

IMPAIRMENT INSIDER

ISSUE 10
FEBRUARY 2023

Introduction

Greetings and happy 2023! I hope the festive break was restful and recharging for you all.

The Impairment Assessment Services team is ready for an action packed and productive year ahead filled with lots of opportunities for us to engage and support assessors.

Joining the team of Sue Fieldhouse and Cassandra Schmidtke is Stephen Roderick. Stephen joined us as Manager Provider Programs in December 2022 and brings extensive experience in the healthcare sector. You will all get a chance to meet him at the assessor forum next month in March, but more on that later in the newsletter!

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of the Impairment Insider and welcome your feedback and contribution, just email us at wpi@rtwsa.com.

Julianne Flower
Leader Scheme Support



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Education and Support

ReturnToWorkSA plans to host regular assessor forums in the coming year and the Impairment Insider Newsletter will be produced more frequently. To ensure that content is relevant and engaging, please let us know specific topics or issues you would like to read about by contacting Impairment Assessment Services with your suggestions via email wpi@rtwsa.com or phone (08) 8238 5960.



IAG UPDATE

Update on review of the Impairment Assessment Guidelines (the Guidelines)

At the invitation of the Minister for Industrial Relations, the Hon Kyam Maher MLC, the Stakeholder Representative Consultation Group (SRCG) was formed in October 2022. The purpose is to review the Guidelines and draft the Third Edition of the Guidelines through a co-design process.

The SRCG meets fortnightly at the AMA(SA) and is chaired by the President of the AMA(SA), Dr Michelle Atchison BM, BS, FRANZCP, GDipArtHist, AMA(M).

The SRCG recently conducted ten facilitated pre-consultation sessions with key stakeholders, including the Accredited Impairment Assessors at the Impairment Assessor Forum (November 2022) and through the AMA(SA) ReturnToWorkSA Reference Group..

Other groups consulted during the pre-consultation phase were unions, legal groups, employer associations and the Minister's Advisory Committee. Key stakeholders were unanimously appreciative of the opportunity for consultation on the Guidelines.

Impairment Assessors and other stakeholders were also invited to provide written feedback to the Secretariat of the SRCG, and we thank those assessors who have taken the time to do so.

The SRCG has prepared a summary of the themes raised in these pre-consultation sessions. We will email you a slide pack with information on the key themes to you early next week and invite you to provide any feedback on these themes.

Following the pre-consultation, the SRCG resolved to establish small chapter-based working groups to review Chapters 2-16 (the medical chapters). Invitations have been sent to all Impairment Assessors and the relevant medical colleges, inviting them to participate in this work. The small working groups will make recommendations to the SRCG.

This will then be taken to wider consultation prior to any drafting of the Guidelines. The work is expected to run from February to April 2023.

The voice and experience of accredited assessors is crucial to the review of the Guidelines, and Impairment Assessors are strongly encouraged to nominate to be involved in the working groups. Alternatively, assessors can contact the SRCG at any time to provide your views, by contacting the Secretariat, Mia Bell on (08) 8233 2475 or mia.bell@rtwsa.com.

Full, formal consultation on a draft of the Guidelines is expected to take place later in 2023.



CASE STUDIES

Assessing scarring and skin

Chapter 13 of the Guidelines provides for assessment of minor skin impairment using the Table for Evaluation of Minor Skin Impairment (TEMSKI). The TEMSKI may be used by assessors not specifically accredited in the skin body system for determining impairment between 0-4% WPI.

When considering assessments of the skin using the TEMSKI table, the principle of best fit applies. It is expected that the report will contain a clear rationale with reference to the criteria in the TEMSKI table and detailed reasoning as to why one category of impairment has been chosen over other categories. As you would be aware, the IAGs direct that the skin is regarded as a single organ and, as such, all non-facial scarring is measured together as one overall impairment. Detailed information should be provided for all identified scarring including the current subject scarring impairment and the pre-existing or unrelated scarring impairment.

A clear description, include anatomical location, description of shape, colour, texture and contrast with surrounding skin. Consideration of whether the scar is clearly visible with the worker's usual hairstyle and clothing. Clarification as to whether there is contour defect and to what extent and whether there is adherence to underlying structures.

When considering scarring, it is also important to consider and report on, the impact of the skin disorder on the ability to perform activities of daily living because of the skin condition alone (exclusive of any other impairment, work related, or non-work related that the injured worker may have) to support your assessment. Assessors are also reminded that a scar may be present and rated as 0% WPI.



IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Introduction to the Whole Person Impairment (WPI) Improvement Program

Since mid-2022, research has been conducted to understand your experience through the WPI process, along with the experience of injured workers. We heard from 91 workers and 34 assessors via surveys. Thank you to those who took the time to provide feedback.

What we found

Overall satisfaction across the WPI process has identified room for improvement, for assessors and injured workers, with:

- 48% of workers satisfied, and
- 55% satisfaction for assessors







For assessors, the following key areas for improvement were:

- the request letter and associated documents
- the lack of preparedness of the worker and understanding of the assessment, and
- the compliance review process.

For workers, finding an assessor and understanding the overall process were key areas of frustration for them.

This diagram summarises all key findings from the feedback.

Satisfaction through WPI process

	Request letter	Scheduling appointment	Assessing the worker	Compliance review
Assessors	<p>Key issue: Irrelevant/too much information is sent</p> <p> 5.33/10</p>	<p>Key issue: Reliability of workers attending appointments</p> <p> 7.4/10</p>	<p>Key issue: Workers are unprepared or unable to effectively express their injury</p> <p> 5.33/10</p>	<p>Key issue: Overall review process needs work, more support/clarification from ReturnToWorkSA</p> <p> 4.95/10</p>
Workers	<p>Key issue: Doesn't understand the process</p> <p> 4.7/10</p>	<p>Key issue: Difficult to choose an assessor</p> <p> 4.3/10</p>	<p>Key issue: Perceived thoroughness of examination and time spent with worker. Workers expected to receive treatment advice and medical opinion.</p> <p> 5.8/10</p>	

Improvement initiatives



Over the coming year, we will begin implementing several improvement initiatives aimed at improving the WPI experience for assessors and injured workers.

February 2022 change: Request letter template and attachments

- Our first initiative will be to improve the request letter, tailoring the information provision and attachments provided to the assessor, based on feedback we received at the assessor forum (November 2022). We aim to make the request letters concise and relevant so that you can quickly decipher what you need to know.
- Future initiatives will include compliance reviews and information sharing with workers.

Regular updates on progress will be communicated to all.

Your help is crucial

We know that we won't get perfect solutions the first time. Please continue to give your feedback to improve this process.

If at any time you have feedback, you can contact our Impairment Assessment Services team at wpi@rtwsa.com or by phone on (08) 8238 5960.

We look forward to working with you to improve your experience with the registered Scheme.



IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The role of the Assessor - appointments and availability

We know the WPI process can be lengthy. For the financial year 2022, the average time from commencement of the process until payment was 267 days. There are multiple reasons for this, including the complexities of gathering relevant medical information to support assessment, the consultation process on the request letter prior to the appointment, and appointment availability.

In his judgement of *Cavoto v Return to Work Corporation of South Australia*, the Honourable President Justice Dolphin provided some insights into the frustrations experienced by the South Australian Employment Tribunal with appointment availability and delays to appointments. Assessors may be interested to read this judgement.

We acknowledge that many of our assessors do not exclusively undertake WPI assessments as they are also undertaking other clinical responsibilities. Some specialties such as ophthalmology, cardiovascular or urinary and reproductive have limited assessors with accreditation to perform these assessments.

Assessors are reminded of the administrative requirements for accreditation as directed in the **Impairment Assessor Accreditation Scheme**.

Appointments

Examinations should be performed as soon as possible after the request for an appointment has been made. An assessor is generally required to see the worker within six weeks of the appointment being requested unless an alternate date is agreed with the requestor and the injured worker.

Reports

Assessment reports are required to be submitted within 10 business days of undertaking the examination. Templates are available on the **ReturnToWorkSA website** to help complete your report.



Feeling busy? The number of reports has increased significantly

ReturnToWorkSA has been undertaking a review of the compliance of WPI reports in the registered Scheme since the introduction of the Impairment Assessment Guidelines in 2015. Over the years, the number and complexity of assessments have increased considerably. In the registered Scheme, each report has been reviewed by a representative of ReturnToWorkSA for compliance with the methodology in the relevant Guidelines.



The increase in the number of assessments and the added complexity of multiple claims and multiple impairments will impact on appointment availability and provision of reports. It is understood that sometimes this is outside your control. Please contact the requestor to discuss if you cannot meet this requirement.

At times, ReturnToWorkSA may seek further clarification before the report can be marked In Accordance with the Impairment Assessment Guidelines. To reduce the instances where this may occur, we encourage you to check your calculations prior to sending your report, in addition to providing a clear rationale to support your assessment. If clarification is sought, prompt response is encouraged and appreciated so as to minimise any delay in the determination of the injured worker's entitlements.



Provision of two reports

Issue 5 of the [Impairment Insider Newsletter \(April 2018\)](#) advised that in rare cases, assessors may be asked to provide impairment assessments for an extensive list of injuries in the one request letter and provided the option to split the assessments over two reports and charge two assessment fees, providing prior agreement had been obtained with the requestor.

When this option is undertaken, assessors often provide a repeat of information in the second report. This is unnecessary as the two reports will be read together. Instead, provide a continuation of the report in the second report. To alleviate this, it may be helpful to split the reports across separate claims or alternately separate the reports across separate body systems.



GENERAL UPDATES

Invoicing – where to send

Invoices for impairment assessment reports are managed and paid for by the requestor, not by ReturnToWorkSA (except those reports requested by our EnABLE team).

To avoid any delays in processing your invoice, assessors are reminded to forward the invoice directly to the requestor by emailing it separate to the report (in word, PDF or image file format) using the following addresses:

Gallagher Bassett: invoices@gb.rtwsa.com
EML: accounts@eml.rtwsa.com
EnABLE: EnABLE@rtwsa.com

Please ensure you have the claimant details clearly identified on the invoice. If you have approval for additional costs, this is best attached with your email to ensure prompt payment.



Update your Assessor Listing

To ensure our **public listings** are current, please notify us if your details require updating.

This may include changes to your address, practice details, COVID-19 vaccination requirements or an update to your referral requirements. We also publish information about areas of special clinical interest, spoken languages and consultation in rural and remote areas.

Please email us at wpi@rtwsa.com or call our Impairment hotline on (08) 8238 5960.

A requirement of your accreditation is to maintain adequate insurance cover. If you have renewed this recently, please provide us with a copy of your certificate of public liability and professional indemnity insurance. Don't forget to let us know if your interstate travel or location arrangements change.



Questions, concerns or content suggestions

The whole person impairment process is extensive, complex and prone to change in light of significant legal decisions. We aim to make these newsletters engaging and relevant to current topics.

If you have any queries, concerns or content suggestions email us at wpi@rtwsa.com or phone our Impairment hotline on (08) 8238 5960.



Did you know you can access previous editions of this newsletter?

Have a question about how to manage a particular assessment? Try looking through some previous editions of the Impairment Assessor Insider in case we have clarified it earlier.

The **impairment assessor news and resources page** on the ReturnToWorkSA website contains all previous editions published since the Return to Work Scheme came into effect, as well as notices, templates and other resources.

If you have an idea for an article or resource you would like to see on that page, please let us know at wpi@rtwsa.com.



Save the date

Assessor Forum and Workshop

- Date:** Tuesday 28 March 2023
- Place:** Adelaide Pavillion
Veale Gardens
Corner of South Terrace and Peacock Road
- Time:** 4:00pm to 7:00pm
- Topics:** Update on the review of Impairment Assessment Guidelines, WPI Improvement Program updates, and a workshop for assessment of pre-existing impairment deductions.

Food and light refreshments will be provided.

[Register now](#)

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