

WSIS

Workplace Safety
and Insurance System

Year-end Report 2023

BUILDING A BETTER SYSTEM

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Nova Scotia's Workplace Safety and Insurance System



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The Workplace Safety and Insurance System (WSIS) is a partnership that includes workers, employers, agencies — **Workers' Advisers Program** (WAP), **Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal** (WCAT), **Occupational Health and Safety Branch** (OHS) and the **Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia** (WCB) — and others who provide services in the System.

Our mission is to work together to help keep people healthy and safe at work, to insure against loss, and to support workers' recovery and safe, timely return to work. We strive to be fair, open and responsible in everything we do.

This report presents key outcomes for 2023 related to the **WSIS mission**.

In 2023, Nova Scotia's labor market saw notable progress, with a three percent increase in the working-age population. As more people moved to the province and joined the workforce than ever before, this upward employment trend highlights the important role the WSIS can play in supporting this growth.

Every person deserves to work in a workplace that promotes their safety and wellbeing. In 2023, the WSIS partners made significant progress in this mission, lessening the impact of workplace injuries on Nova Scotians. Over time, the system's efforts have evolved, leading to new initiatives that have reshaped traditional approaches to injury prevention and return-to-work strategies.



Nova Scotia's Workplace Safety and Insurance System (Continued)



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The WSIS performance results shared in the pages that follow reflect a year of encouraging outcomes for workplace safety in Nova Scotia. Fewer Nova Scotians were injured at work, with **the provincial injury rate dropping to an historic low of 1.40 in 2023**. Collaborative efforts among the WSIS partners played a role in nearly 59,000 fewer days lost to workplace injury in 2023. This is the equivalent of about 160 person-years of work.

While there were fewer workplace deaths in 2023 than the previous year, **18 Nova Scotians still lost their life at work or because of their work that year**. Workplace deaths are preventable – and the pain that the loss of a loved one brings to a family is the reason the WSIS will continue to make improvements to the province's workplace safety culture.

That landscape is evolving. This past September, **coverage for gradual onset psychological injuries came into effect in Nova Scotia**, meaning more Nova Scotians are being protected from a new type of workplace injury. This pivotal change aligned with ongoing work in the system, noting the importance of both physical and psychological workplace health and safety. Support for mental wellbeing in the workplace needs to be an intrinsic part of the system's work.

In August 2024, the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration **released the report on the workers' compensation system** — the first such review since the Dorsey Report in 2002.

Workplace Safety and Insurance System Scorecard

System Performance

The performance results are used by the WSIS partners, aligned agencies, stakeholder counsellor programs, injured worker associations and safety associations, and the people and organizations we serve, to gauge the health of the System, and to assess progress on System goals. The table presents the *System Scorecard*, and the results for each key performance measure for both 2023 and 2022.

To clarify our performance, we compare Nova Scotia’s results with New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan — jurisdictions of comparable size and industrial mix — as shown in the charts that follow.

Measures  Outcomes for Workers and Employers	Results	
	2022	2023
% Claims resolved in < 180 days	81%	79.7%
% Labour Force Covered	73%	75%
Return To Employability	90.2%	91.7%
Injury Rate	1.54	1.40

 Service Delivery	Results	
	2022	2023
Injured Worker Satisfaction Index for WCB	74%	76%
Employer Satisfaction Index for WCB	81%	82%
Workers’ Advisers Program Client Satisfaction	96%	96%
Injured Worker Satisfaction, claims > 26 weeks	65.9%	68.6%
Awareness of Importance of Workplace Health and Safety	86%	83%
Decisions allowed or allowed in part (WCAT)	54.2%	50.78%

 Financial Sustainability	Results	
	2022	2023
Percentage Funded	92.9%	94.9%
Actual Average Assessment Rate	\$2.60	\$2.63

System Performance Measures

The system performance results above are based on three measures used by the WSIS — improving outcomes for workers/employers, improving service delivery, and ensuring financial stability of the system.

1. Improving Outcomes



Return to Work within 180 days

This metric measures the proportion of WCB claims where the injured worker can make a successful return to the workforce within six months of their injury. In 2023, the percentage of workers returning to work within 180 days declined slightly to 79.7%.



Percent of Labour Force Covered

In 2023, the percentage of the labour force covered increased slightly to 75% but was still one of the lowest rates of coverage in Canada.



Return to Employability

This metric measures the percentage of injured workers who successfully return to work at their full pre-injury earnings. The percentage of injured workers who returned to work with no earnings loss held steady at 91.7% in 2023.



Injury Rate

The Injury Rate is a measure of the number of time-loss claims per 100 WCB-covered workers.

The overall injury rate in the province improved, reaching an historic low of **1.40** in 2023.

2. Service Delivery



Stakeholder Satisfaction Indices

Both injured workers and employer satisfaction with WCB service remain above established targets for these measures. The Worker Satisfaction Index increased to **76** per cent, and the Employer Satisfaction Index improved to **82** per cent. Satisfaction with Workers' Advisers Program (WAP) services is **96.3%** for 2023. Injured worker satisfaction on claims greater than 26 weeks was **68.6%**.



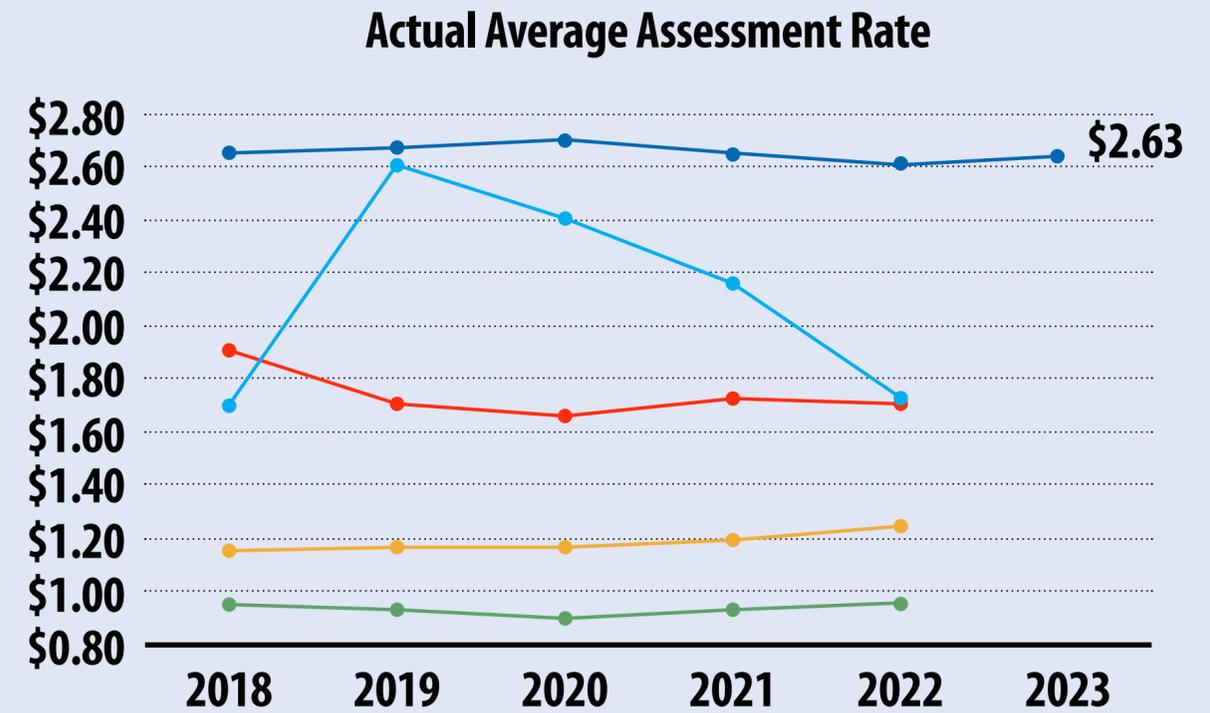
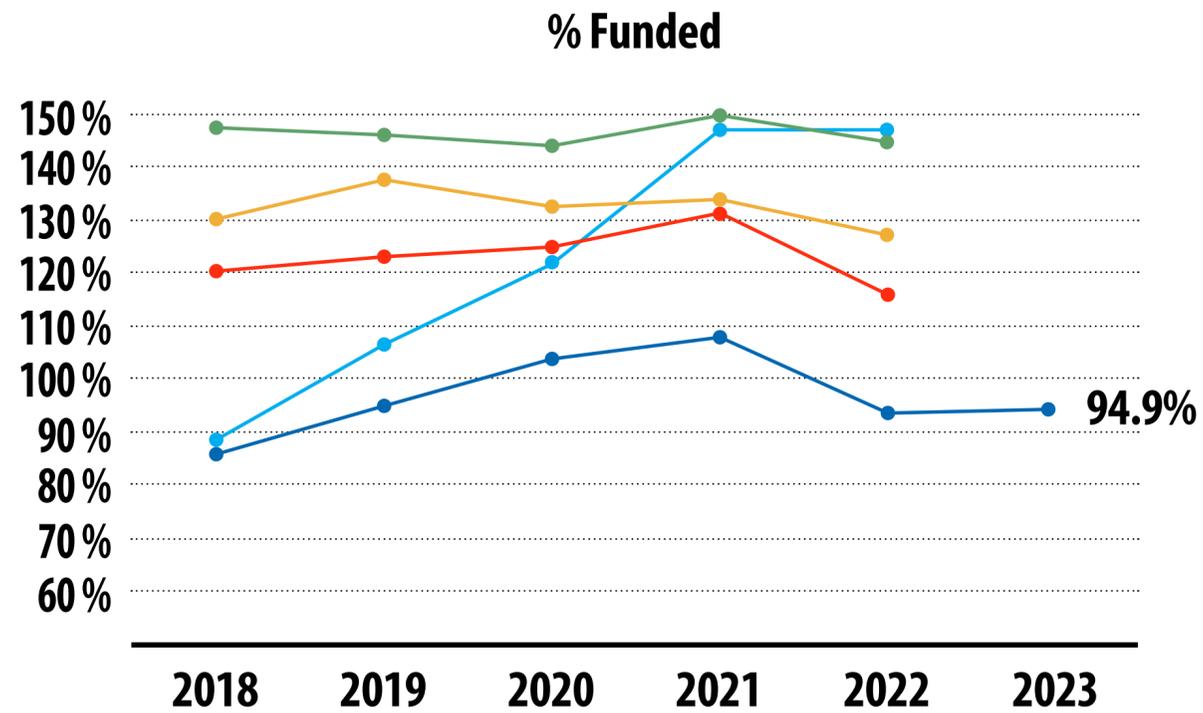
Awareness of Importance of Health and Safety

In 2023, **83%** of survey respondents indicated that health and safety is critically important or important.

System Performance Measures (Continued)

3. Financial Sustainability

\$ Ensure Financial Sustainability of the System



- 
 Nova Scotia
- 
 New Brunswick
- 
 Newfoundland & Labrador
- 
 Manitoba
- 
 Saskatchewan

Joint System Initiatives

The WSIS is a partnership with a common goal of positively impacting workplace health and safety outcomes in Nova Scotia. Noted here is a sample of initiatives the system partners helped lead in 2023 to make Nova Scotia a safer place to work.

Key initiatives in 2023 included:



1 Review of Workers' Compensation System

In August 2024, the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration released their committee report on the workers' compensation system in Nova Scotia. WCB was a willing partner in the review process and committed to finding new ways to serve Nova Scotians better. The report's recommendations are discussed further in this annual report. [Learn more →](#)

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2. PFD Awareness Campaign

WCB partnered with Government, FishSafe NS and the Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council on an awareness campaign of the importance of wearing personal flotation devices (PFDs). Radio and digital ads spanned the 2023 spring season, reminding captains and crew to wear PFDs "for the ones who wouldn't know what to do without you." [Learn more →](#)



3. Safety Training in Long Term Care, Home Care and Disability Support

WCB collaborated with government to lead return-to-work information sessions for over 350 employers from 250 workplaces in the summer of 2023. They also partnered together with industry to produce the *Better Safety, Better Care* campaign, to support better outcomes in the long term care and homecare sector. [Learn more →](#)



4. Joint Workplace Initiatives

Three ongoing Joint Workplace Initiatives throughout 2023 and into 2024 see the WCB and the OHS division collaborate closely, sharing information and records from the perspective of both enforcement and WCB operational engagement to inspire better outcomes. Three main initiatives are ongoing, and they include a focus on important items like a respiratory program and return to work best practices in psychological health and safety, and other safety improvements. Ongoing work like this helps deliver on the shared prevention goals of the WSIS, by leveraging knowledge and information within both WCB and the OHS division to work with workplaces toward safer outcomes.

LSI Initiatives

The Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills, and Immigration's (LSI) Safety Branch promotes compliance and builds safety culture through awareness, education, collaboration, engagement and where necessary, enforcement. This approach helps build awareness and understanding to ensure safety is valued and prioritized in Nova Scotia.

In 2023, several key initiatives were advanced to enhance service delivery within the System, including:

1 Digital Strategy

The Safety Branch kicked off a digital strategy initiative aimed at enhancing operational efficiency, improving service delivery, and fostering innovation to meet the evolving needs of Nova Scotians using digital solutions. The digital strategy project is designed to address current inefficiencies within the Safety Branch while aligning with the objectives outlined in the Branch's 2022–2027 Strategic Plan. The initiative focuses on leveraging technology to streamline operations, enhance compliance activities, and improve accessibility to safety information for both internal interested parties and the public.

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2. Preventing Harassment in the Workplace engagements

In November and December 2023, the Safety Branch engaged with over 600 Nova Scotians through in-person and virtual events, as well as surveys and written submissions on the topic of preventing harassment in the workplace. The *What We Heard* report from these engagements is now available on NovaScotia.ca.

[Learn more →](#)



3. Safety Awareness & Outreach

In 2023, the Safety Branch took part in 26 shows and conferences to share information about safety requirements in Nova Scotia. They also created a variety of safety materials, including guides, pamphlets, and videos. These resources include the *Assessing the Risk of Violence Guide*, the *JOHSC and Worker Representative Guide*, and updated brochures on the Internal Responsibility System (IRS), worker and employer responsibilities, and what to expect during an officer's visit, all available in multiple languages. The videos produced focus on workplace accessibility and safety, reporting requirements, and safety guidelines for newcomers and youth. [Learn more →](#)



4. Policy work

Policy work has included an amendment to the *Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)* regulations to align Nova Scotia's regulations with the modernized national framework based on the Globally Harmonized System developed by the United Nations. The purpose is to protect the health and safety of employees who work with or are at risk of exposure to hazardous products in the workplace. There has also been an amendment of the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations (WHSRs)* under the *OHS Act* to adopt the 2018 edition of CSA standard CSA Z797 - *Code of Practice for Access Scaffold*.

LSI Initiatives (Continued)



5. Minister's Occupational Health and Safety Education Trust Fund

The Occupational Health and Safety Education Trust Fund supports sectors, workplaces and organizations in creating a strong and sustained safety culture. The fund supports education, training, promotion and other activities to increase awareness and knowledge of occupational health and safety, reduce the risk of injury and build a positive workplace safety culture. Funding for the program comes from fines and court-ordered payments for violations of the *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act and Regulations*. In 2023, seven (7) applications were approved for funding. The many excellent applications included an online training module for new and vulnerable workers that focuses on the fundamentals of workplace safety in Nova Scotia, developed by the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour; an initiative to enhance a culture of eye safety in workplaces, schools, and universities with the CNIB Foundation; and the creation of a program on psychologically healthy workplaces with LArche Homefires, a not-for-profit organization that works with smaller home health care service providers. [Learn more](#) →



6. The Technical Safety Division

The Technical Safety Division works with its clients to achieve compliance with legislation, regulations and adopted safety standards respecting: Fuel Safety, Boilers and Pressure Vessels, Power Engineering and Registered Plants, Electrical Installations & inspections, Elevators and Lifts, Amusement Devices and Regulated Cranes. In 2023, the Council of Atlantic Premiers formalized an agreement aimed at enhancing technical safety, facilitating interjurisdictional commerce, and improving the mobility of certified tradespeople across Atlantic Canada. Drafted by Nova Scotia (NS) Technical Safety, this agreement reflects a shared commitment to reducing regulatory barriers and eliminating interprovincial discrepancies that impede workers and employers.

Technical safety works in the Safety Branch to prevent workplace injuries. Amendments to the *Technical Safety Standards Regulations* have incorporated the latest codes for Boilers and Pressure Equipment, Fuel Safety, Cranes, and Power Engineering, aligning NS with 2023 and future industry best practices to improve safety and operational efficiency. The Division has recently signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the federal government—covering elevators and lifts, boiler and pressure equipment inspections, exemplifying federal-provincial collaboration and generating approximately \$500,000 annually for the province.

Focusing on Electrical Safety, a working group has been established to modernize the Nova Scotia Power Inc's (NSPI) process, with a focus on addressing population growth and the integration of emerging technologies. In the clean energy sector, Nova Scotia is nearing the completion of product certification for a local battery manufacturer by 2024, supporting the adoption of renewable energy technologies. In addition, a solar photovoltaic (PV) engagement held in November 2023 brought together key interested parties, including contractors, Solar NS, Efficiency NS, IBEW, and the NS Apprenticeship Agency (NSAA) to modernize work practices in the solar industry.

The Trade Regulation Framework between Technical Safety and NSAA has further streamlined power engineering exam proctoring, increasing exam availability by 33% and facilitating trade certification. Public awareness campaigns on escalator safety continue to reinforce workplace and public safety across the province.

Future advancements for the Division will include the expansion of the Fuel Safety online permitting portal, allowing for increased self-issued permits, thereby improving client services.

LSI Initiatives (Continued)



7. Nova SAFE

Nova SAFE was developed for Nova Scotians as a modern and convenient way to access important safety information, resources, and regulations while doing their work. Over the past year the Safety Branch has seen considerable interest and usage of Nova SAFE with more than 43,000 users, and 130,000 sessions.

The department has had two successful marketing campaigns that have reached thousands of Nova Scotians. These campaigns have not only brought awareness to Nova SAFE but have promoted an increase of use. The ad campaign has had more than 8 million impressions, and our YouTube promotional videos have been watched more than 400,000 times.

The site launched in May of 2023 with 30 topics in both English and French and added an additional 9 topics in July of 2024. In October of 2024 an additional 6 topics will be added. With the changes to the WCB Act specifically around Psychological Injury, the topic of Harassment and Violence in the Workplace was added. This topic and the accompanying resources link to eLearning programs, guides and other resources to support Nova Scotia employers and employees as they navigate the new legislative changes.

This October Google Translate will be added to Nova SAFE, which will enable the department to reach a new group of workers, the newcomers to Nova Scotia, with the translation of the content into 80 different languages. Getting foundational safety information to our new and vulnerable workers in their chosen language will help them to better understand the hazards in the workplace and how to stay safe at work. [Learn more →](#)

WCB Initiatives

WCB Nova Scotia continued to move forward with initiatives aimed at improving service, preventing injuries and improving return to work approaches for workers, employers and service providers across the province.

Key initiatives in 2023 included:



1 Welcoming new CEO

After a competitive nationwide search, WCB welcomed **Karen Adams** as its new CEO in 2023.

Holding leadership positions on the world's stage, Adams is helping to lead the WCB through a new era of expanded injury coverage and enhanced services. [Learn more →](#)

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2. Getting Ready to Support Gradual Onset Psychological Injuries

Gradual onset psychological injuries are now covered in Nova Scotia. WCB implemented a new service model, with an expanded GPI team to help support this new type of injury claim. [Learn more →](#)



3. Launching Return to Work Awareness Campaign

WCB launched the 'Getting back is part of getting better' ad campaign to promote healthy work as part of recovery. [Learn more →](#)



4. New Approved Rate Range

In 2023, WCB announced a new rate framework to provide transparency for covered employers. Based upon the overall funded percentage, it provides a clear picture for when rate changes might be needed and for when benefit changes might be recommended to Government. [Learn more →](#)



5. Adjudication Pathway Pilot

WCB launched the Learner Pathway Pilot in 2023 to give its employees an opportunity to explore an adjudication career through internal training sessions.



6. RTW Requirement in Safety Certified Program

WCB added a return-to-work element to the Safety Certified accreditation program. [Learn more →](#)



7. CSNS Pilot Launch

WCB Nova Scotia piloted a service with Construction Safety Nova Scotia that matches workers who have been injured on the job with meaningful transitional work with other employers in the construction industry. [Learn more →](#)

WCB Initiatives (Continued)



Other Key Outcomes for WCB

- Worked with ISANS to promote injury prevention for newcomers in the hospitality sector
- Improved training in RTW, piloted new roles, and developed a roadmap to guide improvements over the next several years
- Introduced faster decision making on straightforward claims
- Improved the Primary Care Physician's form to focus on return to work and reduce paperwork for doctors
- Invested in employee health and wellness, including a new online platform of learning tools.

WCB Review and Recommendations



In 2023, the Minister of the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration (LSI) established a Workers' Compensation Review Committee (RC) to validate and prioritize the issues with the workers' compensation system in Nova Scotia.

Engagements were held in November and December of 2023. There were 13 in-person and six virtual sessions, opportunities to present to the Review Committee, written submissions and an online survey. Over 1,000 Nova Scotians provided input into the review.

The Review Committee submitted its report to the Minister of LSI on July 9, 2024, which included 10 key priority issues to be addressed in the system in Nova Scotia. They were:

1. System Sustainability

The RC heard that the accident fund has been consistently underfunded for more than 30 years in NS and this has an impact on rates and benefits and that the funding approaches WCB is using need to support the system.

2. Prevention

A safe and healthy workplace protects workers and can reduce injury/illness costs. The Review Committee recommends having a third-party review of prevention that contributes to building a prevention strategy.

3. Awareness and Understanding of the System

Safety Branch and the WCB through outreach and education, support system transparency, and accessibility. The Review Committee recommends a review of the organizations aligned with the system to lead to a less complex and better aligned system.

4. Claims Administration

The claims administration process is slow and communication is poor while decisions made by the WCB are not always easy to understand. The Review Committee feels that WCB should establish and communicate service standards and consistently provide reasoned decision letters.

5. Supporting Safe and Timely Return to Work

In Nova Scotia, long claim durations are the most significant driver of system costs. Per capita, far more time is lost to workplace injury here than in other jurisdictions. The Review Committee recommends legislating return to work cooperation between workers, employers and the WCB to reduce durations.

WCB Review and Recommendations

(Continued)



6. Compensation and Benefits

The Review Committee heard that injured workers are facing financial hardship given inflation rates and the current state of WCB benefits.

7. Coverage

50,000 Nova Scotians do not have workplace injury insurance and 75% of Nova Scotia's workforce is covered by WCB. The Review Committee recommends engagement to gain feedback on how to expand coverage.

8. Psychological Health and Safety and Gradual Onset Stress

There is a need for a more proactive approach to supporting psychological health and safety in the workplace.

9. Reviews and Appeals

The appeals process takes a long-time and this has a negative impact on injured workers. The Review Committee recommends that an in-depth review of the appeals system be conducted focused on improving efficiencies and would include the organizations that support the appeals process.

10. System Transparency and Accountability

Most jurisdictions mandate regular reviews of their workers' compensation systems and a purpose statement to guide the overall interpretation of the Act to align system partners in the intent of the WCA. The Review Committee believes that system transparency and accountability need to be strengthened. This could include making changes to legislation to incorporate a purpose into the WCA as well as legislating key elements of the system such as regular reviews.

Appeals **Table 1 – System Appeals, 2018 to 2023**

The quality of service provided by System partners is also measured by the number of decisions overturned through appeals.

Year	WCB - Claims		WCB - Internal Appeals			WCAT			NS Court of Appeal
	Received	Time Loss	Received	Decisions	Allowed/ Allowed in part	Received	Decisions	Allowed/ Allowed in part	
2023	20,487	5,217	1,241	1,230	308 (25%)	511	317	161 (50.78%)	14
2022	20,527	5,420	1,087	1,010	301 (30%)	445	391	212 (54.2%)	6
2021	21,283	5,391	1,196	823	175 (21%)	449	438	220 (50.2%)	8
2020	19,944	4,977	970	959	207 (22%)	495	418	169 (40%)	6
2019	25,183	5,663	1,134	1,184	286 (24%)	593	461	207 (45%)	6
2018	24,584	5,819	1,354	968	191 (20%)	553	528	209 (40%)	15

Jurisdictional Comparison

Table 2 - Comparison of Compensation Benefits, Selected Canadian Jurisdictions*

Index Area	Nova Scotia	New Brunswick	Newfoundland & Labrador	Manitoba	Saskatchewan
Component	Description				
Percentage of the Workforce Covered	73%	91.6%	96%	77.7%	74.5%
Waiting period	2/5 of weekly benefits	1/5 of weekly benefits	No	No	No
CPP offset for earnings loss benefit	Yes, 50% is offset	Yes, 50% is offset	Yes, 75% of net CPP benefits is offset	Yes, 100% offset	Yes, after 12 months of loss of earnings capacity, 50%
Percentage of earnings covered: Long-term	75% of net 1 st 26 weeks (about 6 months) then 85% of net	85% loss of earnings	85% of net	90% of net	90% of net
Fatality benefits other than pensions - immediate lump sum	\$15,000 at date of death	An amount equal to 50% of the New Brunswick Industrial Aggregate Earnings 2021: \$22,379.50	\$15,000 or 26 times the worker's average weekly net earnings at time of injury, whichever is greater	\$88,150	None
Maximum Earnings Covered	\$69,800	\$67,100	\$67,985	No maximum	\$91,100
Average New Impairment Award	8.64%	8.80%	17.07%	5.21%	7.48%
Annuity	Yes, 5% of extended earnings replacement benefit is set aside for annuity	Yes, 10% of 'long-term earning loss' benefit is set aside for annuity	Worker paid a pension replacement benefit at age 65 if loss of a pension benefit due to compensable injury can be proven	Yes, up to 7% of 'long-term earning loss' benefit is set aside for annuity	Yes, 10% of 'long-term earning loss' benefit is set aside for annuity
CPI Index or AIW index	Yes, 50% of CPI	Yes, 100% of CPI	Yes, 100% of CPI	Yes, AIW	Yes, 100% of CPI
Supplementary Benefits	Yes, for claims prior to March 23, 1990	No	No	No	No

* Information in table is based on 2022 numbers, the most recent AWCBC (Association of Workers Compensation Boards of Canada) data for each jurisdiction.