

Improving approaches to early and sustainable return-to-work in the construction sector

Purpose of the proposed research

The purpose of the research is to collect information that will enhance our understanding of the barriers and facilitators to early and safe return to work (RTW) in the Ontario construction sector.

Why is the proposed research important?

Work disability is a significant economic and health burden in Canada and internationally. In 2009, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) in Ontario changed its RTW policies and practices. Our recent comparative research into RTW outcomes across Canada suggests that RTW and disability duration outcomes in some Ontario sectors (e.g., health care and the service sector) appear to have been more responsive to these changes.

Overall, there has been little policy and evaluative research of RTW outcomes conducted in the construction sector. RTW research has tended to be cross-sectoral or focused on other sectors that are distinctly different from construction (e.g., health care or public service).

The burden of work disability in the construction sector is high. Injured workers in this sector

Why study the construction sector?

- Construction represents the fourth largest sector covered by the WSIB, accounting for about 9% of workers covered.
- Between 2011 and 2016 covered employment in the construction sector increased by 36%.
- The 2017-and-beyond outlook for construction in Ontario suggests that this is a sector that will continue to grow over the next five years, which translates to more employers and more workers covered.
- It is amongst the leading sectors for allowed lost time claims in all age groups. Construction accounted for 11% of allowed lost time claims in 2016.
- Lost time injury rates in this sector are consistently higher than average.

experience longer times to RTW, and lower likelihood of RTW, compared to other sectors, due to factors such as a lack of suitable alternative work, the structure of firms, and the organization of work and work contracts.



The introduction and implementation of mandatory coverage in construction, as well as related policies on re-employment and work re-integration in this sector, present an ideal opportunity to explore the impact of RTW policy on a sector with specific challenges in facilitating early and safe RTW.

What does the project involve?

The project will be carried out in three phases. First, we will conduct a national and international policy and research scan of RTW policies and best practices in the construction sector. Second, we will identify and assess key performance indicators pertaining to successful RTW in the sector. Third, we will identify the sector-specific barriers and facilitators to early RTW.

To collect data, we will conduct interviews and focus groups with key informants (e.g., policy makers, practitioners, health and safety association representatives, employers and workers) within the construction sector. Information on policy and practices will also be drawn from publicly available information. Data on key performance indicators and evidence relating to RTW policies and practices will be drawn from the WSIB, key construction stakeholders in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba, and participating compensation boards in each jurisdiction.

This research is being conducted by the Partnership for Work, Health and Safety (PWHs) at the University of British Columbia over the period of 2017–2018. PWHs Co-Director Dr. Chris McLeod is leading the project, with the support of a team of international policy and research experts.

How will the project benefit the construction sector?

In the short term, this research project will generate an inventory of best practices in RTW in the construction sector, as well as knowledge to further inform the development of evidence-based policy and practice at the WSIB and within the sector. Identifying the factors that facilitate early and successful return to work—and implementing them in policy and practice—will lead over the longer term to shorter disability durations after injury.

More information

Please contact Chris McLeod, PWHs Co-Director, at chris.mcleod@ubc.ca with questions about this study. General enquiries should be directed to Suhail Marino, PWHs Director of Privacy and Operations, at suhail.marino@ubc.ca.

