



Priority Employer Program 2023 Program Review Summary

WorkplaceNL
Health | Safety | Compensation



Program Description

WorkplaceNL's Priority Employer Program (PEP) helps employers that have high claims and high costs. Created in 2002, the voluntary program provides these employers with consultative services that support implementing effective occupational health and safety (OHS) systems.

Employers are invited to join PEP based on their claims experience. Each year, WorkplaceNL and its actuary conduct a five-year analysis to identify employers with:

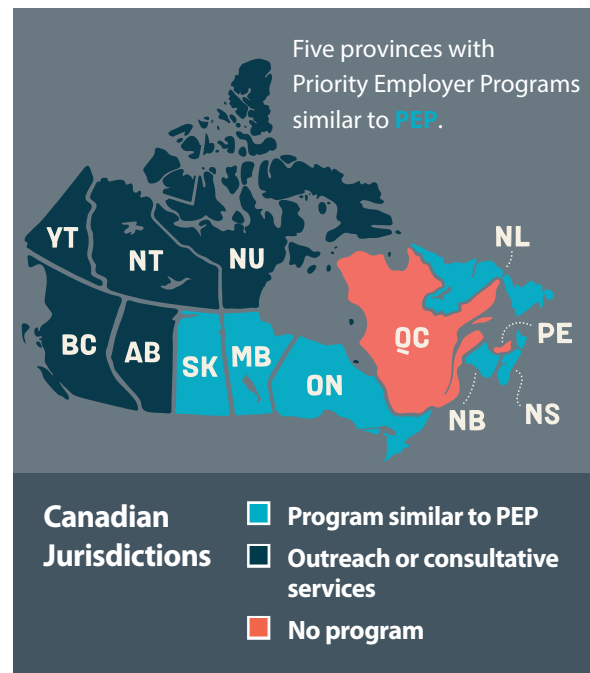
- An experience charge under the PRIME program due to high claims costs;
- A high number of claims (usually 25 in the last five years); and
- A sudden increase in their incident rate of injury.

Employers who do not meet these criteria can also ask to participate. The program currently includes 218 large employer accounts from all industries, with the highest participation from Health Care (95 employer accounts), Services (38 employer accounts) and Wholesale Trade and Retail Trade (19 employer accounts).

We assign a health and safety advisor to each priority employer to help identify areas for improvement and develop action plans focused on the primary causes of incidents in their workplace. We also provide employers with access to specialists in ergonomics, industrial hygiene, certification safety training and data analytics. Monthly safety outcomes are monitored to determine whether employers achieve their performance indicators or require more support.

Employers remain in PEP until their safety performance improves, or they choose to exit. Safety performance is defined as: having a well-developed and implemented OHS program (scoring at least 80 per cent on our audit); PRIME compliance; and a lost-time incident rate at or below their industry's average. Approximately 25 employers a year meet these criteria and exit the program. We may refer employers who exit before meeting these criteria to the OHS Division of Digital Government and Service NL if there are safety performance concerns.

Five other Canadian jurisdictions have a program similar to PEP (Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Saskatchewan), while four others provide general outreach or consultative services (Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories/Nunavut and Yukon).



Methodology

The PEP program review, completed in 2023, included:

- A review of performance outcomes.
- A jurisdictional review.
- Employer consultation via a survey and one-on-one feedback sessions.
- Consultation with WorkplaceNL operating departments and the OHS Division.

Key Findings

Performance Outcomes Review

Priority employers accounted for 51 per cent of all accepted claims and 55 per cent of all lost-time claims from 2018 to 2022. Priority employers reduced their claims by 10.7 per cent and serious injury claims by 12.3 per cent over the same period. In addition, lost-time incidence rates for priority employers decreased 53.6 per cent in the period.



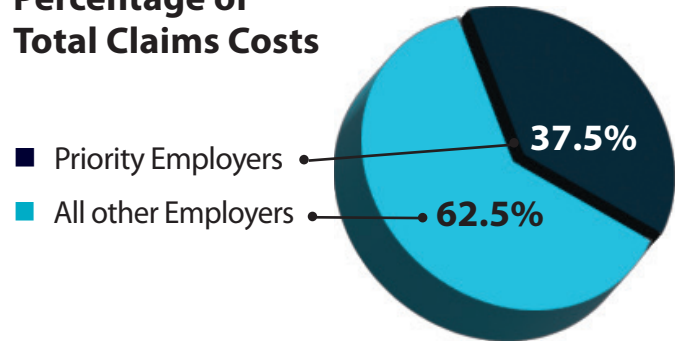
Lost Time Incidence Rate (per 100 workers)

Priority Employers	3.2
All other Employers	1.5

In 2022, the priority employer lost-time incidence rate was 3.2 per 100 workers, which was 2.1 times the provincial rate.

Priority employers accounted for \$310M (37.5 per cent) of claims costs from 2018 to 2022. Priority employers had 104,000 paid weeks of claims, representing 39 per cent of all paid weeks. Claim duration increased by 25.8 per cent and claim costs by 43.6 per cent from 2018 to 2022.

Percentage of Total Claims Costs



From 2018 to 2022, WorkplaceNL conducted 2,838 outreach activities for priority employers: 803 audits, 1,809 visits and 226 presentations. Eight full-time health and safety advisors spent 31,039 hours working directly with priority employers. Outreach was impacted to varying degrees from 2020 to 2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Jurisdictional Review

Nine Canadian jurisdictions said creating and sustaining partnerships with high-risk employers is an effective approach to advance OHS outcomes. They also noted improving safety performance with high-risk employers contributes to preventing injury and illness and positively impacts boards' injury funds.

Based on information learned from other jurisdictions, we will assess the following:

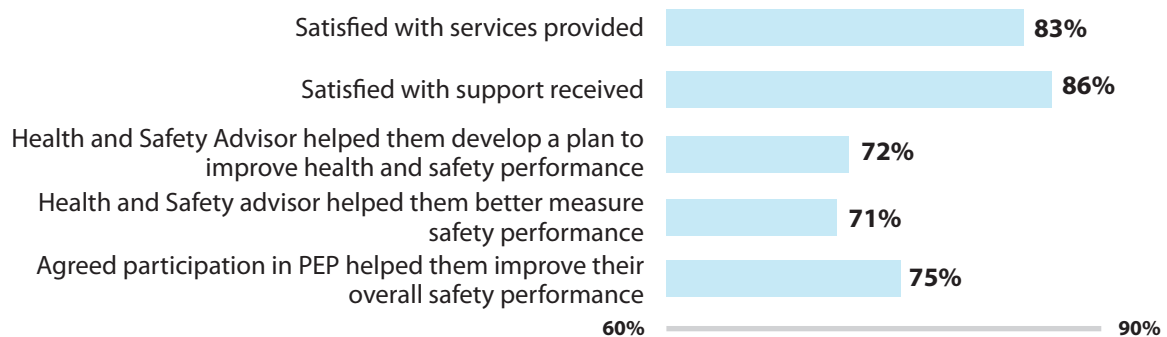
- Expanding selection criteria to include employers with fatalities in the last 12 months or a conviction under OHS legislation in the last 36 months.

- Including more detailed information about the activities performed by health and safety advisors, the specific deliverables and participation requirements of employers and when WorkplaceNL services should be withdrawn.
- Revising procedures to provide more clarity on safety milestones of the program.
- Reviewing measures to better benchmark an employer's progress.
- Updating procedures to incorporate more return-to-work support services.
- Enhancing accountability measures to better address non-participation.



Priority Employer Consultation

Sixty-two priority employers responded to our online survey, representing a 28 per cent response rate (+/-6 per cent margin of error; 19 times out of 20). Results showed most employers are satisfied with their participation in PEP.



Throughout 33 different one-on-one sessions, employers noted:

- A preference for more in-person visits from their health and safety advisor.
- More return-to-work collaboration with Claims Services.
- Better tools for understanding claims' current and future financial impacts.
- The importance of and having enhanced access to WorkplaceNL's safety performance data, which helps them improve business decisions.
- Quarterly reports are valuable, but require revisions.

WorkplaceNL and OHS Division Consultation

Four consultation sessions were held with WorkplaceNL teams who provide primary and secondary services to priority employers. Findings included:

- High-risk employers benefit from having an assigned health and safety advisor.
- Employer accountabilities regarding participation and timeliness to address proposed changes need to be strengthened.
- Improving access to priority employer systems and data would help employees managing claims in making return-to-work connections.
- Employers would benefit from more education on the financial impacts of claims, particularly assessment rates, and health and safety advisors should be equipped to provide this information.

Another consultation session was held with OHS Division. Their feedback focused on the need to maintain more frequent communication and collaboration between them and WorkplaceNL. They also recommended that WorkplaceNL engage OHS officers early in the planning process once a priority employer is identified.

An internal working group also reviewed technology systems and processes. They noted data and trend analysis is challenging as priority employers change each year, systems do not capture sufficient program history and records can span multiple systems.

The working group identified technology enhancements to help with reporting, system-generated letters and work queues. Using systems such as connect could also modernize services for employers and reduce mailing costs.

Recommendations

1. Revise PEP procedures.
2. Increase collaboration between health and safety advisors, OHS officers, and return-to-work staff to deliver coordinated education and services for priority employers.
3. Improve PEP quarterly reporting process.
4. Provide additional training and educational resources to assist priority employers in understanding the financial impact of claims.
5. Enhance technologies by modifying work queues, developing file histories, creating automated letters, and linking audits to employers' files.
6. Identify requirements and scope options for an employer case management system.
7. Develop an accountability framework to support outcome-based evaluation.