

# A MORE ACCURATE PICTURE OF WORKER DISABILITY, DISEASE AND DEATH.



On April 28, National Day of Mourning, remember and recognize, **ALL** workers killed, injured or made ill by hazardous work.

## CHANGE MAKERS: MOURN FOR THE DEAD. FIGHT FOR THE LIVING.



**CLAIMS ALLOWED BY ONTARIO'S WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE BOARD (WSIB) HAVE BECOME THE DEFAULT STATISTICS SHARED BY MANY** when discussing the number of workers killed, injured, or made ill each year by hazardous work. **This practice must stop.**

In their own words, the WSIB is one of the largest insurance organizations in North America. It is not an organization whose mission is to record the true toll of suffering in terms of injuries, illness, and death suffered by Ontario workers. In fact, the experiences of workers and their families, and a growing body of research evidence tells us **most deaths and many injuries and illnesses caused by hazardous work are never reported to or recognized by the WSIB.** This is particularly the case for cancer and other occupational illnesses with long latency periods between workplace exposure(s) and disease onset. And the same is likely true of mental injuries, a significant and growing issue which is still not being adequately addressed in many workplaces across all sectors.

A more accurate picture of worker deaths, injuries, and illnesses must be prioritized and widely communicated to the public, government regulators, employers, and others. Failure to shed light on the true toll of suffering serves only to downplay the collective need to pursue safer, healthier work more aggressively through enhanced regulations, stronger regulatory enforcement and ultimately workplace prevention efforts.

## A TRUER TOLL

### Conservative Estimates of Ontario Worker Suffering

Estimated 2023 worker deaths  
resulting from hazardous work.

**2,540**

\*WSIB-allowed 2023  
worker death claims

**254**

Estimated 2023 worker injuries and illnesses  
resulting from hazardous work.

**353,312**

\*WSIB-allowed 2023  
worker injury and illness claims

**176,656**

\*[2023 WSIB Health and Safety Statistics](#) (This data was accessed April 8, 2024, on the WSIB web site.)

## THE EVIDENCE



In a [2018 study](#), University of Ottawa researchers suggest a **more accurate picture of worker deaths** would number between 9,800 and 13,200 Canadians – or 10 to 13 times higher than fatalities reported by provincial and territorial compensation boards. Although, whether one multiplies by 10 or 13, the report concludes, **even these are conservative estimates.**

Other research has long supported this truth. For instance, Dr. Annalee Yassi estimated 6,000 work-related deaths annually in Ontario from cancer, cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases alone (Occupational Disease and Worker Compensation in Ontario, 1983). In 2017, Occupational Cancer Research Centre (OCRC) and Cancer Care Ontario [produced a report](#) suggesting occupational exposures are responsible for approximately two to 10 per cent of all newly diagnosed cancer cases. A government [commissioned study](#) by Dr. Paul Demers, OCRC director, published in 2020 found less than 10 per cent of Ontarians with occupational cancer ever get compensated. Additional research evidence suggests between [five](#) and [16 per cent](#) of cancers are work-related. Based on this research evidence, and estimates provided by the [Canadian Cancer Society](#), **between 1,610 and 5,152 Ontarians died in 2023 from work-related cancer.**



A similar picture of underreporting has emerged for work-related injury and illness. University of Washington researchers [published evidence in 2019](#) suggesting even the most conservative estimates indicate **half of work-related injuries and illnesses are not accurately reported** to the appropriate regulatory authority. In 2020, Ontario's Institute for Work and Health (IWH) [published study results](#) finding 64 per cent of injuries go unreported to a workers' compensation board. [Research led by IWH](#) and published in 2021 found more than half of British Columbia workers missing two or more workdays because of an injury or disease did not submit a claim. Equally troubling, they found employer actions were responsible for this claim suppression. In 2022, a team of [IWH researchers](#) [published](#) findings of an Ontario study suggesting upwards of 40 per cent of emergency department visits for the treatment of work-related injuries or illnesses are not reported to the WSIB as required by law.

**Underreporting and under recognition of mental injuries are likely no different.** The WSIB allowed some [2,600 claims for mental stress](#) in 2023 including those relating to traumatic incidents, chronic stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder. This is surely just the tip of the iceberg considering the [Mental Health Commission of Canada \(MHCC\)](#) [suggests 500,000 Canadians miss work due to mental health concerns each week.](#)

Statistics Canada has also investigated this same issue [surveying workers in April 2023](#) and found 7.5 per cent of employed Canadians (or approximately 1.2 million) took time off work because of work-related stress or for mental health reasons in the previous 12 months. In their press release about these findings, Stats Can said those surveyed cited **heavy workloads and inability to achieve work life balance** as significant causes of poor mental health. Other common workplace hazards responsible for this suffering range from harassment and violence to lack of control over work and lack of support from management. Those employed in health care and social assistance most frequently reported very high or high levels of work-related stress. Although workers in several other sectors including public administration and education followed close behind.