

# Frequently asked questions

## Mental disorder claims

This document answers frequently asked questions about psychological injury claims. The *Workers Compensation Act* calls these *mental disorder claims*.

### Overview

#### In what circumstances will a mental disorder be covered by WorkSafeBC?

A mental disorder may be covered if either of the following applies:

- It is a reaction to one or more **traumatic events** that arise out of and in the course of employment, or
- It is **predominantly caused** by a significant work-related stressor, or a **cumulative series of significant work-related stressors**, that arise out of and in the course of employment

“Arising out of and in the course of employment” generally means the mental disorder developed while the worker was at the workplace during work hours and doing an activity related to their job duties.

The mental disorder must be **diagnosed by a psychiatrist or psychologist**.

Some workers may experience emotional or psychological reactions following a traumatic event. In some cases, these reactions can be a normal and expected part of processing trauma. While these reactions may be distressing, they may not meet the clinical threshold for a diagnosed psychological injury. As a result, they may not meet the criteria for acceptance.

#### What is the mental disorder presumption, and who does it apply to?

The *Workers Compensation Act* presumes coverage for workers in eligible occupations when the following conditions are met:

1. They are exposed to one or more traumatic events in the course of their employment — that is, at a time and place and during an activity reasonably connected to their job — **and**
2. They are diagnosed with a mental disorder that may arise from exposure to a traumatic event, and the diagnosis is received from a registered psychiatrist or psychologist.

If **both conditions are met**, the psychological injury is presumed to be work-related unless evidence shows otherwise.

The eligible occupations are community-integration specialist, coroner, correctional officer, emergency medical assistant, emergency response dispatcher, firefighter, harm-reduction worker, health care assistant, nurse, parole officer, police officer, probation officer, respiratory therapist, shelter worker, sheriff, social worker, transition house worker, victim service worker, and withdrawal management worker.

## When may a mental disorder not be covered by WorkSafeBC?

A mental disorder may not be covered if it does not arise out of and in the course of employment, if it is not a reaction to work-related traumatic events or predominantly caused by significant work-related stressors, or if it has not been diagnosed by a psychiatrist or psychologist.

In addition, a mental disorder may not be covered if it arises from an employer's decision related to employment. For example, processes related to deadlines, reorganizations, working conditions, performance management, or a change in job duties. For this exclusion to apply, the employer must have made a decision about the worker's employment that falls within the employer's control. That decision must be based on a generic process and made and performed in good faith. In these cases, the claim will be disallowed.

## How is a claim for a mental disorder adjudicated?

First, both the employer and the worker should [report the injury](#) as they would any other type of work-related injury. Once the claim is established, we will assign it to a senior adjudicator, who will take a relevant history, contact the employer as required, obtain relevant medical reports, and establish the facts.

If more details are required to support a claim decision, the employer is expected to respond to requests for information. The employer's participation in this process is separate from their requirement to conduct an incident investigation.

If the evidence supports the worker's claim of exposure to one or more traumatic events, or one or more significant work-related stressors, the

senior adjudicator will arrange an assessment by a psychologist or psychiatrist to determine if the worker has a diagnosable mental disorder. If the worker has a diagnosis from another psychologist or psychiatrist, that diagnosis may be considered instead.

Once there is enough information to determine whether the worker is eligible for compensation, the senior adjudicator will make a decision. They will tell the worker the decision and send a letter explaining the reasons for the decision to both the worker and employer. If the claim is accepted, benefits may include:

- Coverage for mental health treatment
- Wage-loss benefits if time off work is required
- Return-to-work and recovery support

## What is a claim number, and how can I get more information about the claim?

When a claim is registered, it's assigned a claim number. The worker, employer, and health care practitioner are all given the claim number. Workers can [check the status](#) of their claim online to see whether it's been accepted.

If the claim is accepted, the worker will receive instructions to check details online, including:

- Whether a payment has been made to them, the date, and the amount
- WorkSafeBC correspondence
- Return-to-work dates

**Note:** Employers, health care practitioners, and other parties cannot access the worker's personal information or wage-loss payment information. They should contact WorkSafeBC if they need more information for claim-related requests.

## Who manages mental disorder claims at WorkSafeBC?

Mental disorder claims are assessed with care and are managed by a specialized Mental Health Claims team.

- Senior adjudicators make decisions on claim acceptance and initial wage-loss compensation.
- Case managers oversee ongoing wage-loss payments, health care treatment, and recovery and return-to-work planning.
- Vocational rehabilitation consultants support return-to-work programs as needed.
- Psychologists, medical advisors, and mental health specialists provide clinical support.
- Service coordinators support the case manager.

## Additional information for workers

### What should I do if I think something at work has caused me to have a mental disorder?

- Seek treatment and inform your treatment provider that you think your mental disorder is related to your job.
- Report it to WorkSafeBC's [Teleclaim Contact Centre](#) by calling 1.888.967.5377 (Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.). A representative will collect your information and send your claim to a senior adjudicator, who will follow up with you. You can learn what to expect when reporting by visiting [worksafebc.com/report-injury](https://www.worksafebc.com/report-injury).

- Notify your employer immediately. Maintain communication with your employer; even if you are unable to perform your regular duties, they may be able to temporarily offer you different duties.

**Note:** It's against the law for an employer to tell you not to report an injury, disease, or disorder to WorkSafeBC.

### Do I need a psychological diagnosis before a claim is accepted?

Yes. To accept a claim, WorkSafeBC requires a *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illnesses* (DSM) diagnosis from a psychologist or psychiatrist. If you already have a diagnosis, it may be considered; if it is not sufficient, WorkSafeBC may arrange an assessment.

### What steps should I take if I suspect that bullying or harassment in the workplace has led to my mental health disorder?

- Report it to your employer.
- Seek treatment and file a claim.

For tips on responding to bullying and harassment, call our Prevention Information Line at 1.888.621.7233 or see [Responding to workplace bullying and harassment](#) on [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

### Does the process differ for bullying or harassment claims?

The claims process is similar for all mental disorders. However, when a mental disorder claim involves bullying or harassment, we need to conduct a thorough investigation before making a decision on the claim.

## Additional information for employers

### What should I do if a worker reports a work-related mental disorder?

If a worker reports a work-related mental disorder and requires time off or treatment as a result, you must report the mental disorder to WorkSafeBC within three business days of the worker first reporting it to you — or within three business days of you or your representative becoming aware of it.

- The quickest way to report is online. [Log in](#) to your online services account, click the **Claims** tab, and select **Submit a Form 7 Report of injury or illness**. If you don't yet have an online services account, you can view [our step-by-step guide](#) for full details and instructions on how to create one.
- Alternatively, you can complete and submit the [Employer's Report of Injury or Occupational Disease](#) PDF by mail or fax.

In addition:

- If the worker misses work because of the injury or mental disorder, please ensure they call our [Teleclaim Contact Centre](#) (1.888.967.5377) to report it to WorkSafeBC.
- If a mental disorder is connected to a serious injury or fatality, report the incident as soon as possible to WorkSafeBC by calling the Prevention Information Line at 1.888.621.7233.

### What are my responsibilities during the claim adjudication process?

- Stop any unacceptable behaviour in the workplace immediately and restore a safe environment to support the worker's return to work.

- Assess if different duties are temporarily available for the worker.
- Report the claim promptly and follow WorkSafeBC's reporting requirements.
- Share any concerns about the claim with WorkSafeBC.
- Respond to requests for information from WorkSafeBC, even if you are conducting your own internal investigations.
- Keep records of claim-related investigations and actions, as this information may be requested by different WorkSafeBC staff members; privacy requirements may limit information sharing within WorkSafeBC.

## Review and appeal

If you disagree with a WorkSafeBC decision, you can request a [review](#).

For details, see:

- [Claims review and appeal guide for workers and dependants](#)
- [Claims review and appeal guide for employers](#)

## WorkSafeBC resources

- [Practice directive on mental disorders](#)
- [Bullying & harassment webpage](#)
- Prevention Information Line (toll-free in Canada): 1.888.621.7233