

Family First

Additional comments

The practices and procedures of Australia Post over the past three years in relation to the treatment of injured and ill workers has been cause for serious concern.

Family First successfully moved for a Senate Inquiry because for too long these serious allegations were ignored by successive governments and the concerns were not properly investigated.

During the inquiry and submission process a number of alarming revelations were brought to light which describe how Australia Post has been forcing its injured staff to return to work well before they have recovered from workplace injuries.

Family First believe that this is largely due to flawed salary bonus policies which are based on "lost time injury" figures. As a result of these salary bonus policies, managers are encouraged to unfairly pressure workers to return to work prematurely when they are still recovering from a workplace injury. In fact, this bonus system may be jeopardising the health and wellbeing of Australia Post employees recovering from workplace injuries.

For example, in a submission to the inquiry, it was revealed how Mr Scott Lynch, an Australia Post employee, was forced back to work simply to sit in a lunch room and watch TV so that the lost time injury figures would could be kept low. This kind of action is outrageous and puts the health of workers at risk.

Furthermore, during the inquiry the committee heard from an Australia Post employee, Mr Trevor Crawford, who described how after suffering a brain haemorrhage and broken rib, he was forced to return to work for just 45 minutes per day, which included a 15 minute break.

He stated,

How useful can you be to an organisation when you get sent back to work for 45 minutes a day? I was not allowed to drive. I was supposed to take a 15-minute break in the middle of those 45 minutes. I was not allowed to stand while I was at work. This was all written into the directions of my return to work program, and that puts you offside straight away. It adds stress to your life. You are wondering what the heck is going to happen next. I was doing a duty which I was totally unfamiliar with. It was a duty that was of no use to anybody because I probably made so many mistakes that someone else would have had to basically redo it anyway. They just wanted you to be seen to be at work, and that was wrong.

Both these examples demonstrate clearly that the salary bonus policies encourage managers to fudge the numbers in order to increase their own pay packet and are inappropriate.

During the inquiry it was also heard how Australia Post has been exercising its powers under the *Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989* to force injured workers to attend InjuryNET facility nominated doctors despite the preference of some workers to attend their own GP.

This has resulted in workers being recommended for modified or light duties in cases where the worker's own GP has declared them unfit for work and raised further questions about the integrity of this program.

Similar concerns were raised by Dr Con Costa about the independence of these opinions,

If that doctor is being paid quite a high fee and is contracted to InjuryNET it is not what we really call a second opinion. It is a paid-for opinion. I do not know if I am explaining myself very well. The importance of any doctor opinion should not be based on who is paying that doctor; it should be an independent opinion by someone who has no interest—is not employed by that third party. That is a worthwhile second opinion. To me, any other second opinion is not really worth while.

Family First does not believe that the medical advice of workers' own GPs should be overridden by the advice of facility nominated doctors who have a conflict of interest.

Subsequent to the hearing, it was announced that a memorandum of understanding was signed between the CEPU and Australia Post to eliminate bonuses based on Lost Time Injuries. Family First welcomes this announcement and the decision to eliminate a flawed incentive program.

Recommendation

Family First recommends that Australia Post conduct a complete review of its salary bonus policies and eliminate any policies which raise a conflict of interest between the financial rewards paid to managers and the health and wellbeing of employees.

**Senator Steve Fielding
Family First Party**