Work health and safety is union business

The Insurance Commission of Western Australia's annual report provides an overarching review of the objectives, performance and financial results by financial year. The report also identifies workers' compensation claims by sectors.

The overall summary across public sector employees found that there was a 4.1 per cent increase from the previous year in new workers' compensation claims.

Treatments for those on workers' compensation claims included medical specialist appointments, physiotherapy, hospital visits and other services.

The average cost per finalised claim in 2025 was 3.3 per cent higher than 2024. Physical injury claims made up 84.9 per cent of new claims in this financial year, comprising of injuries caused by stress to the body and being hit by moving objects. Slips, trips and falls are still ranked as the top three causes in 2025 of new injury claims.

The 2025 report shows that in education there were 2,550 finalised claims with 2,351 new claims. The total number of lost hours in time paid was 962,307; of which 148,471 days were reimbursed. In the financial year this equated to 619 educators in the government sector that were absent from work. In total $97,007,213 was paid on finalised claims.

Mental health claims have increased 23.4 per cent since 2024, often showing more complex issues and challenges in supporting members to return to their worksites.

Common causes include exposure to traumatic events, exposure to workplace or occupational violence, work pressure, harassment and other factors.

The SSTUWA is not surprised at the increase in these claims, especially as PCBUs (persons conducting a business or undertaking) are required to act on psychosocial hazards reported at a workplace; this is similar to physical risks presented.

This year has seen the SSTUWA embark on many firsts regarding work health and safety (WHS). We have dealt with several very complex member issues that have provided us with a blueprint on how to deal with similar issues going forward. We continue to support members individually, via the consistency at a Member Assist level, at a branch level and also advocate at a system level to ensure all educational settings are safe.

Our 2025 State of our Schools survey outlined the various forms of violence experienced by our members, which included psychological incidents, bullying, harassment in person and online, not forgetting about the physical and verbal abuse. What was concerning is the increase of these perpetrators being parents.

The SSTUWA has started its respect campaign with members being encouraged to placed posters with the following slogan: *Students learn from adults. Please be polite and respectful when raising issues with teachers and school leaders.*

We are currently working with the Department of Education on updating their Connect and Respect resources to help alleviate disrespectful behaviours and to clearly outline expectations from parents and caregivers when engaging with staff at a school site.

At the time of writing, the SSTUWA will be contacting the TAFE directors on the changes in legislation regarding diesel fume particulates and how each campus should be mitigating risks.

What is key to our organisation is the role that staff members at the union play in mitigating work health and safety risks.

Our internal process allows us to triage all member issues at Member Assist or school organiser level before being passed on to our WHS organiser, Antony Pearson, and myself as the senior officer with WHS responsibilities. Part of this triaging includes legal advice from our Legal Team to assist in investigating relevant regulations in the WHS Act.

This year alone the union has dealt with, but not limited to:

- Infrastructure concerns.

- Biological hazards.
- Minimising zoonoses (excrement).
- Psychosocial hazards.
- Intruders at a workplace.
- Asbestos.
- Workplace violence and aggression.
- Coercive control.
- Electrical and water outages.
- Gendered violence/sexual harassment.
- Heat exposure.
- Classroom adjustments for staff.
- Welding fumes.
- Diesel fumes.

The SSTUWA is a strong, independent, democratic union of public educators protecting and improving our industrial and professional rights and promoting quality public education for all. This includes our aim to keep all schools and TAFE colleges as safe sanctuaries of learning.



By Sharmila Nagar
Vice President

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