



Australian Government

Comcare

COMCARE SCHEME— WORKERS' COMPENSATION STATISTICS 2019-20

July 2020

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

Comcare has published this document as part of its legislative functions under the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRC Act) and the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act).

This document supports and complements other data and information published by Comcare as part of these legislative functions. For more information, see 'Related data sources'.

1.2 STATUS OF ACT GOVERNMENT

The Australian Capital Territory Government was granted a self-insurance licence from 1 March 2019 by the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.

For the purposes of this report, its claim experience contributes to that of the self-insured licensee sector throughout the period of scrutiny (five years for most measures).

1.3 KEY FINDINGS

At the scheme level, for the five years from 2015-16 to 2019-20:

- the number of employees covered under the SRC Act has increased from 374,100 to 397,500 (refer to figure 2.1)
- the number of employees covered under the WHS Act has increased from 408,700 to 415,800 (refer to figure 2.1)
- there has been a 11 per cent reduction in the incidence of claims received from 16.4 to 14.5 claims received per 1000 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees (refer to figure 3.1)
- there has been a 20 per cent reduction in the incidence of accepted body stressing claims from 5.5 to 4.4 claims per 1000 FTE employees (refer to figure 3.7)
- there has been a 4 per cent increase in the incidence of serious claims from 6.2 to 6.5 claims per 1000 FTE employees (refer to figure 3.5)
- median weeks of time off work for psychological claims has increased by 22 per cent from 15.1 to 18.4 weeks of time off work (refer to figure 4.3)
- the scheme has shown increases in the affirmation rate for reconsiderations (refer to table 5.1) and decreases in the affirmation rate for AAT decisions (refer to table 5.2) since 2015-16.

2 SCHEME PARTICIPATION

2.1 COVERAGE UNDER THE SRC ACT AND THE WHS ACT

The Comcare scheme comprises employers covered under the WHS Act, the SRC Act or both Acts.

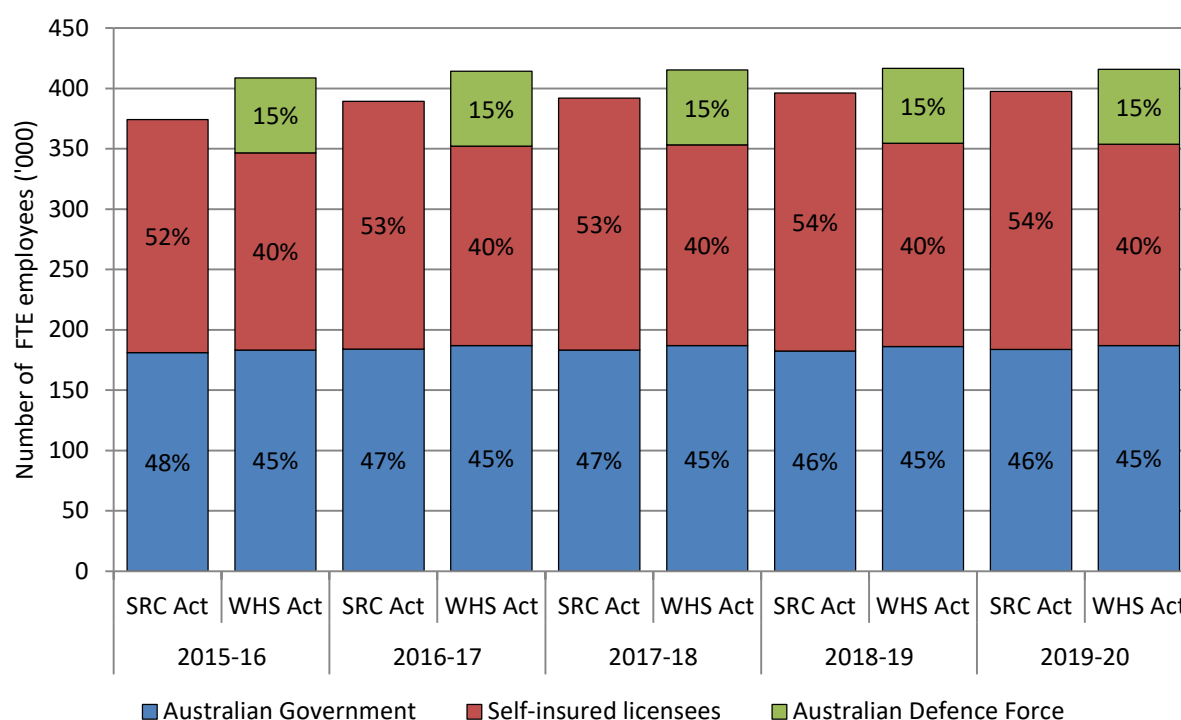
The WHS Act covers the Australian Government sector, 31 of the 38 self-insured licensees, the Australian Defence Force and a number of Commonwealth public authorities covered only by the WHS Act.

The SRC Act covers the Australian Government sector and all 38 of the self-insured licensees.

The ACT Government (a self-insured licensee) is covered by the SRC Act but not by the WHS Act.

For more information on self-insurance under the SRC Act, refer to the [Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission website](#).

Figure 2.1 Scheme coverage



As at 30 June 2020, there were approximately 397,500 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees covered under the SRC Act and 415,800 FTE employees covered under the WHS Act.

The total WHS Act FTE has increased marginally (two per cent) over the five years between 2015-16 and 2019-20.

The SRC Act FTE has increased six per cent over this period, with most of the increase attributable to growth in the self-insured licensee sector.

Table 2.1 Comcare scheme coverage as a percentage of Australian industry

Industry	SRC FTE at 30 June 2020			WHS FTE at 30 June 2020			Australian industry FTE at May 2020 '000	SRC as percentage of total industry	WHS as percentage of total industry
	Australian Government '000	Self-insured licensees '000	Comcare SRC jurisdiction '000	Australian Government* '000	Self-insured licensees '000	Comcare WHS jurisdiction '000			
Public Administration and Safety	142.1	31.5	173.6	204.5	0.7	205.2	849.4	20.4%	24.2%
Information, Media and Telecommunications	11.8	31.8	43.7	11.8	31.8	43.7	183.5	23.8%	23.8%
Financial and Insurance Services	1.4	64.7	66.1	1.4	61.3	62.7	486.3	13.6%	12.9%
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	6.1	62.4	68.6	6.7	50.7	57.3	583.2	11.8%	9.8%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	15.8		15.8	15.8		15.8	1109.0	1.4%	1.4%
Manufacturing	1.4	6.0	7.4	2.8	6.0	8.8	852.8	0.9%	1.0%
Education and Training	0.2	5.3	5.4	0.2	5.3	5.4	1033.2	0.5%	0.5%
Construction		5.1	5.1		5.1	5.1	1174.1	0.4%	0.4%
Health Care and Social Assistance	2.0		2.0	2.0		2.0	1731.9	0.1%	0.1%
All other industries	2.9	7.1	10.0	4.0	5.9	9.9	4183.5	0.2%	0.2%
All industries	183.6	213.9	397.5	249.0	166.8	415.8	12186.8	3.3%	3.4%

* Australian Government WHS coverage includes 62,000 ADF employees

Notes:

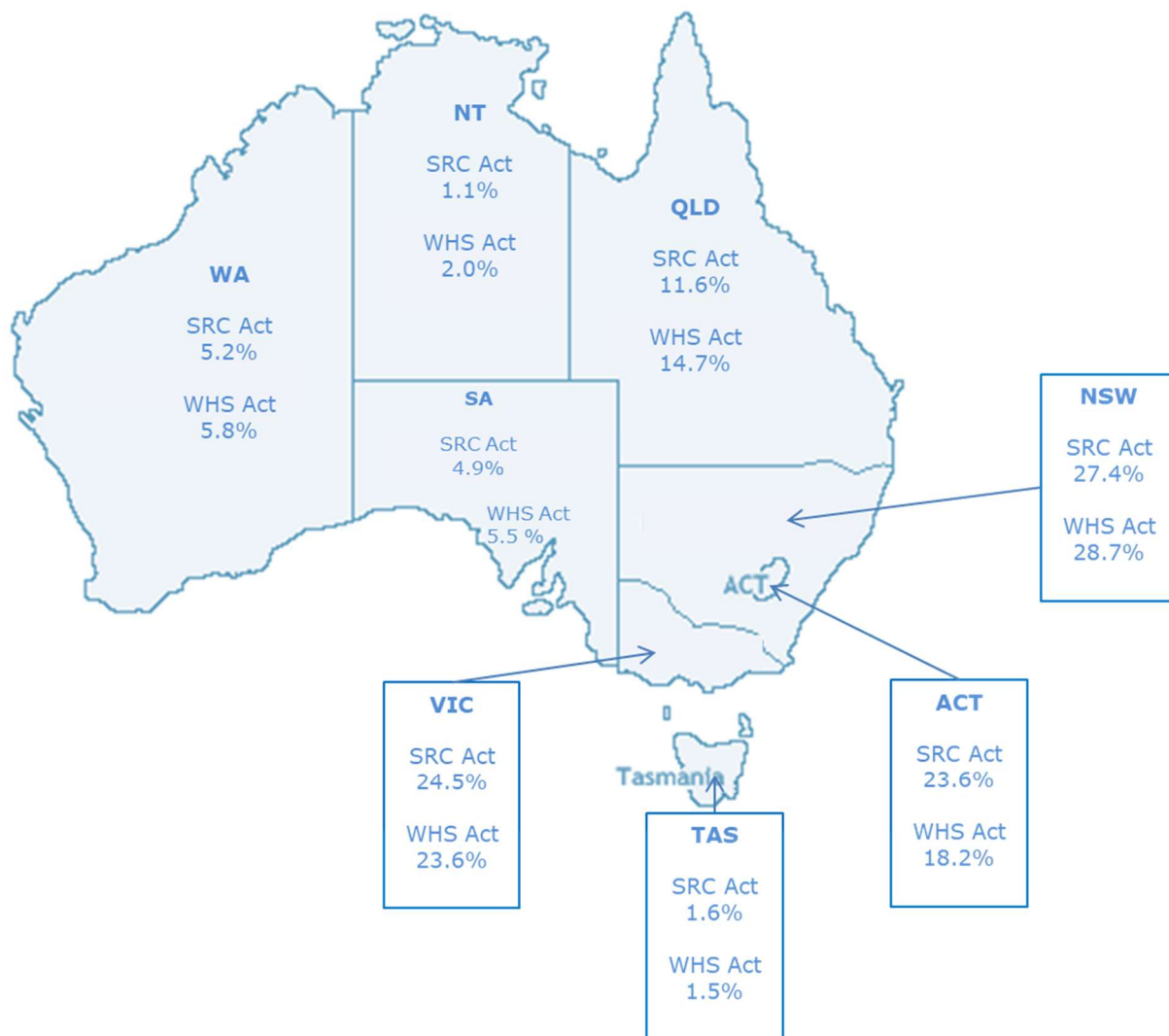
1. 'All other industries' includes: Accommodation and food services; Administration and support services; Agriculture, forestry and fishing; Arts and recreation services; Electricity, gas, water and waste services; Mining; Other services; Rental, hiring and real estate services; and Wholesale trade as defined in ANZSIC 2006.
2. Australian industry FTE estimate includes ADF.
3. Australian industry FTE source: ABS 6105.0 Australian Labor Market Statistics.
4. Totals may not sum from components due to rounding.

The Comcare scheme covers a broad range of industries. Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of FTE employees covered under the SRC Act and WHS Act, by Australian and New Zealand Industrial Classification (ANZSIC), as a percentage of all Australian industries.

The Comcare scheme's SRC Act jurisdiction covered approximately 3.3 per cent of all persons employed in Australia. The highest proportion of coverage is in the 'Information, Media and Telecommunications' industry (23.8 per cent) followed by 'Public Administration and Safety' (20.4 per cent) and 'Financial and Insurance Services' (13.6 per cent).

The Comcare scheme's WHS jurisdiction covered approximately 3.4 per cent of all persons employed in Australia. The 'Public Administration and Safety' industry has the largest proportion of coverage at (24.2 per cent), followed by the 'Information, Media and Telecommunications' industry (23.8 per cent) and the 'Financial and Insurance Services' industry (12.9 per cent).

Figure 2.2 Scheme coverage by location as at 30 June 2020



The Comcare scheme is a national scheme with employers and employees in every state and territory. The SRC Act may also cover locally engaged overseas employees. The WHS Act also covers workers based overseas including Australian embassy staff working abroad.

The geographic distribution of employees covered by the SRC and WHS Acts across all Australian states and territories as at 30 June 2020 is provided in Figure 2.2. New South Wales has the highest numbers of workers covered by the SRC Act and the highest numbers covered by the WHS Act.

The figures in Figure 2.2 are a reflection of employee numbers (headcount), not full-time equivalents (FTE).

3 WORKERS' COMPENSATION

3.1 CLAIMS RECEIVED

The incidence rate of claims received in the Comcare scheme has been decreasing over time, reducing by 11 per cent from 2015-16 to 2019-20.

Australian Government sector experienced a 33 per cent reduction in the period and self-insured licensees a 1 per cent reduction.

The mix of received claims (classified according to injury type) has been relatively consistent over the same period (figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1 Incidence of claims received

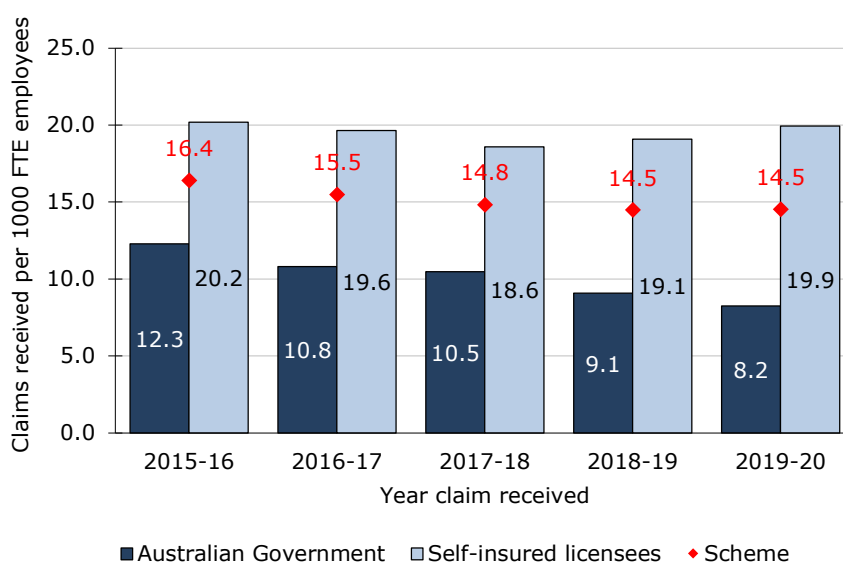
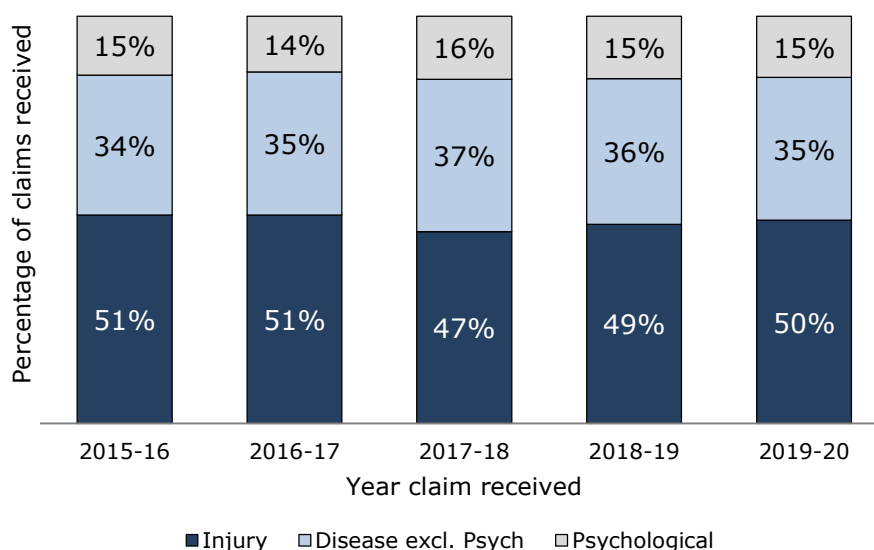


Figure 3.2 Percentage of claims received by type of claim



3.2 INITIAL CLAIMS ACCEPTANCE RATE

The initial claims acceptance rate represents those claims that had an initial liability determination made during the period 2015-16 through 2019-20, where the initial determination decision was to accept liability for the claim. This does not include claims accepted following reconsideration or review.

Figure 3.3 shows that 74 per cent of claims with a date of first determination in 2019-20 were initially accepted across the scheme, an increase from 72 per cent in 2015-16. This was driven mainly by an increase in the acceptance rate for self-insured licensees over the period.

Figure 3.3 Initial claims acceptance rate

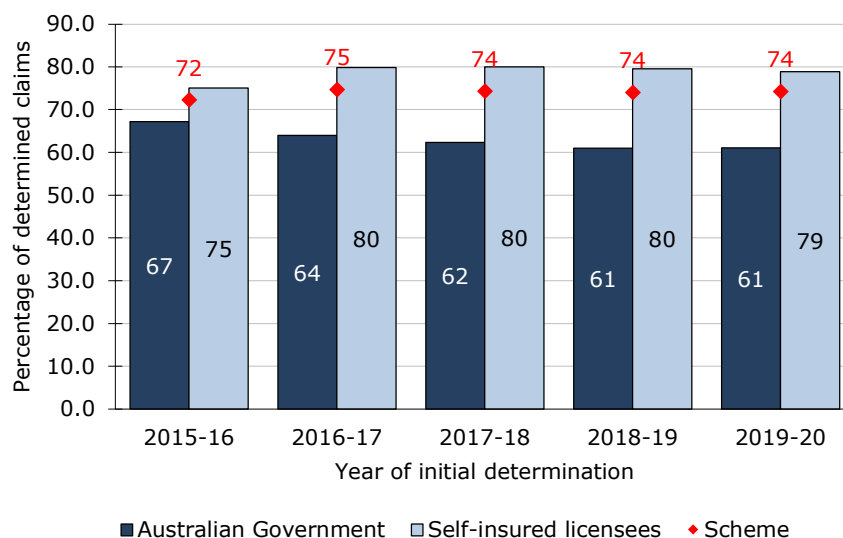
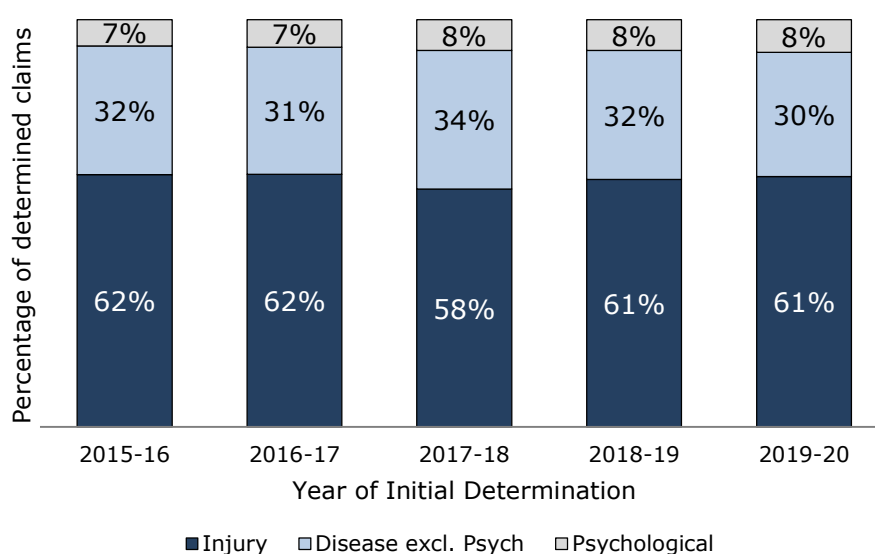


Figure 3.4 shows that the initial acceptance of injury claims continues to be the highest proportion of claims accepted across the scheme. There have been only minor shifts in these proportions over the reporting period.

Figure 3.4 Initial claims accepted by type of claim

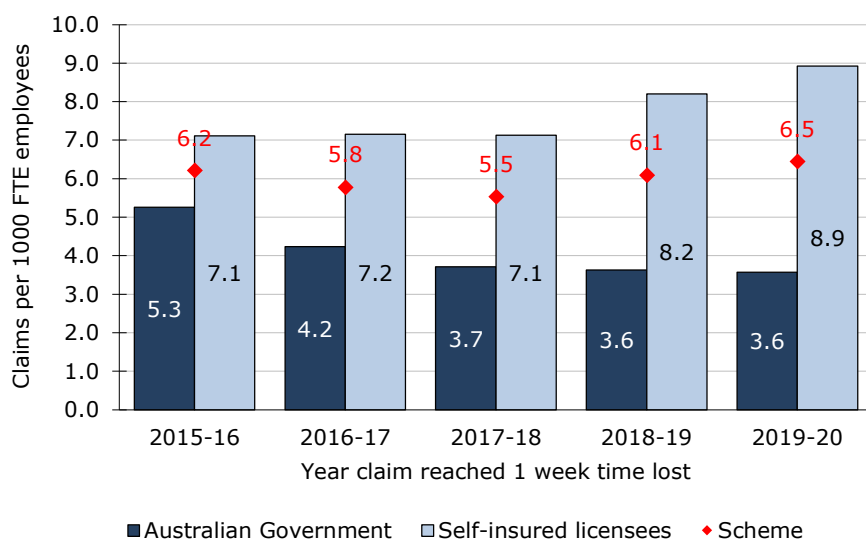


3.3 INCIDENCE OF SERIOUS CLAIMS

Serious claims are claims that result in a total of one week or more of lost time. The incidence rate of serious claims is the number of claims that reach one week or more of time lost per 1000 FTE employees during a given reporting period.

Licensees have experienced an increase since 2015-16 whereas Australian Government has experienced a decrease.

Figure 3.5 Incidence of serious claims

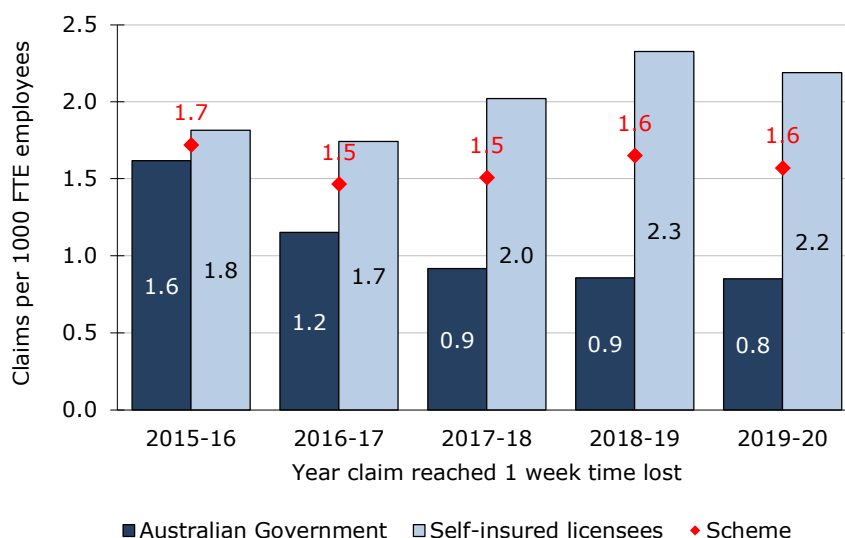


3.4 INCIDENCE OF SERIOUS CLAIMS FOR MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD), as a nature of injury, include joint diseases such as osteoarthritis, spinal conditions such as disc displacement, sciatica, and a range of muscle, tendon and related tissue disorders¹.

The incidence rate of serious MSD claims shows a similar pattern over the period, with licensees experiencing an increase and the Australian Government experiencing a decrease.

Figure 3.6 Incidence of serious musculoskeletal disorder claims



¹ These are defined under the *Types of Occurrence Classification System 3rd Edition*, as published by Safe Work Australia.

3.5 BODY STRESSING

The lead mechanism of injury for accepted workers' compensation claims across the Comcare scheme is body stressing (refer to Table 3.2 on page 17).

The scheme incidence rate of body stressing claims has reduced by 20 per cent from 2015-16 to 2019-20. The reduction in the rate for the Australian Government was more pronounced, experiencing a 52 per cent reduction over the period.

Figure 3.7 Incidence of accepted body stressing claims

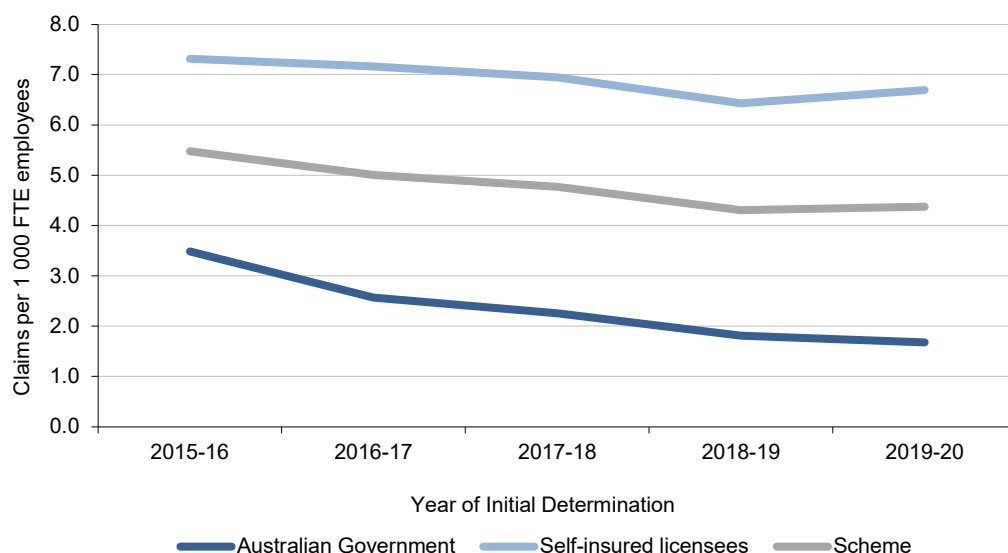
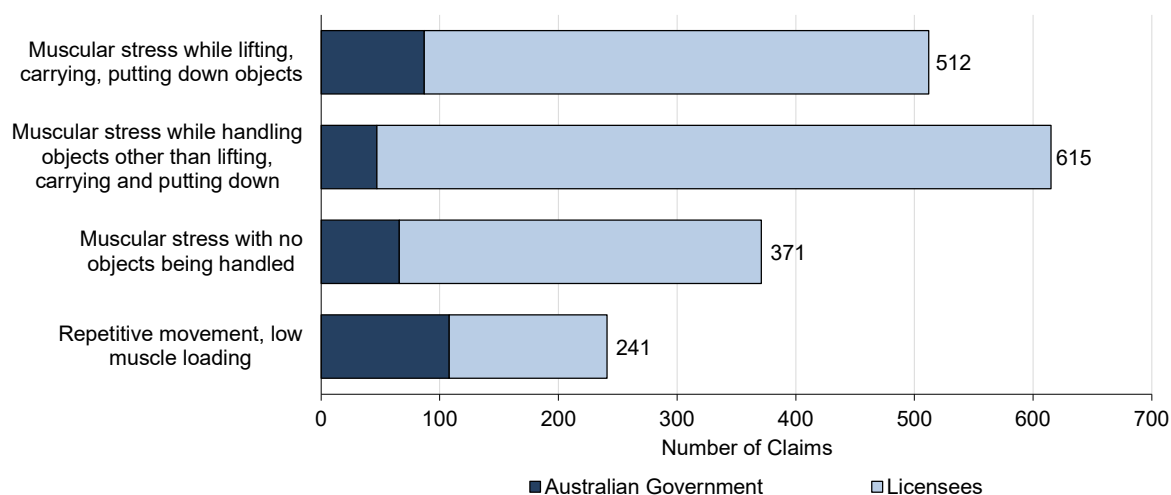


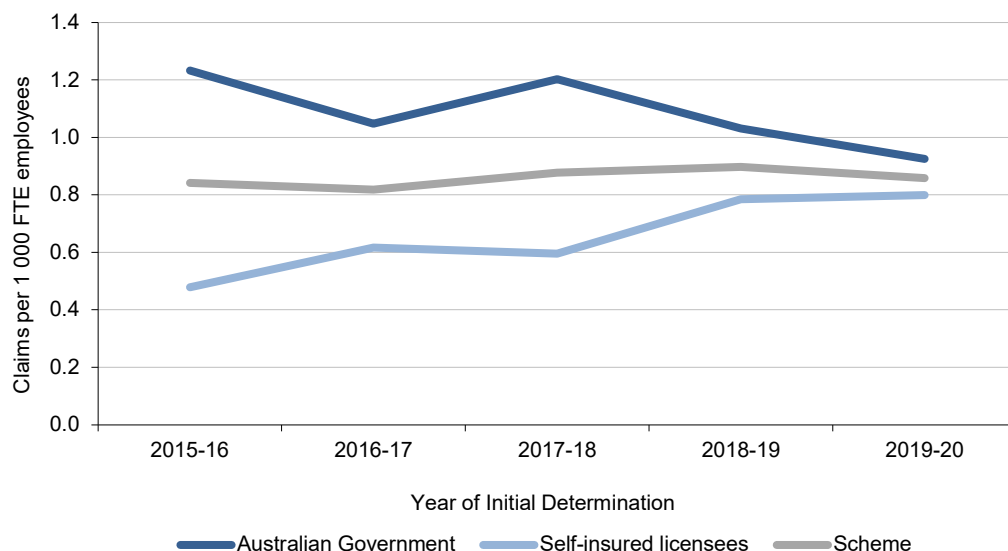
Figure 3.8 Body stressing claims by mechanism of incident—initially accepted in 2019-20



3.6 MENTAL STRESS

From 2015-16 to 2019-20, the incidence of mental stress claims across the scheme decreased by 2 per cent. The experience was mixed with the incident rate for the Australian Government falling and that of self-insured licensees rising over the period.

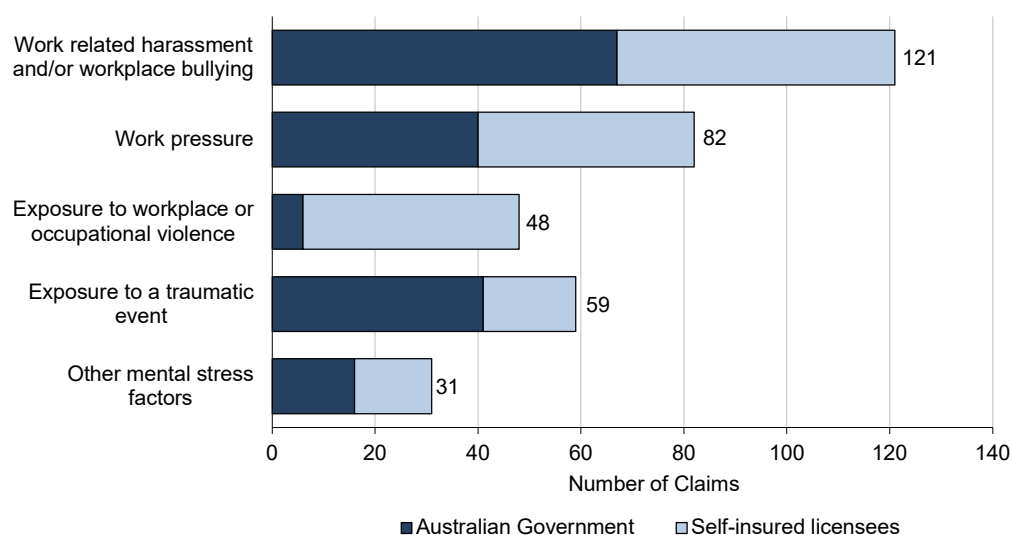
Figure 3.9 Incidence of accepted mental stress claims



A breakdown by mechanism of incident of the number of mental stress claims accepted during 2019-20 is shown in Figure 3.10.

Across the scheme, the most significant sub-groups for mental stress claims were 'work related harassment and/or workplace bullying' (35 per cent of claims) and 'work pressure' (24 per cent of claims).

Figure 3.10 Mental stress claims by mechanism of incident initially accepted in 2019-20



3.7 ACCEPTED CLAIMS BY TYPE OF CLAIM

An injury is generally the result of a single identifiable incident that can be pinpointed to a specific time and place such as a vehicle accident, while a disease usually results from

repeated or long-term exposure to an agent or event such as repetitive typing, or long-term exposure to agents such as dust or asbestos.

Under the SRC Act, psychological conditions are determined using the disease provisions.

Between 2015-16 and 2019-20, the Australian Government agencies has seen an overall reduction in the incidence of all claim types, whereas the licensee outcomes have been mixed.

Figure 3.11 Incidence of accepted injury claims

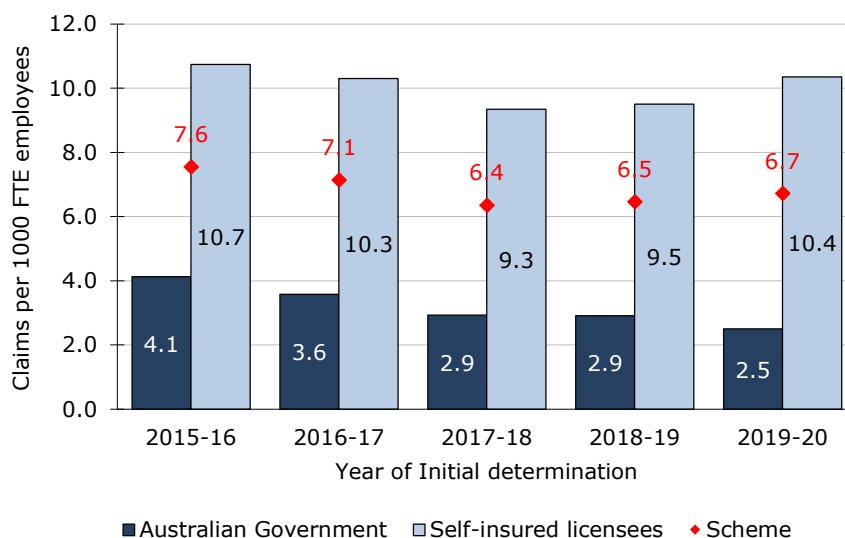


Figure 3.12 Incidence of accepted disease (excluding psychological) claims

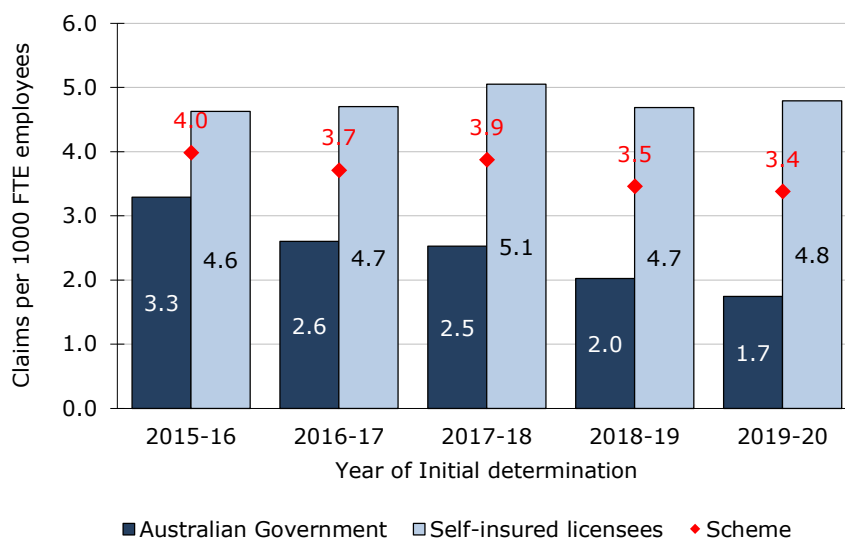
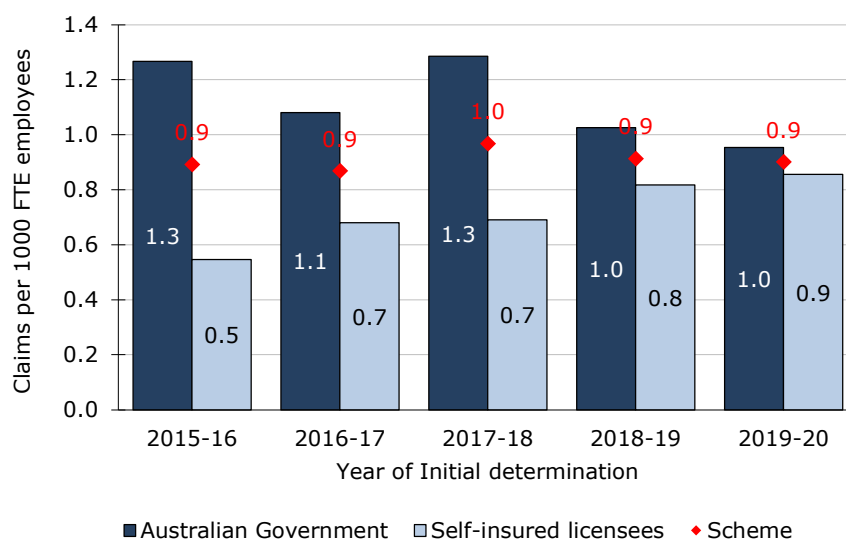


Figure 3.13 Incidence of accepted psychological claims



3.8 COMPENSATED WORKER FATALITIES

Table 3.1 presents compensated fatalities under the SRC Act since 2015-16.

There were 4 compensable disease death claims accepted by the scheme in 2019-20. Of these, 3 were attributable to mesothelioma/asbestosis.

A single claim was accepted for a physical injury resulting in death during 2019-20.

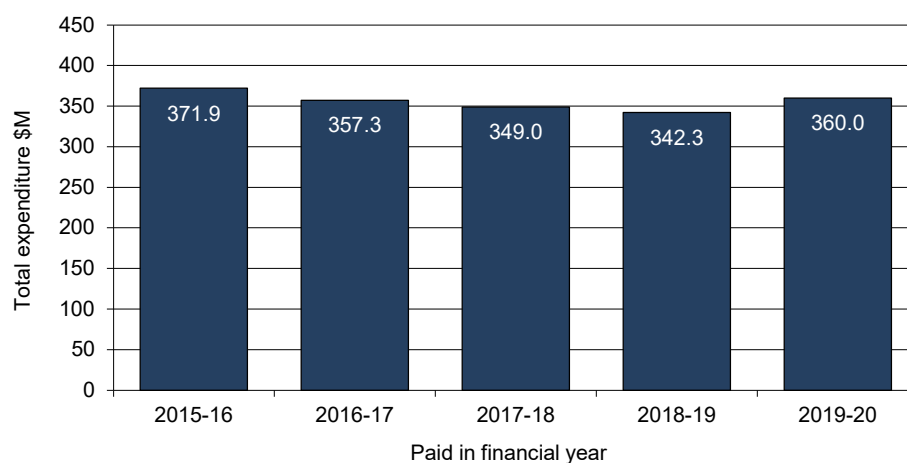
Table 3.1 Compensated fatalities under the SRC Act

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Scheme					
Injury	1	1	2	-	1
Disease excl. Psych	10	18	10	17	3
Psychological	-	2	-	-	-
Australian Government					
Injury	-	-	1	-	-
Disease excl. Psych	10	18	10	16	3
Psychological	-	1	-	-	-
Self-insured licensees					
Injury	1	1	1	-	1
Disease excl. Psych	-	-	-	1	-
Psychological	-	1	-	-	-

3.9 SCHEME CLAIM PAYMENTS

Total payments made for workers' compensation claims for the Comcare scheme have been decreasing since 2015-16. These payments include wage-replacement payments to injured workers and payments for medical, rehabilitation, legal and administrative costs. Figure 3.14 shows a 5 per cent increase in payments in 2019-20 compared with a year earlier.

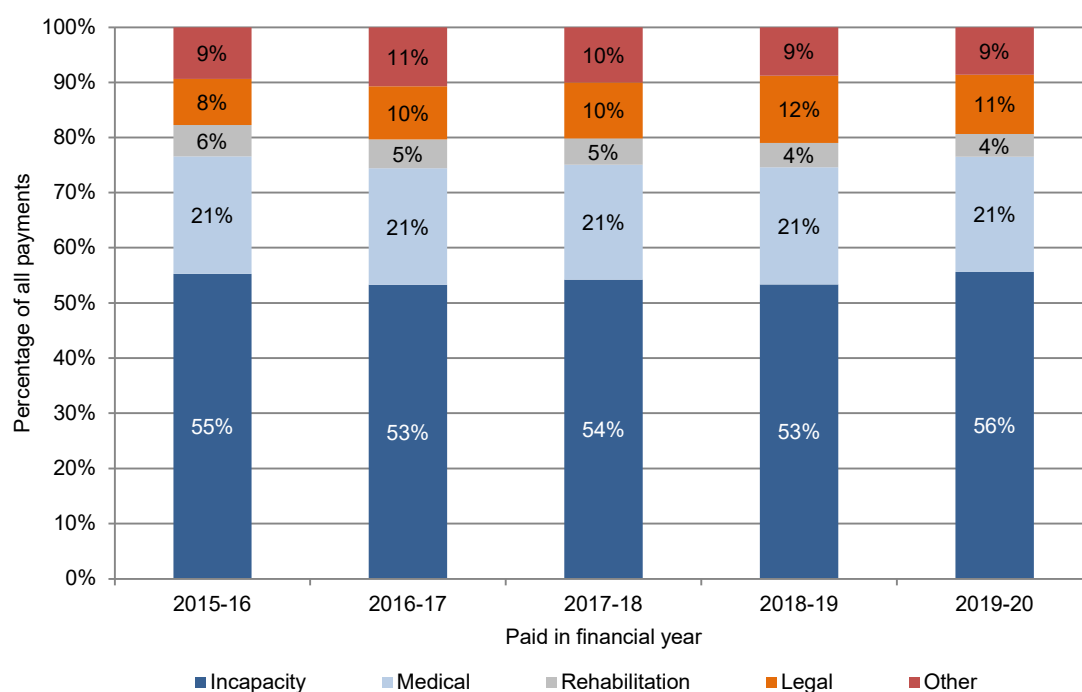
Figure 3.14 Workers' compensation payments by financial year



3.9.1 Claim payments by type

Figure 3.15 shows the proportion of claim payments in each financial year by payment type. This shows that over time, incapacity (diminished ability to engage in work resulting in wage-replacement payments) has consistently been the leading payment type.

Figure 3.15 Workers' compensation payments by type



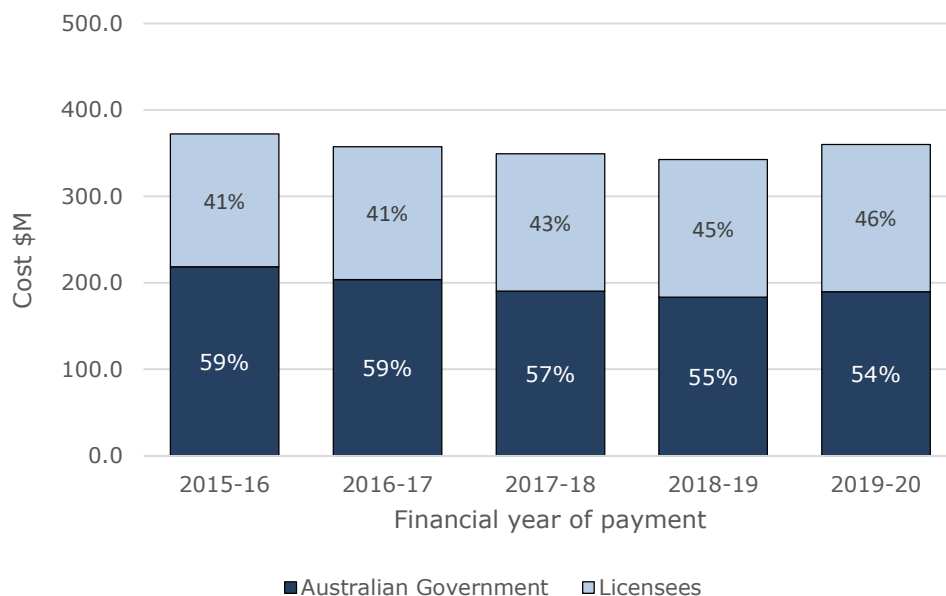
Note:

'Other' includes: Death benefits, lump sum payments and non-compensation payments such as travel (excluding ambulance) costs.

3.9.2 Claim payments by sector

Figure 3.16 shows claim payments by sector for the financial years 2015-16 to 2019-20. The proportion of payments attributable to Australian Government claims has been reducing over the period.

Figure 3.16 Workers' compensation payments by sector by financial year



3.9.3 Claim payments by mechanism of incident

Figure 3.17 shows the claim payments by mechanism of incident for the financial years 2015-16 to 2019-20. Body stressing and mental stress claim costs account for the highest proportion of cost over the five years reported.

Figure 3.17 Workers' compensation payments by mechanism of incident

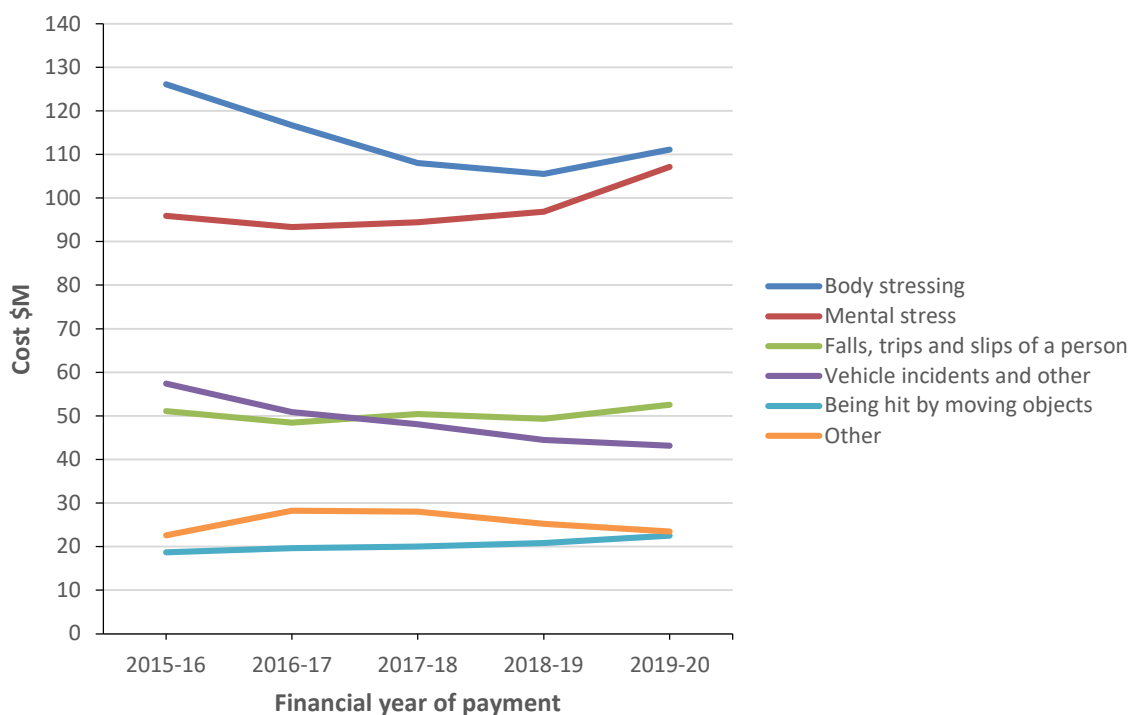


Table 3.2 shows a breakdown of accepted claims and claim costs by mechanism of incident during the latest two financial years.

Table 3.2 Percentage of claims accepted, and payments made by mechanism of incident

Mechanism of incident	% of all accepted claims in the financial year	% of total claim payments made in the financial year
2018-19*		
Body stressing	40%	32%
Falls, trips and slips of a person	22%	15%
Being hit by moving objects	12%	6%
Vehicle incidents and other	9%	14%
Mental stress	8%	28%
Hitting objects with a part of the body	4%	2%
Sound and pressure	2%	2%
Chemicals and other substances	2%	3%
Heat, radiation and electricity	<1%	<1%
Biological factors	<1%	<1%
All mechanisms of incident	100%	100%
2019-20*		
Body stressing	40%	29%
Falls, trips and slips of a person	21%	14%
Being hit by moving objects	12%	6%
Vehicle incidents and other	11%	12%
Mental stress	8%	27%
Hitting objects with a part of the body	4%	2%
Chemicals and other substances	1%	2%
Sound and pressure	2%	3%
Heat, radiation and electricity	<1%	<1%
Biological factors	<1%	<1%
All mechanisms of incident	100%	100%

* Year of initial determination or year of payment

During 2019-20, body stressing injuries/diseases accounted for approximately 40 per cent of accepted claims and 29 per cent of claim costs.

Mental stress claims accounted for approximately 8 per cent of accepted claims and 27 per cent of claim costs.

4 REHABILITATION AND RETURN TO WORK

4.1 CLAIM DURATION

4.1.1 Time lost to date—incapacity durations

Table 4.1 shows the percentage of accepted claims, with time lost, during the period 2015-16 to 2019-20 that reached selected incapacity durations. The Government sector has higher proportions of claims reaching incapacity durations for all claim types than the self-insured licensees.

Psychological claims are reaching incapacity durations at higher percentage than injury or disease claims.

Table 4.1 Time lost to date

Time lost to claims accepted in the period					
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Australian Government - injury					
Accepted claims	415	373	311	318	223
One week or more	83%	83%	83%	82%	84%
Six or more weeks	43%	42%	44%	49%	47%
12 or more weeks	28%	27%	27%	31%	23%
26 or more weeks	15%	15%	12%	14%	8%
Australian Government - disease excl. psychological					
Accepted claims	335	261	256	178	115
One week or more	85%	85%	89%	86%	89%
Six or more weeks	51%	53%	48%	45%	47%
12 or more weeks	32%	38%	34%	34%	25%
26 or more weeks	19%	22%	14%	18%	7%
Australian Government - psychological					
Accepted claims	206	181	201	158	106
One week or more	97%	98%	97%	99%	96%
Six or more weeks	87%	87%	87%	83%	85%
12 or more weeks	74%	80%	80%	72%	73%
26 or more weeks	51%	67%	66%	59%	42%

Time lost to claims accepted in the period					
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Self-insured licensees - injury					
Accepted claims	1268	1322	1235	1433	1466
One week or more	65%	68%	71%	69%	69%
Six or more weeks	28%	33%	33%	31%	27%
12 or more weeks	17%	21%	21%	19%	15%
26 or more weeks	8%	12%	9%	10%	3%
Self-insured licensees - disease excl. psychological					
Accepted claims	521	576	658	646	601
One week or more	77%	79%	80%	79%	73%
Six or more weeks	39%	43%	41%	37%	31%
12 or more weeks	24%	25%	27%	23%	17%
26 or more weeks	13%	12%	13%	9%	4%
Self-insured licensees - psychological					
Accepted claims	92	124	125	158	143
One week or more	95%	96%	94%	92%	95%
Six or more weeks	72%	71%	74%	71%	65%
12 or more weeks	51%	61%	68%	56%	51%
26 or more weeks	43%	47%	50%	42%	28%

Note:

The information presented in the above table will change over time, particularly for the more recent years, as the experience matures.

4.1.2 Median time lost

The median time lost measure provides the middle point of time lost in each reporting period, for both claims due to injury and claims due to disease. About half the claims will accumulate more than a week off work. This measure indicates the time that it takes for these claimants to return to work.

The following three figures show the median duration of time lost for claims accepted during the period 2015-16 to 2019-20. This is based on claims with one week or more of incapacity that had an injury date between three and 18 months prior to the calculation date.

Across the scheme, the median incapacity for injury claims has risen from 4.7 weeks for claims accepted in 2015-16 to 5.0 weeks for claims accepted in 2019-20 (figure 4.1).

For disease claims, the median duration of time lost has reduced from 5.4 weeks to 5.2 weeks over the same period (figure 4.2). Disease claims exclude those due to mental stress—these claims tend to have longer periods of time lost across the duration of the claim.

For psychological claims, the median duration of time lost has been increasing over the period, from 15.1 weeks in 2015-16 to 18.4 weeks in 2019-20 (figure 4.3).

All three figures below show that the median duration of incapacity for self-insured licensees' claims was consistently lower than for the Government sector.

Figure 4.1 Median time lost—injury claims

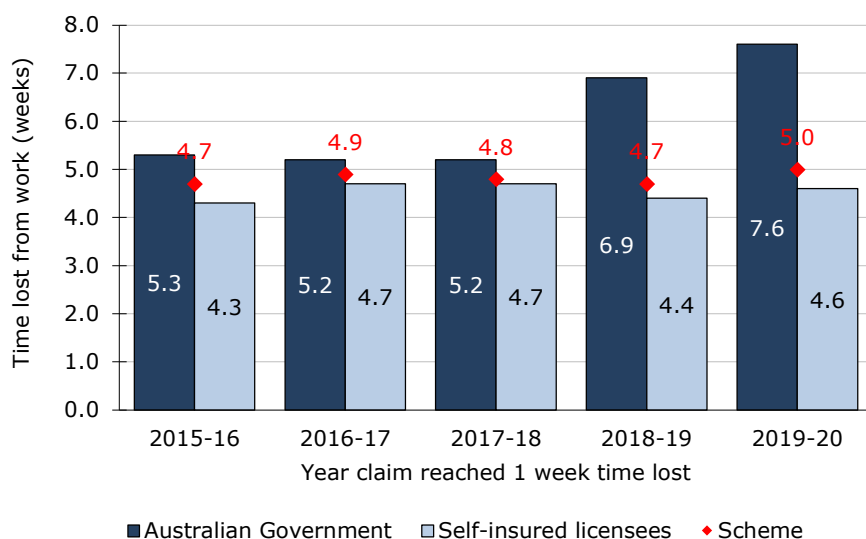


Figure 4.2 Median time lost—disease (excluding psychological) claims

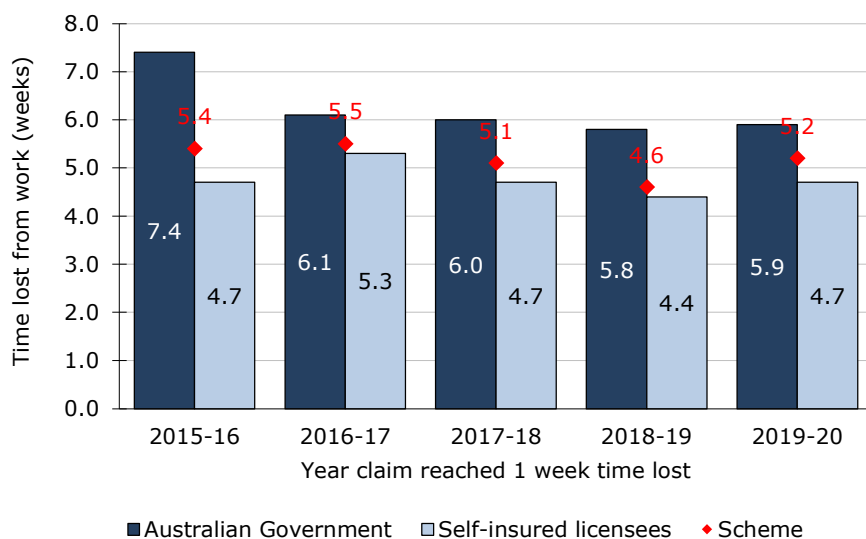
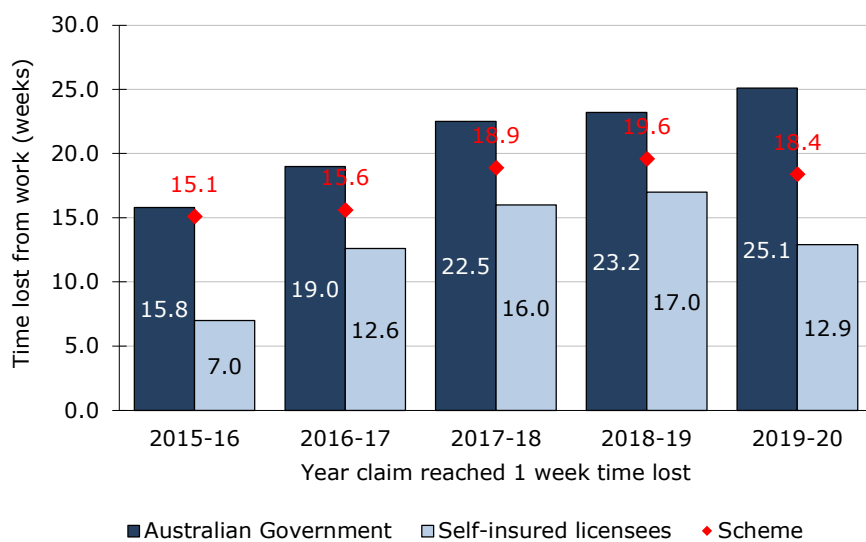


Figure 4.3 Median time lost—psychological claims



5 DISPUTATION

5.1 RECONSIDERATIONS

Table 5.1 provides data relating to requests for reconsideration received and decided during the period 2015-16 to 2019-20. The table also shows the percentage of original decisions which were upheld following a request for reconsideration (affirmation rate).

The reconsideration affirmation rate has improved over the period for the scheme as a whole.

Table 5.1 Requests for reconsiderations summary

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of reconsideration requests received					
Scheme	3,170	3,164	2,735	2,378	2,255
Australian Government	1,562	1,825	1,566	1,268	942
Self-insured licensees	1,608	1,339	1,169	1,110	1,313
Number of reconsideration requests decided					
Scheme	3,115	3,109	2,684	2,356	2,096
Australian Government	1,527	1,769	1,555	1,254	837
Self-insured licensees	1,588	1,340	1,129	1,102	1,259
Affirmation rate* at reconsideration					
Scheme	82%	82%	86%	84%	84%
Australian Government	83%	81%	88%	84%	80%
Self-insured licensees	81%	83%	83%	85%	86%

*percentage of original decisions affirmed

5.2 AAT APPLICATIONS

Information on the number of AAT applications received and finalised during 2015-16 and 2019-20 are provided at table 5.2.

Table 5.2 AAT request summary

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of AAT requests received					
Scheme	1,404	1,535	1,372	1,156	1,035
Australian Government	624	803	840	668	396
Self-insured licensees	780	732	532	488	639
Number of AAT requests finalised					
Scheme	1,087	1,269	1,290	1,390	1,096
Australian Government	425	568	634	814	697
Self-insured licensees	662	701	656	576	399
Affirmation rate* at AAT					
Scheme	67%	66%	72%	64%	60%
Australian Government	50%	57%	68%	63%	53%
Self-insured licensees	77%	73%	75%	64%	72%

*percentage of original decisions affirmed

The AAT affirmation rate is the proportion of AAT cases affirmed, withdrawn or dismissed in that year (varied or set aside decisions make up the remainder of cases finalised).

The scheme AAT affirmation rate has declined from 67 per cent in 2015-16 to 60 per cent in 2019-20. The self-insured licensee AAT affirmation rate has been consistently higher than that of the Australian Government sector over the five-year period.

6 DATA SOURCES AND RELATED INFORMATION

6.1 ADVICE TO READER ON THE DATA

Claims based data can be subject to development and may therefore differ to other Comcare publications and future updates of the data provided within this document.

6.2 DATA SOURCES USED IN THIS PUBLICATION AND DATA NOTES

Scheme performance information presented in this document has been compiled from a variety of sources including workers' compensation claims and survey data.

Workers' compensation claims data presented in this report are extracted from Comcare's Data Warehouse using data as at 30 June 2020.

FTE employee data are collected by Comcare from all Australian and ACT Government and self-insured licensees. Australian Defence Force (ADF) FTE is obtained from the ADF Annual Report or the Department of Defence directly.

The *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2007* amended the provisions of the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* to remove coverage for injuries sustained during non-work-related journeys. Therefore, injuries sustained while travelling to and from work are not included in this report.

6.3 RELATED DATA SOURCES

Comcare published information

Comcare and SRCC Annual Reports

<https://www.comcare.gov.au/about/governance/annual-report>

Comcare's scheme performance webpage is updated regularly and provides information on its regulatory activity (incident notifications and enforcement activities), workers' compensation data (claim types, duration and costs), court and AAT proceedings and Scheme sustainability. <https://www.comcare.gov.au/scheme-legislation/scheme-performance/overview>

List of current self-insured licensees under the SRC Act

https://www.srcc.gov.au/information_for_self-insurers/licensees

Safe Work Australia published information

Safe Work Australia's Comparative Performance Monitoring Report (CPM)

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/collection/comparative-performance-monitoring-reports>

Work health and safety statistics Australia

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/collection/key-work-health-and-safety-statistics-document-collection>

Comparison of Workers' Compensation Arrangements in Australia and New Zealand

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/collection/comparison-workers-compensation-arrangements-australia-and-new-zealand>

National Return to Work Survey

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/workers-compensation/return-work#national-return-to-work-survey>

Type of Occurrence Classification System (TOOCS)

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/type-occurrence-classification-system-toocs-3rd-edition-may-2008>

7 VERSION CONTROL

Version Number	Date	Description
1	July 2020	Original version.