

# Final Workshop Discussion Group

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The Use of Workers' Compensation Data for Occupational Safety and Health Workshop concluded with a plenary discussion session. Opportunities and avenues for collaboration and cooperation were discussed among other items. Below are some points that were raised by the workshop participants.

Workers' compensation data can be used to influence leadership within industry and government on the needs for and benefits of occupational safety and health interventions. WC data can also be used for secondary and tertiary prevention. A national database of WC claim information is not available nor is there a representative sample.

Annual summary statistical bulletins and other research reports are published by a number of workers' compensation insurance organizations such as NCCI, IAIABC, NASI and WCRI. No single data source captures all occupational injuries and illnesses so estimates of the injury and illness frequencies and rates may be low even within jurisdictions. Even some major injury types such as concussions, amputations and fractures may be underreported.

Research collaborations are best based on shared interests. Shared usage of data requires long-term commitments and collaboration since one should not anticipate that the meaning and context of data are self-explanatory. Research is frequently completed through collaborative agreements among private and public organizations and institutions. Public agencies have extensive experience with collaborations and public health organizations are familiar with needs

and methods for protecting private and confidential information. Prior agreements are informative on ways to overcome concerns about the confidentiality of information. State funds and state workers' compensation agencies may share public interest in injury and disability prevention. Use of WC information for targeting government inspections is not likely to be persuasive to gain collaboration from private organizations.

Some industries such as health care have numerous informative data sets. By comparing occupational injury and illness information from different sources including WC, the limitations of each source can be identified. Such comparison and linking of data can lead to better estimates of the total numbers and rates of occupational injuries and illnesses but this is not a trivial task. For example, the total burden of occupational injuries, illnesses and fatalities cannot be precisely estimated since sources report varying numbers and elements of the burden are not measured in ways that may be readily combined.

Approximately 30 states utilize the IAIABC electronic data interchange (EDI) first reports of injuries. These reports are collected by respective state agencies for portions of their total claims that resulted in loss work time greater than the individual state minimums to qualify for indemnity payments. Some states also aggregate the "medical only" claims. State WC agencies collect and use claims data primarily for performance metrics on the delivery of services. WC data owners may not be authorized to share data with others – even with agencies in their own states in some cases. Except for the standardized data collected by NCCI from

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40 jurisdictions, the state level data are probably most complete. NCCI seeks collaboration research with third parties dependent upon the research topics and subject to data limitations and restrictions.

Research by the different interests groups may lead to greater knowledge to reduce injuries and illnesses and show that cost savings are obtainable for interventions. For example, NCCI data might be used in collaborative research to examine patterns of claims for states with innovative loss prevention program requirements. Best practices for the use of WC data to identify intervention needs could be developed. Other projects might compare detailed claims data at NCCI with first report of injury form information from a few states. Loss prevention data that may be useful for research and surveillance could be examined. More standardization of WC data elements and coding systems would increase utility. A primer on WC could be written to address the informational needs of researchers and public health. Workshop participants who are researchers may join the group formed by John Burton. Their annual meetings are very informative and discuss ongoing research projects.

For public employees, WC costs are frequently the only driver to gain the attention of management since OSHA standards do not apply in many jurisdictions. The addition of public sector data to the BLS Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses has been quite informative and reveals greater injuries and illnesses for government employees in many occupations/industry segments than what occurs in the private sector. Public employees also have greater rates of injuries in group health data.

Ideas for future workshop topics were discussed. These included:

- Factors which impede full reporting of injuries by employees and employers
- Linkage of WC with group health data
- Chronicity of disability due to injury or illness

- Leading indicator and metrics to measure effectiveness – best practices should be identified
- Loss prevention methods and metrics from private insurance as well as state funds
- Panel of state legislators on what drives their changes to state requirements
- Practical applications of workers' compensation data for employers and labor

In conclusion, the information shared at this workshop demonstrates the value of utilizing workers' compensation data for occupational injury and illness prevention. Much of the data are collected systematically and longitudinally and maintained in organized databases. Many employers and the insurance industry do use the data to better understand and manage their risks. Public health programs can use WC data to discover intervention needs and evaluate their effectiveness, and improve administration of their occupational health programs. Together, all can help control the substantial occupational injury and illness costs to workers, employers, the economy, and society.

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