



Key findings and recommendations

Early intervention is critical to helping employees with an injury or illness recover at and return to work. It has been shown to significantly reduce the impact and duration of emerging symptoms of ill health, injury or illness, and prevent secondary or chronic conditions. Evidence also suggests that focused early intervention programs help drive a positive workplace health and safety culture.

Over the past year, Comcare partnered with three Australian Public Sector agencies to test whether a structured and independent early intervention service provided:

- early access to treatment support services
- self-management where clinically appropriate
- enhanced ability, and support, to recover at and return to work

The pilot results demonstrated significant improvements to recovery at and return to work and a positive cost benefit for employers.

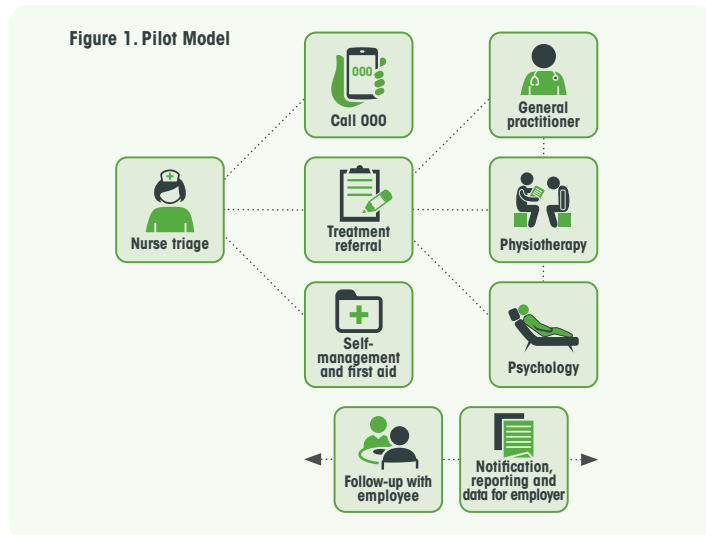
Pilot overview

The pilot was open to any employee who sustained an injury/illness at work or developed symptoms that impacted their ability to work, regardless of the cause. The first step involved employees calling a nurse triage service. The nurse clinically assessed the employee's condition and provided treatment advice, including a referral where appropriate. The employer received notification of the triage call, along with aggregate data and reporting on the pilot's progress.

Please refer to Figure 1 below.

Key findings

The pilot achieved strong results and recovery rates as part of an independent evaluation that compared participant outcomes to a control group¹.



Supports recovery and return to work



2x the recovery rate
compared to the control group



93% of participants triaged to GPs were certified fit for work



Participants had less time off work to recover compared to the control group

A positive cost benefit for employers²



In the majority of cases, the pilot resulted in a cost saving to employers based on participants':

- improved recovery
- reduced likelihood of developing a chronic condition, and a
- reduced risk of developing a secondary injury/illness.

¹ A group of employees with a compensation claim between 2014-18 from each agency was used as a comparison group for pilot participants.

² Agencies with the largest number of participants, implementing the program over a longer time period, resulted in the greatest cost savings per participant. It is recommended that agencies who adopt early intervention programs measure participant experience over a duration longer than 12 months.

Triage process provided faster access to treatment and self-management



Physical injuries

80% of participants accessed **treatment** within **3 days**
93-97% managed their condition using only the services provided under the pilot.



Psychological injuries

80% of participants accessed **treatment** within **8 days**
85% managed their condition using only the services provided under the pilot.

High levels of satisfaction with the triage process

79% had a "very good" experience (the highest rating) with the early intervention provider and practitioners

15% had a "good" experience with the early intervention provider and practitioners



94% total combined

Participants that recovered from injury were less likely to progress to chronic conditions



Physical injuries

50% lower likelihood of developing a chronic condition.



Psychological injuries

10-30% lower likelihood of developing a chronic condition.

Key Recommendations

- Employers should consider implementing a structured early intervention program that includes:
 - a triage service
 - incident notification to employers at the time of the triage call
 - a robust data collection framework.
- Early intervention programs should be offered to any employee who sustains an injury/illness at work or developed symptoms that impact on their ability to work, regardless of the cause of the injury/illness or symptom.
- Early intervention programs should include safety protocol awareness and hazard identification through feedback mechanisms and enhanced monitoring processes.
- Early intervention programs should be considered as part of the delivery of a cost-effective response to support the health and wellbeing of employees. A rigorous cost/benefit analysis is recommended measuring experience over a minimum of twelve months.
- Several guidance tools such as promotional materials, case studies and frequently asked questions were identified as useful in implementing the early intervention program, and should be adopted for future roll out.



"The service offered was fantastic. The triage phone service was a wonderful entry point. The information sharing amongst care professionals made the whole process a lot less stressful for me. The professionals that I was referred to through the pilot were of a high quality." **Pilot participant**

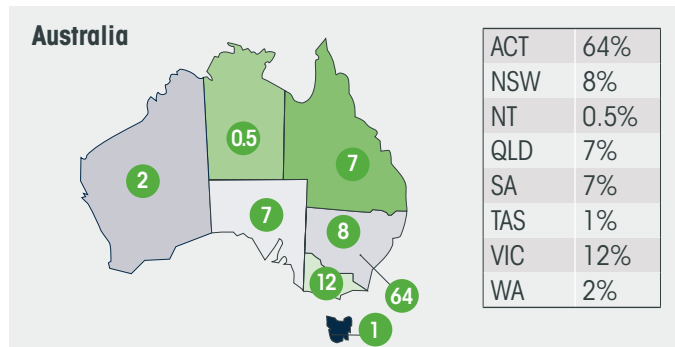
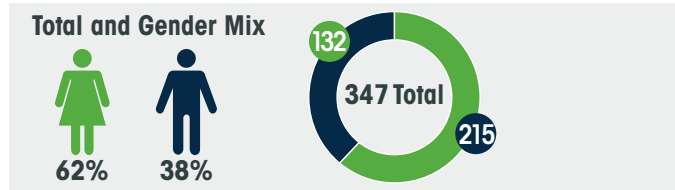


"Experience was easy from start from speaking to the nurse to be assessed to receiving the email with my booking. Appointment available on same day as I spoke to nurse. Practitioner was very good & experienced. Would highly recommend. Thank you" **Pilot participant**

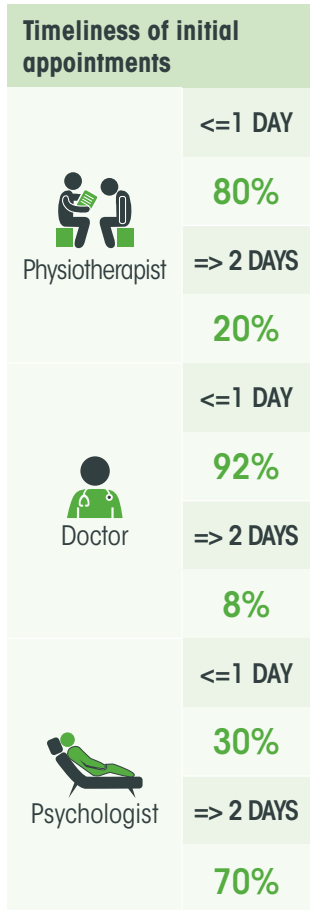
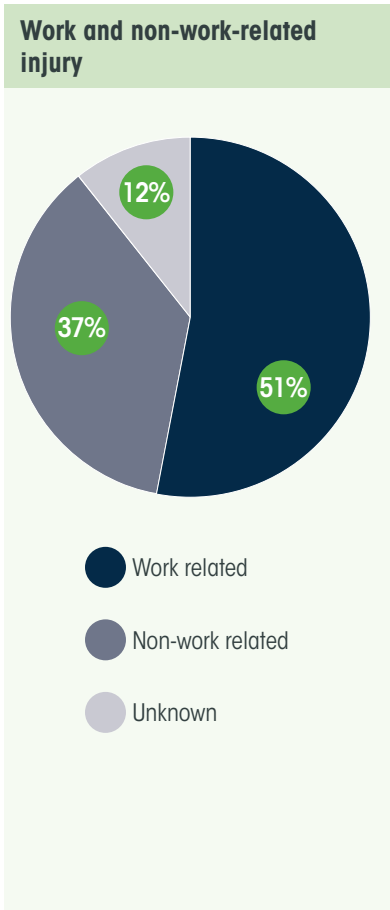
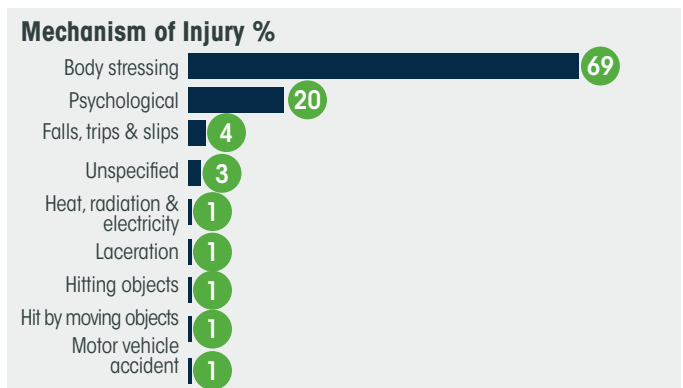
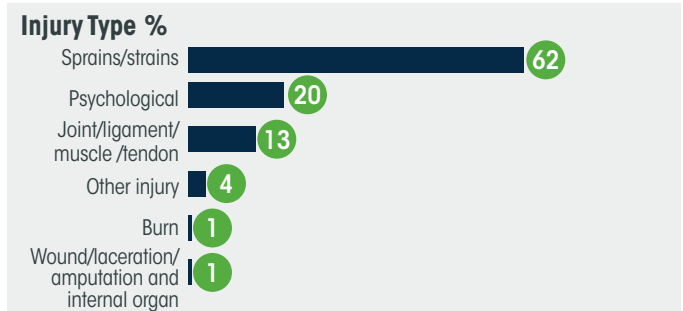


Agency results and insights

There was a total of 347 calls to the early intervention triage service during the pilot. Please see below for the overall results including, participant demographics, injury insights and survey feedback.



Of the 347 triage calls, nearly two thirds (64%) of pilot participants were based in the ACT, which is reflective of the large proportion of employees for the three agencies which are in that jurisdiction. Smaller numbers of employees based in Victoria (12%), Queensland (7%), NSW (8%), South Australia (7%) and Western Australia (2%) also made use of the service.



Strongly recommend that this program be extended. It was wonderful and actually prevented my injury from getting much worse. Without the pilot I would've ignored my injury until it became unbearable. Having an actual early intervention program which was easy to refer into, and free, actually prompted me to take my injury seriously.

Pilot participant

	79%	77%
Described their experience with Injurnet and their practitioners as "very good" (highest rating).		
	79%	94%
Found the appointment time to be "very convenient" (highest rating)		
Would see Injurnet practitioners again		

*The percentages captured for the overall results have been rounded.

Post Pilot Questionnaire

According to the questionnaire, participant feedback showed the pilot improved:



Employees' sense of trust in their employer's ability to support their injury



Level of corporate engagement

Participants selected either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' for the following statements.

81%

My immediate supervisor is committed to supporting my health and wellbeing at work.

67%

Believe their agency does a good job of communicating what it can offer in terms of health and wellbeing.

70%

I am satisfied with the policies/practices in place to help me manage my health and wellbeing.

80%

I believe my immediate supervisor cares about my health and wellbeing.

85%

The people in my work group are committed to work health and safety (WHS).

94%

Proactively take responsibility for their health and wellbeing at work.

81%

My agency supports employees to escalate work health and safety (WHS) risk related issues with managers.

75%

Believe their agency cares about their health and wellbeing.

68%

I feel a strong personal attachment to my agency.

61%

The pilot was widely promoted within my organisation.

92%

The pilot was easily accessible.

35%

Are more likely to report workplace hazards compared to the year before.



"This is an excellent program, they arranged a physio within a few days and when I required additional sessions they approved them quickly. I think this truly assisted to prevent my injury escalating. In conjunction with this program I also was provided with an ergonomic assessment to prevent it re-occurring." **Pilot participant**



"I'm very impressed. I imagined that the process was going to be daunting considering I hurt myself at work and because of that I was reluctant to report it. This was a positive experience. Thank you." **Pilot participant**



"I was recommended to the pilot by a colleague upon experiencing chest pains at work (quite scary!) The hospital emergency waiting times were about 2-3 hours, and the earliest bulk billing GP I could get into was over the weekend. Obviously with something like chest pain, you don't want to let it go on too long. The lovely nurse who triaged me on the phone was able to get me into a medical centre within half an hour, and next door to where I live! It was such an easy and straightforward process. I may have a broken sternum, which would have never been picked up if I'd just left it as I was planning to do because of the inconvenience and cost involved of seeking medical care. Thank you thank you thank you for offering this service!" **Pilot participant**



"I am so grateful this pilot is available. I have just recently lost my father and being able to access some support to help me work through many of the stresses I have encountered over the last month is invaluable to me." **Pilot participant**

Contact us



Deegan.Angie@comcare.gov.au



(03) 9914 6358 | 1300 366 979



comcare.gov.au



LinkedIn



Twitter