



Parliamentary Review

Occupational Therapy Australia Submission to the review of Queensland Workers' Compensation Scheme

Occupational Therapy Australia (OTA) is the professional association for occupational therapists. Our members are qualified occupational therapists employed throughout the public and private sectors. They provide health care, vocational rehabilitation and consultancy to clients.

The Association represents in excess of 1200 Queensland Occupational Therapists and over 5000 members nationally. This paper is prepared by the Queensland Division of Occupational Therapy Australia.

Occupational Therapy is a nationally registered health profession requiring the completion of a four year undergraduate degree or two years post graduate degree. Occupational therapy is a profession that is concerned with promoting health and well being through occupation.

Occupational therapists who specialise in the Work/Vocational Rehabilitation field provide expert advice to employers and workers to optimise performance at work and prevent re-injury. Occupational therapists achieve this by assessing the worker, the task and the environment to achieve a safe and sustainable worker-job match.

The approach taken by an occupational therapist is:

- client and customer-centred (they develop individualised programs)
- evidence-based (they are informed by cutting edge research and best practice)
- goal-oriented (they work towards functional goals)

- collaborative (they use their training in counselling and communication skills to liaise with and consult with key stakeholders)
- holistic (they are trained in both physical and psychosocial aspects of function and performance).

Occupational therapists are a key profession in the delivery of rehabilitation and return to work services in Queensland, and operate as either sole practitioners or as a member of a rehabilitation provider organisation. Due to the longstanding involvement of Occupational Therapists working in this field of practice, they are well positioned to comment on the review of the Workers Compensation System in Queensland.

In relation to the terms of the enquiry and the implementation of the 2010 Recommendations for Structural Review, we wish to make comment about the following terms:

1. Objectives of the Act Section 5 (1) (b) encouraging improved health and safety performance by employers:

- Should be amended to: - encouraging improved health, safety and injury management performance by employers.

2. Section 5 (4) should be amended to include a new subsection:

- 5 (4) (f) Provide for flexible employer based injury management arrangements suited to the particular needs of industry.

OTA would also like to make general comments for the committee to review to improve the outcome for injured workers and decrease cost.

3. Overall scheme message:

- The scheme needs to develop and promote at least 4 or 5 positive injury management themes/messages that provide an over arching umbrella for stakeholders to use and reinforce.
- These could include the health benefits of work, working your way back to life, employer based injury management, sustainable return to work, early intervention and resolution the key to better outcomes. The importance is to focus on better work outcomes for injured workers.

4. The scheme needs to consider the national harmonisation and endorsed frameworks as rehabilitation standards and alternative measures of performance.

There needs to be a review of how the Queensland workers' compensation scheme compares to the scheme arrangements in other Australian jurisdictions. When conducting the inquiry, the committee should also consider and report on implementation of the recommendations of the "Structural Review of Institutional and Working Arrangements in Queensland's Workers' Compensation Scheme. "

To assist in the implementation of recommendations from the 2010 review, particularly 5.4 regarding return to work and rehabilitation policies, Queensland could adopt the Nationally Consistent Approval Framework for Workplace Rehabilitation Providers developed by the Heads of Workers Compensation Authorities, (HWCA, 2009) and widely adopted by other jurisdictions in Australia. This would provide a

nationally consistent framework with standards to guide workplace rehabilitation practice in Queensland.

Occupational therapists support the need for greater integration of the injury prevention and rehabilitation arms of legislative implementation in Queensland. Only through greater linking and accountability of the injury prevention and compensation arms, can the financial and human costs of work injury be reduced.

Occupational therapists are evidence-based practitioners. The performance of the scheme to meet its objectives for effective and durable return to work for injured workers could be improved by a greater requirement for evidence-based practice.

Current practice in the scheme is influenced by marketing and commercial forces, rather than driven by what is known to be the most effective methods of rehabilitation and return to work. Schemes in other countries, (California, USA) have adopted evidence-based guidelines and achieved excellent results.

Furthermore, the scheme could be improved by the use of profits from the scheme to fund and support cutting edge research in the field, e.g. as in Victoria (ISCRR) and Canada (The Institute for Work and Health).

5. The Scheme needs to focus on early intervention and injury management

OTA supports the need for early intervention and for rehabilitation case managers to support this from a claims perspective. To complement this, OTA also support the need for the National harmonisation of injury management to ensure consistent injury management practices nationally. OTA believes this would assist the Queensland scheme to reduce the social and financial cost of injury and illness.

In particular, OTA has concerns that the provision of rehabilitation case management provided by WorkCover Queensland, does not have a consistent quality.

OTA notes that in other states, rehabilitation Case Managers undergo specific training and accreditation to ensure quality and consistency. OTA would support this as this would lead to better return to work outcomes and reduce overall cost with reduced time loss from work claims.

Proposed Solutions:

- Training and accreditation to rehabilitation providers and case managers
- Referral to rehabilitation provider's in particularly Occupational Therapist to assist with the whole of claim to allow for more early intervention and streamline management to assist workers to return to work.

To achieve this OTA believes that there is an urgent need for planning. The Minister could immediately establish the first advisory committee under section 487 that would focused on providing advice in regards to the establishment of a 5 year plan in regards to injury management, commencing with the development and implementation of advisory standards for injury management in Queensland.

The committee would need to consist of relevant experts from the medical, allied health, rehabilitation specialists and educational institutions. The committee could advise on injury management models and the benefits of employer based injury management strategies that improve early intervention initiatives that lead to better outcomes.

OTA would like Queensland to take a lead in this, by developing advisory standards that provide flexible options for employers in regards to simple employer based injury management models.