

WorkCover SA

Claims Operational Guidelines

Chapter 13: Managing critical incidents

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Contents

Chapter 13: Managing critical incidents	3
Overview.....	3
Purpose	3
Definitions.....	3
Why people self-harm	4
Warning signs.....	4
Support.....	5
Potential Suicide – emergency admission policy for undetermined and accepted claims	5
Payments	5
Threatening Behaviour	5
Contacts	6

Chapter 13: Managing critical incidents

Overview

WorkCover is committed to ensuring the injured worker's claims experience is a helpful and seamless one, providing them with the tools and mechanisms to assist in their safe recovery, rehabilitation and ultimate return to work. We understand that when an injury occurs, it can impact every aspect of their life potentially leading to frustration and stress. This can take its toll on some workers who may need additional support and guidance through these times. An injured worker can feel isolated due to the limitations the injury has caused or angry at what has happened to them, potentially resulting in them behaving aggressively towards those that are trying to help them.

In some cases, a worker may threaten self-harm or harm to others, so WorkCover and its claims agent have established procedures to support injured workers, staff and service providers when faced with these incidents.

Purpose

The primary goal of WorkCover's critical incident framework is to:

- establish a requirement that both WorkCover and its claims agent will mitigate the risk of injury, trauma or loss of life of stakeholders, providers, associated parties, and the staff of WorkCover and its claims agent staff
- ensure the worker is contacted
- enable the staff of WorkCover and its claims agent to effectively assist stakeholders when a critical incident occurs
- provide an effective and consistent approach to the management of critical incidents.

Definitions

Associated Party:	Minister's office, Tribunal, WorkCover Ombudsman's office, Minter Ellison Lawyers, Medical Panels SA
Breach of the Law:	Criminal assault. (Assaults do not have to include physical contact. If a person is put in fear and believes a threat of violence is imminent, this may constitute an offence). Conditional or direct threats towards a person.
Contact:	Includes telephone, email, postal mail, facsimile, SMS txt message, in-person (face-to-face) and internet posts.
Critical Incident:	Actual or threatened harm to self, a stakeholder or staff involving physical injury, pain, extreme stress, fear or psychological harm that may have long-lasting effects, which requires immediate investigation and response. This includes someone who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ threatens self-harm

- attempts self-harm
- threatens to harm staff
- harm to staff
- threatens to harm associated parties
- harms an associated party.

Duty of Care: WorkCover and its claims agents are responsible for ensuring appropriate steps are taken to ensure the safety of staff, stakeholders and associated parties.

Self-harm: Any behaviour that involves the deliberate causing of pain or injury to oneself, including cutting, burning or hitting oneself, drug overdose, binge-eating or starvation or putting oneself in dangerous situations.¹

Staff: Employees of WorkCover SA or the claims agent.

Stakeholder: Injured worker or their employer.

Why people self-harm

Self-harm is generally, a response to distress. While people who self-harm do not necessarily mean to kill themselves, it can become a compulsive and dangerous activity that requires professional help.²

Warning signs

The following warning signs are not in any particular order, and are only possible indicators that someone may self-harm.

- express hopelessness or helplessness
- write or speak of their intention, saying goodbye
- dramatic change in personality or appearance
- irrational, bizarre behaviour
- overwhelming sense of guilt or shame
- changed eating or sleeping patterns
- giving away possessions or putting affairs in order
- lack of interest in the future
- self-harming actions, such as overdoses.³

General approach and philosophy

Stakeholder Interaction procedure/s will stipulate the processes and support mechanisms that are to be followed to help injured workers.

¹ Beyond Blue, Sane Factsheet - Suicidal behaviour and self-harm: the Facts

² ibid

³ ibid

An arrangement is in place between WorkCover, WorkCover's claims agents and contracted legal providers, the Workers Compensation Tribunal, Medical Panels SA and the Office of the Minister for Industrial Relations to ensure the associated parties are notified of critical situations where someone's personal safety is at risk.

Information received in respect to a critical incident will be managed in accordance with Section 112 of the *Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1986* (the Act).

Support

Potential Suicide – emergency admission policy for undetermined and accepted claims

When a medical expert believes a worker

- who has suffered a compensable injury (or potentially has suffered a compensable injury) and
- is at risk of harming themselves or others without psychiatric or psychological intervention,

must be admitted into a hospital. The claims agent must immediately approve admission.

Where costs are incurred as a result of obtaining a medical expert's assistance or the assistance of a community health service such as an ambulance, the claims agent should approve these costs as part of the emergency strategy used to prevent the worker committing an act of self-harm, subject to the limits in the scale of costs.

Payments

1. Where the claim is undetermined and the case manager has been advised of hospitalisation post admission, provisional medical payments should be made in the first instance, in accordance with section 32A of the Act or paid as interim payments if the costs are likely to exceed the maximum which can be paid under section 32A.
2. Where the claim has been determined and the psychiatric hospital has advised the case manager post admission, the case manager must determine liability in accordance with the principles of section 32 of the Act.

Threatening Behaviour

WorkCover and its claims agents have a duty of care to provide a safe environment for staff.

WorkCover and its claims agent's staff regularly interact with stakeholders, either in person or via telephone and/or written communication. This interaction may result in unwelcome behaviour from the stakeholder, including threats of self-harm and/or threats of harm to others.

WorkCover and its claims agent's will establish procedure/s to effectively manage any emergency situation that may occur as a result of interaction with stakeholders.

WorkCover and its claims agents take threats made to its staff or representatives seriously and will report the incident to the South Australian Police Department, or other associated parties, when necessary.

Where threats are received by staff towards providers (health and rehabilitation), the staff member will comply with internal procedures to ensure the relevant provider is notified.

Contacts

WorkCover's Service Improvement Unit monitors and reports incidents of self-harm or harm to others. Claims agents are required to report critical incidents to the Service Improvement Unit in line with WorkCover's critical incident policy.

Critical incident resources

In the case of a critical incident the contact numbers below can be used by case managers and stakeholders:

Resource	Contact numbers
South Australian Mental Health Service – Acute Crisis Intervention Service	13 14 65 (24 hour access to mental health services State-wide, including remote areas)
SA Ambulance Service	000 (emergency) or 13 29 62 (non-emergency)
SA Police	000 (emergency) or 13 14 44(non-emergency)
Lifeline	13 11 14