

WCB Occupational Injury Service

Background

Injuries in the workplace happen. In most cases, they do not warrant going to the emergency room. Imagine a worker is climbing into their truck and they slip and tweak their knee. Perhaps a driver is in the middle of tarping a trailer when they hurt their back pulling a tarp over a load. Even office workers can be at risk of carpal tunnel syndrome or back and neck problems from non-ergonomic workstations.

In cases like these, the first step after applying first aid is to contact the [Occupational Injury Service \(OIS\) clinic](#).

Many employers may be thinking, why not send the worker to their family doctor?

That is a legitimate option, and it's the employee's right to do so. Employers can not force a worker to go to an OIS clinic. But as an employer, you should want to use an OIS clinic for the following reasons.

1. Quick access to quality medical care, usually on the same day, helps injured workers recover quickly and safely, and ultimately return to work.
2. OIS doctors have knowledge of the employer site, operations and modified work options so they can help create a practical return-to-work plan.
3. OIS disability management reports are completed with detailed physical work capabilities and return-to-work dates.
4. Ensures the worker, employer, case manager and doctor are all informed with the same information.
5. Reduces compensation costs because workers are treated earlier and workers spend less time off work.
6. Skilled/productive workers are retained, eliminating the need to re-hire or train a replacement.

Alternatively, when a worker goes to the family doctor:

1. The worker may have to wait several days to see the doctor, which will likely end up being treated as lost time if they are not reporting to work as scheduled.
2. The doctor may not focus on return to work and WCB processes, but still provide a note for time off without any discussion of modified duties and return to work.
3. You may not know that a worker is injured until you get a notice from WCB, which would be treated as lost time if they have not come to work.
4. You may not receive a fitness for work assessment.



Overview

OIS is a service available to employers who:

1. Hold a WCB account.
2. Are committed to supporting injured workers to return to work.
3. Have a suitable modified duties program available.
4. Are prepared to participate in the OIS process.

If your organization does not meet those four basic requirements, there may be additional work required in order to successfully participate in the program.

What is OIS?

OIS provides workers with quick access to a doctor, ensuring a safe and timely return to work is achieved. The goal is to help injured workers return to work safely by providing quick access to quality medical care and facilitating communication between the worker, employer, doctor and WCB [1].

What is an OIS clinic?

A medical clinic that has applied for and met all the requirements needed to deliver OIS. They are staffed with doctors, nurses and other rehabilitation staff with a background in the treatment of work-related injuries. It is a clinic for people hurt at work [2].

What are the employers responsibilities?

The employer's role is to actively support their worker during the return-to-work process. The employer's responsibilities include:

1. Making a commitment to disability management by signing up for OIS.
2. Having appropriate modified work available for injured workers.
3. Developing and introducing a workplace OIS process.
4. Sending appropriate cases to OIS and contacting the clinic in advance when a case is on the way.
5. Providing the injured worker with transportation to the OIS clinic.
6. Completing a WCB report within 72 hours of injury.
7. Participating in OIS case conferences to discuss modified work options and create a return-to-work plan.
8. Supporting all parts of the return-to-work plan including modified work, rehabilitation and follow-up visits.
9. Maintaining regular contact with the return-to-work team and communicating any problems.

How much does it cost?

The fees associated with using the OIS clinic are charged to the WCB claim of the injured worker. While the cost of the first visit at an OIS clinic is higher than the cost of a non-OIS clinic visit, the physicians' expertise in work-related injuries at these clinics consistently results in lower overall claim costs. The employer fee for a first OIS visit is \$299.29 and includes a fitness for work report, sent to the employer within 24 hours as well as a return-to-work discussion between the doctor and worker [3]. There is no out-of-pocket expense associated with the OIS clinic.

How to proceed

The process is simple:

1. Select a Clinic
2. Sign up
3. Roll out the program

Select an OIS clinic

Use the [OIS Clinic Finder](#) tool on WCB's website. Identify a clinic that is close to your place of business and provides the services that are applicable to your workforce. Alternatively, download the [OIS Clinic List](#) and select a suitable clinic.

Employers are able to select multiple OIS providers based on their company size and locations. For example, a company with operations in Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Calgary and Edmonton should select a provider in each of those markets.

Signing up

Don't wait until you have an injury and need a doctor. Sign up now and be prepared.

Signing up is completed online via the [WCB OIS sign-up page](#). Once you have collected the info below, the process takes a few minutes. Upon submission, the selected clinic will contact you to arrange the orientation in a few days or perhaps a few weeks.

Required information

1. WCB account number. If you have more than one WCB account number, ensure each one completes and submits a sign-up sheet.
2. Company legal name
3. Contact name of someone who has signing authority for the company
4. Company address
5. Contact info for the main point of contact
6. Select your preferred OIS clinic and complete an orientation

Orientations take about one hour, sometimes less. The intention is usually to conduct an in-person orientation with the service provider. However, orientations can be done virtually now. The OIS provider will also schedule a time to come tour the worksite. The intent of the tour is to gain an understanding of the operations, gather available physical job demands analysis information, understand modified work opportunities and identify how to tailor OIS to best meet individual needs.

Rolling out in your organization

As with any new program, communication and education are key. After the orientation, identify the specific internal process steps to access OIS in your organization (e.g. who do workers report to, who will take them to the clinic etc.). The OIS provider can assist you with this. WCB also has OIS resources online. WCB provides a range of [OIS resources for free](#). Draft your company's policy and procedure. This does not need to be a complex policy or procedure; however, it should define expectations for both the worker and the company.

Next, arrange an information session for workers and union representatives (if applicable) to orientate them to OIS. Again, the OIS provider can assist you with this (if needed). Employers should plan the rollout in a structured way including email, toolbox talks, and management meetings among others. The message is that if you are injured at work, we can arrange for you to see the doctor that day or the next. These doctors are trained in dealing with workplace injuries and working with WCB.

Need Help? Contact AMTA

AMTA can provide members with one-on-one guidance on the information provided in this article. If you have any questions, please contact AMTA and our experienced staff will be happy to help. For your WCB, Safety, Compliance or Human Resources questions, please email Workplace Support Services at wss@amta.ca or call 1-800-267-1003.

References

- [1] Workers' Compensation Board -Alberta, Occupational Injury Services (OIS) Guide, https://www.wcb.ab.ca/assets/pdfs/employers/OIS_guide.pdf
- [2] Workers' Compensation Board -Alberta, Occupational Injury Services (OIS) Guide, https://www.wcb.ab.ca/assets/pdfs/employers/OIS_guide.pdf
- [3] Workers' Compensation Board, Occupational Injury Service (OIS) [https://www.wcb.ab.ca/insurance-and-premiums/lower-your-premiums/occupational-injury-service-\(ois\).html](https://www.wcb.ab.ca/insurance-and-premiums/lower-your-premiums/occupational-injury-service-(ois).html)