 41,194 work years annually due to work-related injury, disease and mental health conditions, a new measure of the national

burden of workplace injury and illness has found.

This equals more than 41,000 lost jobs.

The Monash University team developed the new "Working Years Lost" metric to measure the national burden of work-based [injury](#), illness and disease resulting in compensation claims.

[Published](#) in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, the study aimed to quantify the national burden of working time lost to compensable occupational injury and disease and how working time lost is distributed across age, sex, injury and disease.

Professor Alex Collie from Monash University's School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine said it was the first time such figures had been collated.

"Normally we track injury and disease at work by counting the number of people making compensation claims or the amount of time they spend off work," he said.

"This new measure combines those two concepts and presents it as something more meaningful, which can be summarized as the number of people off work for a full year."

Professor Collie said the working years lost (WYL) measure provided a different view of the "challenge" of workplace injury.

"The impact of some types of injury and disease are more accurately represented in this new metric," he said.

"For instance, mental health conditions have a much higher percentage of working years lost than of workers' compensation claims. This is

because we take the long time off work for each mental health claim into account, whereas simply counting claims does not do this."

The national study covered people with accepted workers' compensation claims and receiving wage replacement benefits for time off work, lodged between July 2012 and June 2017.

Male workers incurred 25,367 (61.6%) WYL while [female workers](#) accounted for 15,827 (38.4%). A total of 21,763 WYL (52.8%) were from workers aged over 45 years, despite these workers accounting for 66,742 (44.1%) accepted claims.

Traumatic injury resulted in 16,494 (40%) WYL per annum, followed by [musculoskeletal disorders](#) (8,547 WYL; 20.7%) and [mental health conditions](#) (5,361 WYL, 13%).

"Annually, compensable occupational injury and [disease](#) in Australia results in a substantial burden of lost working time, equivalent to over 41,000 lost jobs," Professor Collie said.

"The distribution of burden reflects the higher labor force participation of males, slower rehabilitation in older workers, and the relative impact of common occupational injuries and diseases. Effective occupational health surveillance, policy development and [resource allocation](#) will benefit from population-based monitoring of working time loss."

More information: Alex Collie et al, The burden of working time lost to compensable occupational injury and disease in Australia, 2012–17: a retrospective population-based study, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2024). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.52309](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.52309)

Provided by Monash University

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