

APA

AUSTRALIAN PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION

10 August 1999

*NATIONAL OFFICE
PO Box 6465
Melbourne, VIC 3004
Level 3, 201 Fitzroy St,
St Kilda, 3182
Tel: (03) 9534 9400
Fax: (03) 9534 9199
Email: national.office
@physiotherapy.asn.au
ACN 004 265 150*

Please find enclosed a submission to The Inquiry into Older Workers. This submission has been prepared by members of the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA), and the Ergonomics Society of Australia.

The Ergonomics and Occupational Health Group of the APA have developed this submission to highlight the particular needs of older workers with occupational injuries and illnesses.

The APA would welcome the opportunity to further discuss this submission with your committee.

The key contact for this submission is

Dr. David Worth
Rankin Occupational Safety and Health
7 East Terrace
Mile End
SA 5031

Telephone (08) 8234-0877
Fax (08) 8234-0977

We commend this submission to you, and look forward to receiving further information in regards to this most important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona McKinnon
National President
Australian Physiotherapy Association

**SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO OLDER WORKERS FROM THE
ERGONOMICS AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH GROUP OF THE AUSTRALIAN
PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION AND THE ERGONOMICS SOCIETY OF
AUSTRALIA**

In respect of the terms of reference of the Inquiry into Older Workers, we make the following points.

- Point of contact, Dr. David Worth, Physiotherapist, Rankin Occupational Safety and Health, 7 East Terrace, Mile End, SA 5031, telephone 08 8234 0877, fax 08 8234 0977, e-mail - rankinosh@bigpond.com.au
- Members of the Ergonomics and Occupational Health Group of the Australian Physiotherapy Association and the Ergonomics Society of Australia are involved in the prevention and management of occupational injury and illness in older workers in clinical settings, shop floor environments, workers compensation and rehabilitation contexts.
- Older workers with occupational injuries or illnesses have special problems and needs as a consequence of their age and its interaction with the effects of the injuries and illness and the workers compensation and rehabilitation processes
- Workers compensation and rehabilitation legislation is a state by state jurisdiction. However, no state workers compensation and rehabilitation legislation makes provision for older workers with work related injuries or illnesses other than taking the workers age into account when establishing capacity to work in any of the deeming sections of the legislation dealing with the reduction of income maintenance according to assessed capacity to work and earn.
- Specific difficulties for older workers with work related injuries and illnesses are:
 - Long term and increased disability impairment and handicap due to interaction between the effects of the illness or injury and increasing age related degenerative changes
 - Decreasing capacity to work with less likelihood of recovery or remission of symptoms
 - Greater difficulty in obtaining alternative or new employment, partly due to labour market demands for younger employees and diminishing work capacity
 - Greater difficulty in returning to pre-injury or pre-illness productivity levels in pre-injury or alternative employment with the pre-injury employer
 - Few, if any, incentives either within the workers compensation systems or the general labour market to employ older workers with a history of work related illness or injury particularly within any of the state workers rehabilitation schemes despite the benefits that many older workers present such as greater work experience, more in depth knowledge of processes and procedures, greater use of productivity efficiencies.
 - There is a significant number of workers over the age of 50 years with workers compensation claims or work related illnesses and injuries in Australia, compared to the number of workers with work related illness or injury below the age of 50 years in Australia (see attached schedule). Some legislations have age caps for the receipt of benefits in the workers compensation systems, whilst others do not differentiate on the basis of age.

- The danger and likelihood of aggravation of symptoms and exacerbation of injuries and illnesses which are contributed to partly by the effects of natural age related degenerative changes and which are likely to be permanent and deteriorating. This makes it difficult to the point of being unrealistic to expect such a worker to be able to return to work, either in the pre-injury job or a new job with the same employer or different employer without significant risk of such aggravation and exacerbation. This is in sharp contrast to the potential for recovery from the effects of a similar illness or injury in a young person without evidence of such degenerative changes. These workers need financial planning assistance.
- There a number of older workers of non English speaking background and very limited education with limited experience in employment and poor adaptability to new employment with work related illnesses and injury for whom rehabilitation and return to work is unlikely in almost any capacity.
- Consideration should be given to re-examination of jurisdictions to determine both the social implications and the effect of the workers compensation funds and employer levies of ongoing income maintenance payments, lump sum settlements for permanent residual disabilities and redemptions under the various Workers Compensation Acts in Australia. From the point of view of social justice, perhaps there is a point where older workers with work related illnesses and injuries belong within the Commonwealth Social Security jurisdiction between a time when age related factors such as detailed above are demonstrated upon assessment to be responsible for a reduction in capacity to obtain suitable employment, deemed total, and eligibility for either an aged or disability pension. Whilst this redistributes the cost burden away from employers and consequently the workers compensation funds and levies, to the general community this seems to be more socially just. It is less demanding on the injured, older worker and represents significant cost savings to the workers compensation systems and in particular, the labour market. Therefore a study into a comparison of costs of attempted, successful and failed return to work rehabilitation may be justified.
- The above jurisdictional reconsiderations should take place across all state Workers Compensation, Rehabilitation and Compensation Acts and if changes are made, they should be uniform across all Rehabilitation and Workers Compensation Acts including Comcare.
- Such a change would also require appropriate criteria for eligibility for social security benefits for eligible injured or ill older workers. This may require formal objective assessment of capacity to work by a skilled and appropriately qualified physiotherapist. It is proposed that a working party be established involving appropriate stakeholders and experts including a representative of the Ergonomics and Occupational Health Group of the Australian Physiotherapy Association and the Ergonomics Society of Australia, the Australian Medical Association, heads of Workers Compensation Australia, government representatives of the Department of Social Security, appropriate actuaries, employer and employee representatives, representatives of older workers in particular and the Consumer Health forum of Australia.

Representatives of the Ergonomics and Occupational Health Group of the Australian Physiotherapy Association and the Ergonomics Society of Australia are happy to support these views with further verbal presentations at the inquiry's hearings should the Inquiry so wish.

Please do not hesitate to contact the authors of this document through Dr. David Worth as stated above.

**NEW SOUTH WALES
WORKERS COMPENSATION STATISTICAL BULLETIN
1996/97**

Foreword

I have pleasure in presenting the ninth issue of Workers Compensation Statistical Bulletin for New South Wales. The Statistical Bulletins provide a unique guide to the operation of the WorkCover Scheme. They also indicate the general trends in workplace health and safety in NSW.

The aim of the Workers Compensation Statistical Bulletin is to provide an overview of claims in New South Wales. Statistical information presented in this bulletin enables industry and individual workplaces to better understand the nature and extent of the problem in their area and identify the issues for priority action.

It should be noted that the data presented in these publications is in accordance with the National Data Set (NDS). The NDS was developed by the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (previously Worksafe Australia) in consultation with a variety of interested parties including employer and employee groups, and Commonwealth and state agencies. The aim of the NDS is to enable the production of national and nationally comparable workers compensation based data collected from various State, Territory, and Commonwealth workers compensation systems.

To accommodate the client requirements, additional information on non-workplace injuries covering commuting accidents are include dint he current Bulletin. The order of chapters have been changed. Care should be taken when comparing data in this publication with the previous publications; comprehensive explanatory notes are provided to assist readers in this regard.

For any comments or enquiries you may have about the Bulletin, contact the Statistics Branch (the phone number and address are given on the facing page).

John Grayson
General Manager
May 1999

Section 1 Employment Injuries

Employment injuries comprise all injuries resulting from accidents, and all occupational diseases contracted or aggravated during the course of a worker's employment. Accidents cover: all workplace injuries - either during work or a work break; and non-workplace injuries - either road traffic accidents, commuting accidents, and accidents away from work during a recess period.

For an explanation of the terms used in the tables, the scope of the statistics and comparability with previous years, see the Explanatory notes, Classifications and Glossary sections of this bulletin.

Main Features

- The incidence of employment injuries in 1996/97 was 26.2 per 1,000 wage and salary earners
- In 1996/97 there were 60,109 employment injuries. Of these 44,654 were workplace injuries and 11,394 were occupational diseases.
- 173 fatalities were reported to insurers in 1996/97. Of these 59 resulted from workplace injuries, 69 from non-workplace injuries and 45 from occupational diseases.
- Compared to 1995/96 the number of employment injuries was in the 60-64 age group (63.2 injuries per 1,000 wage and salary earners). For females it was in the 50-54 and 55-59 age groups (22 injuries per 1,000 wage and salary earners)
- Across industry subdivisions, non-building construction had the highest incidence of employment injuries (105.8 injuries per 1,000 wage and salary earners), followed by storage (102.3)
- Across occupational groups, trades assistants and factory hands had the highest incidence of employment injuries (82.8 injuries per 1,000 wage and salary earners). The incidence was also high for construction and mining labourers (80.8) and other metal tradespersons (68.8)
- Total gross incurred cost of employment injuries was \$864 million in 1996/97, a decrease of 1.9% compared to the 1995/96 gross incurred cost.
- The average gross incurred cost was \$14,381
- Fifty-seven percent of the temporary disability claims resulted in 4.0 weeks or less off work although the average time lost was 11.6 weeks.
- While about 13% of temporary disability claims resulted in more than 6 months off work, these claims accounted for 42% of the gross incurred cost and 64% of the total time lost for all temporary disability claims

Section 2 Workplace Injuries

Workplace injuries are caused by accidents occurring at the workplace either during work or during a work break, where the worker's activity is under the control of an employer. These include all accidents occurring on the premises at which the worker is employed.

For an explanation of the terms used in the tables, the scope of the statistics and comparability with previous year, see the Explanatory notes, Classifications and Glossary sections of this bulletin.

Main Features

- In 1996/97 there were 44,654 workplace injuries representing 74% of all employment injuries in the year.
- The incidence of workplace injuries was 19.4 per 1,000 wage and salary earners. This was an increase of 3.7% compared to the previous financial year.
- Average gross incurred cost of workplace injury cases was \$13,427, however half of these cases had a gross incurred cost of \$3,375 or less.
- Eighteen percent (18%) of workplace injury cases resulted in permanent injury.
- The 55 - 59 years of age group had the highest incidence of workplace injury (23.8 per 1,000 wage and salary earners)
- For temporary disability cases, the average time lost was 10.9 weeks, however half of these cases resulted in time lost of 2.9 weeks or less
- The storage industry (90.2 per 1,000 wage and salary earners) had the highest incidence of workplace injury, followed by non-building construction (64.3) and services to agriculture and other (57.6).
- The occupational groups trades assistants and factory hands (62.6 per 1,000 wage and salary earners) construction and mining labourers (55.1) and other metal tradespersons (48.0) had the highest incidence rates of workplace injuries
- The storage industry (110.9 per 1,000 wage and salary earners) had the highest incidence of workplace injuries for males. Public administration (29.4) had the highest incidence of workplace injuries for females.
- The average cost for workplace injuries to females is less than for males, however the median cost is higher for females than males.
- Forty percent (40%) of workplace injuries were sprains and strains due to body stressing.
- Thirty-one percent (31%) of workplace injuries were to the back. The incidence of these back injuries was 6.0 per 1,000 wage and salary earners.
- High incidences of back injury occurred in storage (30.0 per wage and salary earners), non-building construction (21.9) and other coal mining (15.2) industries. Trades assistants and factory hands (17.5), construction and mining labourers (16.0) and other labourers (15.6) were the occupations with the highest incidence of back injury.

Table 1.3 Age statistics: Number, incidence and time lost

Age group	Fatal	Permanent Disability	<i>Temporary disability</i>		<i>Total cases</i>		<i>Temporary disability cases only</i>		
			6 months and over	Less than 6 months	No.	Inc (a)	<i>Time lost (weeks) (b)</i>		
							Total	Average	Median
Males									
15-19	2	228	145	1,630	2,005	22.3	14,334	8.1	2.1
20-24	15	649	417	3,655	4,736	30.5	38,779	9.5	2.6
25-29	11	927	507	3,929	5,374	30.6	44,904	10.1	2.7
30-34	12	1,242	524	3,820	5,598	33.9	48,654	11.2	3.0
35-39	26	1,342	529	3,842	5,739	34.7	49,861	11.4	3.1
40-44	18	1,469	433	3,033	4,953	32.7	38,670	11.2	3.1
45-49	20	1,772	364	2,716	4,872	35.8	35,170	11.4	3.1
50-54	22	1,684	318	2,154	4,178	38.2	27,809	11.3	3.7
55-69	14	1,766	220	1,517	3,517	51.3	20,120	11.6	3.7
60-64	12	1,226	108	738	2,084	63.2	10,185	12.1	3.7
65 and over	7	357	25	150	539	38.9	2,254	12.9	4.7
TOTAL MALES	161	12,672	3,591	27,189	43,613	34.5	330,872	10.8	3.0
Females									
15-19	1	60	71	617	749	8.5	6,751	9.8	2.4
20-24	2	204	172	1,385	1,763	12.4	16,149	10.4	2.7
25-29	1	237	226	1,306	1,770	12.7	19,901	13.0	3.1
30-34	0	259	226	1,243	1,728	13.8	18,348	12.6	3.3
35-39	3	430	301	1,571	2,305	16.9	25,167	13.5	3.4
40-44	2	454	348	1,701	2,505	19.0	29,706	14.6	3.9
46-49	0	540	361	1,576	2,477	20.8	29,594	15.4	4.0
50-54	2	410	250	1,198	1,860	22.0	22,171	15.4	3.9
65-59	0	247	140	607	994	22.0	10,871	14.7	4.1
60-64	1	78	38	163	280	18.1	3,074	15.4	4.9
65 and over	0	14	8	41	63	10.9	683	13.9	4.7
TOTAL FEMALES	12	2,933	2,142	11,409	16,496	16.0	182,453	13.5	3.4
Persons									
16-19	3	288	216	2,247	2,754	15.5	21,085	8.6	2.3
20-24	17	853	589	5,040	6,499	21.8	54,928	9.8	2.6
25-29	12	1,164	733	5,235	7,144	22.7	64,805	10.9	2.9
30-34	12	1,501	750	5,063	7,326	25.2	67,002	11.6	3.1
35-39	29	1,772	830	5,413	8,044	26.7	75,028	12.0	3.3
40-44	20	1,923	781	4,734	7,458	26.3	68,376	12.5	3.3
45-49	20	2,312	725	4,292	7,349	28.8	64,764	13.0	3.4
50-54	24	2,094	568	3,352	6,038	31.1	49,980	12.8	3.7
55-59	14	2,013	360	2,124	4,511	39.7	30,991	12.5	3.9
60-64	13	1,304	146	901	2,364	48.8	13,259	12.7	3.9
66 and over (c)	7	371	33	191	602	30.7	2,937	13.1	4.7
TOTAL PERSONS	173	15,605	5,733	38,598	60,109	26.2	513,325	11.6	3.1

(a) Inc. (incidence) is the number of injuries per 1,000 wages and salary earners

(b) Time lost is not included for temporary disability cases resulting in 3 or more years off work

(c) includes age not stated (20 cases)

Table 2.3 Age statistics: Number, incidence and time lost

Age group	Fatal	Permanent Disability	<u>Temporary disability</u>		<u>Total cases</u>		<u>Temporary disability cases only</u>		
			6 months and over	Less than 6 months	No.	Inc (a)	<u>Time lost (weeks) (b)</u>		
							Total	Average	Median
Males									
15-19	1	193	111	1,433	1,738	19.3	11,371	7.4	2.1
20-24	5	529	351	3,202	4,087	26.3	32,561	9.2	2.4
25-29	4	689	411	3,404	4,508	25.6	37,051	9.7	2.6
30-34	5	872	431	3,343	4,651	28.1	40,299	10.7	2.9
35-39	10	799	435	3,280	4,524	27.4	40,905	11.0	3.0
40-44	7	691	350	2,610	3,658	24.2	31,269	10.6	2.9
45-49	9	719	278	2,320	3,326	24.5	27,063	10.4	2.9
50-54	8	605	249	1,825	2,687	24.6	22,213	10.8	3.4
55-69	4	532	169	1,280	1,985	29.0	15,831	10.9	3.1
60-64	3	227	87	627	944	28.6	8,309	11.6	3.1
65 and over	1	61	20	119	201	14.5	1,710	12.3	4.3
TOTAL MALES	58	5,920	2,893	23,447	32,318	25.6	268,695	10.2	2.7
Females									
15-19	0	43	49	517	609	6.9	5,065	8.9	2.1
20-24	0	142	113	1,020	1,275	8.9	10,749	9.5	2.6
25-29	1	165	154	972	1,292	9.3	13,787	12.3	2.9
30-34	0	200	158	937	1,295	10.3	13,230	12.1	3.0
35-39	0	314	225	1,202	1,741	12.8	18,731	13.2	3.1
40-44	0	329	228	1,346	1,903	14.4	20,534	13.1	3.3
45-49	0	348	249	1,249	1,846	15.5	21,010	14.1	3.6
50-54	0	288	173	954	1,415	16.8	15,516	13.8	3.4
55-69	0	145	95	474	714	15.8	7,670	13.6	3.9
60-64	0	39	30	129	198	12.8	2,519	15.8	4.7
65 and over	0	11	5	31	47	8.1	413	11.5	4.9
TOTAL FEMALES	1	2,024	1,480	8,831	12,336	11.9	129,260	12.6	3.1
Persons									
15-19	1	236	160	1,950	2,347	13.2	16,436	7.8	2.1
20-24	5	671	464	4,222	5,362	18.0	43,311	9.3	2.4
25-29	5	854	565	4,376	5,800	18.4	50,838	10.3	2.6
30-34	5	1,072	589	4,280	5,946	20.4	53,529	11.0	2.9
35-39	10	1,113	660	4,482	6,265	20.8	59,635	11.6	3.0
40-44	7	1,020	578	3,956	5,561	19.6	51,803	11.5	3.0
45-49	9	1,067	527	3,569	5,172	20.3	48,072	11.8	3.0
50-54	8	893	422	2,779	4,102	21.2	37,728	11.8	3.4
55-69	4	677	264	1,754	2,699	23.8	23,502	11.7	3.3
60-64	3	266	117	756	1,142	23.6	10,828	12.4	3.4
66 and over (c)	1	72	25	150	248	12.6	2,123	12.1	4.4
TOTAL PERSONS	59	7,944	4,373	32,278	44,654	19.4	397,955	10.9	2.9

(a) Inc. (incidence) is the number of injuries per 1,000 wage and salary earners

(b) Time lost is not included for temporary disability cases resulting in three or more years off work

(c) Includes age not stated (10 cases)

Age group	Age statistics: Number, incidence and time lost				<i>Temporary disability</i>		<i>Temporary disability cases only</i>		
	Fatal	Permanent Disability	6 months and over	Less than 6 months	<i>Total cases</i>		<i>Time lost (weeks) (b)</i>		
					No.	Inc (a)	Total	Average	Median
Males									
15-19	0	16	12	82	110	1.2	1,207	12.8	4.3
20-24	1	73	27	230	331	2.1	2,767	10.8	4.5
25-29	0	164	47	293	504	2.9	3,974	11.8	3.6
30-34	2	309	47	301	659	4.0	4,831	13.9	4.7
35-39	9	469	63	354	895	5.4	5,425	13.0	4.7
40-44	3	709	56	290	1,058	7.0	5,195	15.1	5.4
45-49	5	1,001	60	265	1,331	9.8	5,637	17.5	6.0
50-54	7	1,045	51	249	1,352	12.4	4,191	14.2	6.0
55-69	6	1,205	39	172	1,422	20.7	3,340	16.0	7.3
60-64	6	981	11	92	1,090	33.0	1,291	12.7	8.5
65 and over	5	295	2	18	320	23.1	232	11.6	6.9
TOTAL MALES	44	6,274	415	2,347	9,080	7.2	38,109	13.9	5.1
Females									
15-19	0	3	10	43	56	0.6	768	14.5	3.4
20-24	0	25	23	150	198	1.4	2,225	12.9	2.6
25-29	0	28	34	153	215	1.5	2,490	13.5	4.1
30-34	0	32	44	161	237	1.9	3,199	15.8	5.5
35-39	0	70	45	217	332	2.4	3,906	15.1	4.4
40-44	1	78	87	209	375	2.8	6,074	21.1	7.5
46-49	0	137	75	196	408	3.4	5,646	21.1	9.6
50-54	0	97	56	132	285	3.4	4,784	26.0	8.7
65-59	0	73	27	58	158	3.5	1,827	21.8	7.2
60-64	0	30	3	10	43	2.8	241	18.6	3.3
65 and over	0	2	0	4	6	1.0	12	3.0	2.6
TOTAL FEMALES	1	575	404	1,334	2,314	2.2	31,174	18.2	5.6
Persons									
16-19	0	19	22	125	165	0.9	1,975	13.4	4.1
20-24	1	98	50	380	529	1.8	4,992	11.6	3.9
25-29	0	192	81	446	719	2.3	6,463	12.4	3.7
30-34	2	341	91	462	896	3.1	8,030	14.6	5.3
35-39	9	539	108	571	1,227	4.1	9,331	13.8	4.6
40-44	4	787	143	499	1,433	5.1	11,269	17.8	6.1
45-49	5	1,138	135	461	1,739	6.8	11,283	19.2	6.9
50-54	7	1,142	107	381	1,637	8.4	8,975	18.7	6.7
55-59	6	1,278	66	230	1,580	13.9	5,167	17.6	7.3
60-64	6	1,011	14	102	1,133	23.4	1,533	13.3	8.4
66 and over (c)	5	297	2	22	326	16.6	244	10.2	6.3
TOTAL PERSONS	45	6,849	819	3,681	11,394	5.0	69,283	15.6	5.3