



2023 Prevention Initiative Annual Update

Alberta 

Jobs, Economy and Trade, Government of Alberta

July 2024

Title: 2023 Prevention Initiative Annual Update

ISBN 978-1-4601-5978-1

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Introduction

The occupational health and safety (OHS) prevention initiative is a collaborative effort to proactively address potential hazards, eliminate or minimize risks, and foster a culture of health and safety within Alberta's workplaces. By taking actions before an incident occurs, workplace illnesses and injuries can be prevented.

The OHS system is made up of various collaborators and interested parties including employers, health and safety associations, labor organizations, service providers (consultants, trainers, and auditors), the Workers' Compensation Board – Alberta (WCB), government and workers. By identifying priorities for the entire OHS system, the initiative highlights the areas where collaborators and interested parties can align efforts.

This annual update focuses on the period from January through December 2023 and provides an overview of activities to proactively address and raise awareness of disease and injury areas where workers are most affected and/or have the greatest risk.

OHS prevention initiative principles

In Alberta, OHS system collaborators and interested parties are committed to working together to broaden their impact and achieve positive OHS outcomes. By identifying key priorities, actions are tailored to address specific needs at individual work sites while ensuring that efforts remain aligned with the overall safety system in Alberta. This collaborative approach enables effective and targeted improvement in OHS outcomes across the province.

OHS prevention initiative priorities

Alberta OHS reaffirmed three priority injury and illness areas that impact all industries across Alberta through data review and validated this information with collaborators. These priority areas are musculoskeletal disorders; slips, trips and falls; and psychosocial hazards. Musculoskeletal disorders, sometimes referred to as musculoskeletal injuries, are injuries to bones, muscles, ligaments, tendons and nerves due to repetitive use, overexertion and heavy lifting. These can often be prevented through changes to work processes such as removing or reducing repetition or the force used to work. Psychosocial hazards can result in injuries and illnesses from workplace violence, harassment and mental health issues. The [Workplace injury, illness and fatality statistics: provincial summary 2022](#) provides the most up to date statistics for workplace injury and illness claims in Alberta. The following figures and tables provide additional context for the scope and scale of these priority areas on provincial WCB claims. Slips, trips and falls are universally an issue at all Alberta workplaces, no matter how big or small the operation may be.

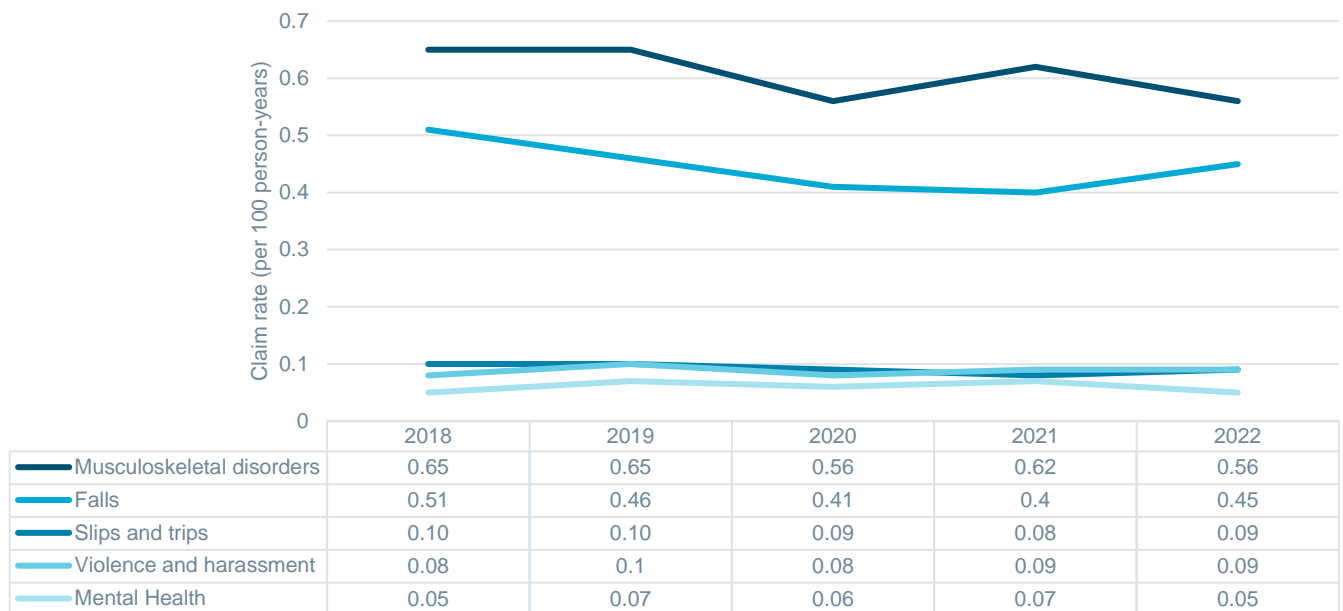


Figure 1. Claim rate (per 100 person-years), in Alberta from 2018 to 2022 by OHS prevention initiative injury and illness category. Source: [Workplace injury, illness and fatality statistics: provincial summary 2022](#)

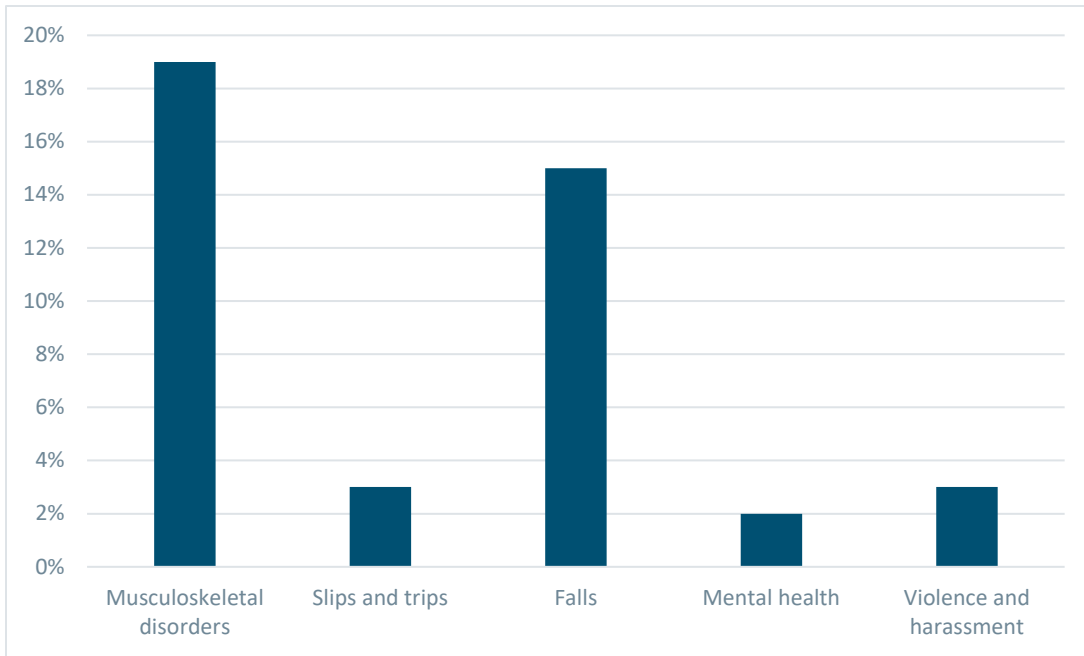


Figure 2. Proportion of 2022 workplace injury and illness claims by OHS prevention initiative injury and illness category. Source: [Workplace injury, illness and fatality statistics: provincial summary 2022](#)

TABLE 1. OCCUPATION GROUP WITH THE MOST CLAIMS IN EACH PREVENTION INITIATIVE INJURY AND ILLNESS CATEGORY

Injury and illness category	Occupation group with most claims	Percentage of claims
Musculoskeletal disorders	Nurse aides, orderlies and patient services	9
Slips and trips	Transport truck drivers	7
Falls	Transport truck drivers	8
Mental health	Paramedical occupation group	18
Violence and harassment	Nurse aides, orderlies and patient services associates	17

Source: [Workplace injury, illness and fatality statistics: provincial summary 2022](#)

TABLE 2. MOST COMMON TYPE OF INCIDENT FOR EACH PREVENTION INITIATIVE INJURY AND ILLNESS CATEGORY

Injury and illness category	Most common type of incident	Percentage of claims
Musculoskeletal disorders	Overexertion	43
Slips and trips	Slip, trip or loss of balance without fall	47
Falls	Fall to floor, walkway or other surface	59
Mental health	Exposure to traumatic or stressful event	35
Violence and harassment	Hitting, kicking or beating	30

Source: [Workplace injury, illness and fatality statistics: provincial summary 2022](#)

The OHS prevention initiative also focuses on workforce types known to be at higher risk of injury and illness. These are:

- small businesses – private sector employers who have less than 20 workers; and
- workers with vulnerabilities - individuals who fit into one or more of the following categories:
 - younger workers (aged 24 or less)
 - older workers (aged 55 or more)
 - Indigenous workers
 - workers with short tenure of work (temporary, seasonal, casual arrangements – up to six months)
 - workers with multiple jobs
 - temporary foreign workers and/or migrants

The OHS prevention initiative priority workforce types are supported through recently published research. The Institute for Work & Health conducted research on [Measuring Occupational Health and Safety Vulnerability in Alberta](#) and received Government of Alberta funding through a research grant. The researchers surveyed 1,026 working Albertans and assessed their OHS vulnerability based on their exposure to workplace hazards in combination with workplace policies and procedures, awareness of OHS rights and responsibilities and empowerment to act to prevent injuries. They found that “employees in small workplaces were the most vulnerable, mainly due to differences in policy and procedure and awareness vulnerability” and these spanned a wide variety of industry sectors including retail, manufacturing and health. Additionally, their results showed a “pattern of worker vulnerability associated with age, with younger workers more likely to experience all types of OHS vulnerability when compared to the oldest group of workers.”

Engagement

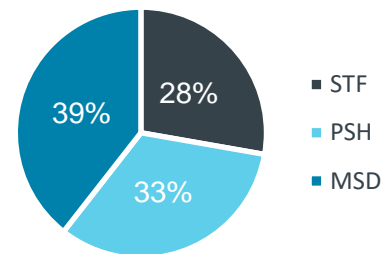
[Information resources](#) were developed in consultation with OHS system collaborators in previous cycles of the prevention initiative with small businesses and workers with vulnerabilities in mind. In 2023, Alberta OHS staff increased engagement with these priority workforce types to improve their awareness of and access to these resources.

Alberta OHS met with internal and external stakeholders to identify opportunities for collaboration, share resources and receive feedback on the initiative. External to the GOA, 31 meetings were held with those representing healthcare, secondary and post-secondary institutions, professional associations and organizations, and other provincial governments.

Alberta OHS staff coordinated with other government areas to improve communication, share best practices and conduct cost-effective outreach to small businesses and workers with OHS vulnerabilities. Monthly meetings were held to discuss outreach strategies and upcoming events. Through this coordinated approach, staff provided information on workplace injury and illness prevention to workers, employers and interested parties at 16 conferences and events. More links to OHS prevention initiative resources were added to [Alis.alberta.ca](#) and to an introductory email distributed to approximately 1,000 new employers each month. OHS prevention initiative resources (Table 3) continue to receive strong online traffic.

TABLE 3. NUMBER OF RESOURCE VIEWS ON THE OHS RESOURCE PORTAL BY INITIATIVE TYPE AND FOCUS FROM JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023*

Initiative focus	All resources	Bulletins	Posters/ Postcards	Videos
Slips, trips, falls (STF)	5,714	4,502	N/A	1,212
Psychosocial hazards (PSH)	6,752	3,438	2,099	1,215
Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD)	8,118	725	5,328	1,717
Total	20,236	8,665	7,427	4,144



Partner spotlight – Alberta Municipal Health & Safety Association

The OHS prevention initiative steering committee includes Certifying Partners who annually report on their accomplishments towards addressing prevention initiative priorities. One of these Certifying Partners is Alberta Municipal Health & Safety Association (AMHSA). Their executive director, Craig Hrynchuk, provided additional details on the work AMHSA has done to support workplace injury and illness and for the prevention initiative.

AMHSA aims to ‘meet municipalities where they are.’ Larger municipalities have more discretionary resources including ergonomists, industrial hygienists, disability management groups, human capital and time. Conversely, some of AMHSA’s smaller members may have fewer resources. Although it would appear that cities with more resources would have an easier time adding prevention programs, they often have long-term focused plans and multiple departments who are responsible for different aspects of health and safety; this makes it complicated to just add another program from AMHSA. For example, an aspect of psychological health and safety might affect risk management, legal, human resources and health and safety committees. Injury and illness prevention does not exist in a silo.

“The National standard [psychological health and safety in the workplace] is excellent, and we wish everybody would adopt it, but it is resource intensive, which can exclude many organizations and could contribute to a low-adoption rate. Other flexible options and programs are needed.”

To help the varied needs of their members, AMHSA created a scalable psychological health and safety audit and auditor certification. The format is aligned to both Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards and has three different levels depending on the municipality’s resources and the complexity of their existing prevention programs. AMHSA also recognized that existing return to work supports were designed primarily for physical injuries and illnesses and there was a need to support return to work after psychological related claims. To address this, AMHSA worked with WCB-Alberta and the Industry Task Force Association to create a cognitive job demands analysis tool to support return to work. AMHSA is in the process of completing these for the highest psychosocial injury positions for municipalities. These will be posted on the AMHSA website so people can download these and use them for different positions in their organizations. Similarly, AMHSA is redeveloping and relaunching their SPARK program. This product is designed to support Alberta municipalities as they work to implement strategies, tools and resources for building psychologically safe workplaces. As part of this effort, AMHSA is looking to provide psychological health and safety training courses that have a range of costs including microskill courses.

“Our injury prevention campaigns need to be about continuing improvement and they need to be data informed.”

AMHSA hosts free online ergonomics training and hosts an online ergonomics self-adjustment tool for its members. They analyze data to identify emerging trends in musculoskeletal disorders to guide their prevention work. Their data analysts use machine learning tools on WCB data, potentially serious incident data and Alberta OHS compliance orders. One emerging trend is in heavy equipment. Heavy equipment is becoming a mobile workstation with

computers. To respond to this, AMHSA collaborated with training partners to facilitate sessions on ergonomics for heavy equipment workers. Their most recent data analysis showed that force injuries are increasing for trades workers, so they are in the process of designing a campaign on force injuries. This will include webinars, toolbox talks and other resources. AMHSA bases their work on evidence and what their members need.

Alberta OHS Inspections

Alberta OHS inspections teams support the prevention initiative by increasing OHS officer awareness of hazards associated with the initiative’s three priority areas, using inspections as an opportunity to provide education to work site parties and taking needed compliance actions. As part of this program, Alberta OHS officers proactively inspect employers before there are problems or complaints. These proactive programs use WCB and other data as evidence to identify industry sectors and employers who have poor OHS performance. Alberta OHS inspections teams included the prevention initiative priority areas in planning for proactive programs and training officers on what compliance issues commonly occur in the priority areas (psychosocial hazards, musculoskeletal disorders and slips, trips and falls).

Each year, Alberta OHS chooses employers and sectors for [proactive inspection programs](#) based on relatively high injury and illness rates, high frequency of incidents or complaints, persistently low rates of compliance or emerging trends. Alberta OHS officers help work site parties identify health and safety hazards and actions to mitigate them. From January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023, the Alberta OHS program conducted 5,292 proactive inspections and issued 5,758 orders (Table 4). Almost all proactive inspection programs included focus on psychosocial hazards, slips, trips and falls, small business, and workers with vulnerabilities. The only program that did not include all focuses was the Cities program, which did not address small business.

TABLE 4. ALBERTA OHS PROACTIVE INSPECTION PROGRAMS IN 2023

Initiative	Time Frame	Inspections/Re-Inspections	Orders ¹
Manufacturing	November– Ongoing	108	142
Cities	May– Ongoing	222	48
Selected Industry - Timber management	May– Ongoing	19	2
Automotive Repair/Auto wreckers	June – December	1,573	2,404
Residential Construction	January– Ongoing	1,000	698
Mills	August– October	40	46
Residential Rebuild	January– Ongoing	148	104
Residential Hail Damage	January– September	21	21
Commercial Construction	January– Ongoing	430	157
Liquor Stores	April – October	715	869
Cannabis Stores	April – October	535	711
Vape Stores	April – October	201	298
Exhibitions	May– August	69	40
Mines Inspections	January– December	96	89
Sand and Gravel	January– December	115	129

¹This includes the total count of the compliance orders, the stop work orders and stop use orders

Grant funding program

Alberta OHS also supports the priority area of psychological health and safety through a grant funding program for first responders living with or at risk for post-traumatic stress injuries (PTSI). The Supporting Psychological Health in First Responders (SPHIFR) grant program has two separate funding streams. Stream one (Services) provides funding for non-profit organizations that provide services to first responders and emergency health care workers living with or at risk for PTSI. Stream two (Research) provides funding to researchers engaged in applied research that generates evidence on prevention or intervention for first responders and emergency health care workers living with or at risk for PTSI. In 2022 the SPHIFR grant program funded 11 projects.

Partner spotlight: AMHSA received a SPHIFR grant to help families of first responders so that they can support first responders and recognize warning signs. AMHSA also recognized that some first responders rely on community peer supports beyond family and is working on strengthening those supports. 'We want to hear from first responders that they'll come back from a shift and be asked about their shift and will say – it was great – even if they saw some traumatic things, to try and protect their families from vicarious trauma'."

SPHIFR PROJECTS FUNDED IN 2022

Project Title	Organization	Grant Stream
Delivering and Evaluating CISM Peer Support Training for First Responders in Alberta	Alberta Critical Incident Advisory Council	Services
First Responders and Family PTSI	Alberta Municipal Health and Safety Association	Services
Personal Protective App (PPApp)	City of St Albert	Services
STWC Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Prevention Program	Bears paw First Nation	Services
PTSI Organizational Impact Evaluation and Implementation of a Resource Guide	Town of Whitecourt	Services
Development of a mobile app for detection of PTSI in first responders.	University of Alberta	Research
Supporting Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Psychosocial Health and Resilience of First Responders in Alberta.	University of Calgary	Research
Effectiveness of Telerehabilitation During the Pandemic for Workers with Posttraumatic Stress Injuries.	University of Alberta	Research
Occupational Stressors Associated with Policing Highly Contentious Mass-Protest Events.	University of Western Ontario	Research
Posttraumatic Stress Injury among Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour First Responders.	University of Calgary	Research
Implementation of PTSI programs in Alberta first responder organizations.	Institute for Work and Health	Research

The path forward

In 2024, the OHS prevention initiative focus will remain on enhancing outreach efforts, engaging collaborators and interested parties with links to priority workforce types and developing effective strategies to connect them with OHS information resources. While the initiative's current priorities concentrate on the improvement of priority workforce types, we will continue to monitor emerging trends and work closely with our industry partners and stakeholders to identify new opportunities for action. New techniques will allow Alberta OHS staff to track and adjust outreach activities in the next year including tracking QR codes on disseminated information resources and analytics techniques.

Summary

The OHS prevention initiative remains committed to engaging Alberta's OHS system collaborators in the development and promotion of freely available information resources aimed at supporting workers at an increased risk of injury and illness. Alberta OHS officers have successfully integrated OHS prevention initiative priorities into focused inspections and proactive inspection programs, which encompass both educational and compliance activities.

The past year has been one of engaged and creative conversations, learning and beginning to further personalize the preferences and needs for information of the audiences that the initiative would like to reach and serve. The prevention initiative has had to adapt to a change in focus from creation of information resources and materials to one of engagement and promotion.

Moving forward, the initiative will continue to draw insights from collaborator engagement, focusing on specific stakeholder groups with higher OHS risks. Feedback and initiative evaluation will be pivotal in driving enhancements to connect priority workforce types with information resources dedicated to strengthening prevention efforts. Through these ongoing endeavors, the OHS prevention initiative will persist in fostering healthy and safe workplaces across Alberta through its collaborators and interested parties.