




NATIONAL  
**RETURN** <sup>2020-2030</sup>  
**TO WORK**   
STRATEGY

The logo for the National Return to Work Strategy 2020-2030. It features the words "NATIONAL", "RETURN", "TO WORK", and "STRATEGY" in various fonts and colors. A large, dark grey arrow curves from the top right of the word "RETURN" down to the word "WORK".

# Key achievements and scorecard report 2020

## Summary

This inaugural *Key achievements and scorecard report* outlines the progress that Safe Work Australia's made in its first year towards the vision and strategic outcomes of the [National Return to Work Strategy 2020-2030](#) (the Strategy).

In line with the review and evaluation section in the Strategy, this report will be produced every two years to provide a summary of progress and inform the 2025 mid-term review.

A summary of the National Return to Work Strategy 2020-2030 is provided at [Attachment A](#).

### In year 1 of the Strategy, Safe Work Australia:

- ↳ **Developed and finalised an implementation plan** for the Strategy and gained Safe Work Australia Member approval to include several national initiatives in Safe Work Australia's Work Plan.
- ↳ **Finalised and published the measurement framework** and accompanying **methodology**. The framework outlines how Safe Work Australia will measure the success of the Strategy.
- ↳ **Completed stage one of the National Employer Survey** which was to develop the survey purpose and policy intent.
- ↳ **Commissioned and funded research to support workers' psychological response to injury and their associated return to work**. The research project began in November 2020 and is scheduled for completion by mid-2021.
- ↳ **Commissioned and funded research on the causes and impact of stigma on return to work outcomes, and approaches to creating positive workplace cultures that support return to work**. The research project began in November 2020 and is scheduled for completion by mid-2021.
- ↳ **Commenced scoping of a research project to explore workers' understanding of workers' compensation systems, and worker communication preferences**. The research project began in March 2020 and is scheduled for completion by the end of 2021.

### National Return to Work Strategy Scorecard

The Scorecard forms the basis for measuring the success of the Strategy over the 10 years, specifically, progress towards achieving the three strategic outcomes (set out below). The first Scorecard on page nine represents a baseline of data for ongoing comparison throughout the life of the Strategy and highlights opportunities for improvement across the national performance measures. Subsequent scorecard reports will allow changes in measurement data to be identified, monitored and analysed.

### Scope of report

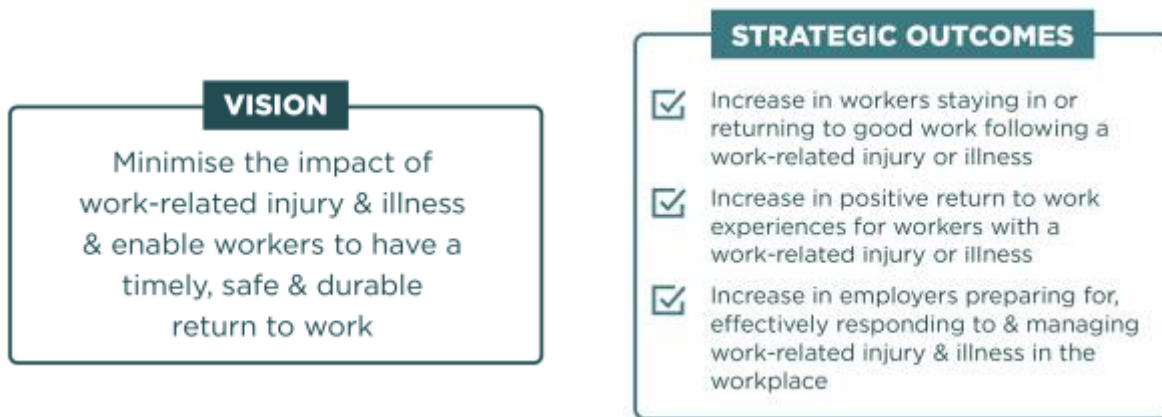
This report captures the work undertaken by Safe Work Australia to progress the Strategy noting that Jurisdictions and other organisations are undertaking initiatives that contribute towards the Strategy's vision. Further information on scheme developments is available in the [Summary of Workers' Compensation Scheme Developments Australia and New Zealand \(2021\)](#).

### Impact of COVID-19

The impacts of COVID-19 on work-related injury and illness and return to work are not yet known. Safe Work Australia is monitoring research and workers' compensation claim data related to COVID-19 and will consider how this may impact delivery of the Strategy.

## Introduction

The National Return to Work Strategy 2020-2030 (the Strategy) provides an approach to improving return to work (RTW) outcomes nationally over the 10-year period between 2020 and 2030. It examines and addresses national policy challenges and aims to promote collective national action to minimise the impact of work-related injury and illness and achieve positive RTW outcomes.



See Strategy snapshot at Appendix A or the full strategy on Safe Work Australia's [website](#).

## Key achievements

### Action Area 1: Supporting workers

**Highlight: Launch of research initiative to support workers psychological response to injury and their associated return to work**

Safe Work Australia has commissioned and funded Griffith University to undertake this research project. The aim is to gain a deep understanding of how workers' psychological responses to injury can affect their recovery and return to work outcome and to identify opportunities to better support workers.

The research will provide an evidence base and advice on applying the research for practical use. This will inform the timely provision of meaningful support to workers to minimise the negative impacts of psychological responses to injury on workers and on their recovery and return to work.

It will also inform a subsequent national initiative in this Action Area to explore opportunities to apply knowledge on psychological responses to injury to return to work and claims management practices.

The report will be based on critical analysis of research findings and includes input from a stakeholder group established for the project. It will also recommend ways to address any critical knowledge gaps identified from the research.

**Status: Final report, including recommendations for practical application, is due for completion by June 2021.**

**Highlight: Commenced significant tender process to undertake research on workers' understanding of workers' compensation systems and return to work**

The objective of this initiative is to gain a deeper understanding of workers' access to, understanding of, and communication preferences for information on workers' compensation, return to work and health literacy.

The initiative's findings and recommendations will contribute to the Strategy's aim of empowering workers to navigate their return to work journey, including how to access information, support and make informed decisions around their health, recovery, claim and return to work. The findings and recommendations from this project will directly inform national initiative 1.2 to 'develop template national messages for workers' based on research findings, for stakeholders to consider when reviewing existing and/or developing new guidance and materials. It will also inform national initiative 1.5 to 'create and maintain a central online repository to share and show-case best practice tailored, client centric and coordinated approaches to return to work' – particularly in regard to structuring and developing this repository to be accessible, relevant and practical.

**Status: Procurement process underway, research to be completed by February 2022.**

## Action Area 2: Building positive workplace culture and leadership

**Highlight: Launch of research initiative to explore the causes and impact of stigma in workplaces, and approaches to creating positive workplace cultures that support return to work**

Safe Work Australia has commissioned and funded Griffith University to undertake this research project which aims to gain a deeper understanding of the causes of workplace stigma around illness and injury and the impact this has on workers, and ways to create positive workplace cultures that support return to work. Input from our stakeholder group established for the project will also inform the research.

The project will help identify opportunities for national action to shift negative perceptions and promote positive workplace cultures, leadership and relationships that support workers following a work-related injury or illness. It will provide advice on applying this research for practical use in developing national messaging for workers, and in guidance for employers to address stigma in the workplace and create positive cultures that support workers.

**Status: Final report, including recommendations for practical application, is due for completion by June 2021.**

## Action Area 3: Supporting employers

**Highlight: Launch of national employer survey initiative**

This initiative seeks to address the current lack of a national mechanism to capture the return to work experience, and workers' compensation more broadly, from the employer perspective. A national employer survey will build a more complete picture of both parties in the return to work relationship – the worker and their employer.

Safe Work Australia completed stage one of this initiative which was to finalise the scope of the survey and define the policy intent to inform the development of the national employer survey. Stage two of the project,

which involves development of the specific survey questions, has commenced. Safe Work Australia has convened a National Employer Survey Working Group to assist in the survey's development.

The aim of the survey is to capture data and provide insights into employer capability and experiences in return to work and their knowledge and experience with workers' compensation more broadly.

**Status: Stage one to develop policy intent has been finalised and endorsed by Safe Work Australia Members. Stage two to develop the survey is underway.**

## Action Area 4: Supporting other stakeholders

**Highlight: Initiative underway to create and maintain a central online repository to share and showcase best practice approaches to return to work, early intervention, innovative claims management models including mobile case management, and case management pathways based on risk factors.**

Employers, treating health practitioners, insurers and claims managers play a role in providing early, tailored, client-centric and coordinated interventions to workers experiencing a work-related injury or illness. Supporting these other stakeholders involved in the return to work process is crucial to the effective operation of the system.

This initiative aims to embed the principles of good work in practice, by encouraging the use of best-practice tailored, client-centric and coordinated approaches to information sharing, through the development of a central repository. The repository will share and showcase information promoting wider consideration, application, and research of insights into the quality of health care and impacts on return to work outcomes.

Safe Work Australia Members are already very active in supporting the delivery of tailored, client-centric and coordinated approaches for injured workers. Support ranges from direct education, resources and guidance for treating health practitioners through to triage approaches, early intervention pilots and programs, pioneering claims management models and use of technological solutions. These outcomes provide a solid foundation of information to be included in the central repository, and will be identified, collected and filtered through an agreed definition for what constitutes "best practice" before being included in the repository.

**Status: Scoping in progress. Further updates will be provided during 2021.**

## Action Area 5: Building and translating evidence

**Review return to work metrics in the national data set (NDS) of workers compensation claims and explore opportunities to modify and/or expand these to measure return to work outcomes**

Research aimed at improving our understanding of Return to Work outcomes is both a key element of the Strategy and one of five priority research areas under Safe Work Australia's Research Work Plan for 2021-2022. Safe Work Australia has commenced several strategic research and data projects that will improve the building and translation of evidence under Action Area 5.

A key aspect of this involves improving our data on return to work. To address this (and a range of other research priorities), Safe Work Australia has commenced a Data Improvement Project, which aims to systematically examine and realise opportunities to improve our data management and data communication.

This includes examining and improving the way information about return to work outcomes are recorded, analysed and reported by:

- ↳ examining our data governance and sharing arrangements, to consider the way we use and share Return to Work data,
- ↳ consulting with jurisdictions and other stakeholders on improving return to work metrics in both the National Data Set for Compensation-based Statistics and the Type of Occurrence Classification System, and
- ↳ considering changes that will make our reports and data on return to work easier to access and use.

For the first time, Safe Work Australia secured ethics approval from a Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct the National Return to Work Survey. This approval ensures participants and other key stakeholders can have confidence in the integrity of the research when providing their information and insights on their return to work experiences. The learnings from this process are also informing the planning and design of the National Employer Survey currently underway.

## Future Areas of Focus

In the second year of the Strategy, Safe Work Australia will focus on:

- ↳ completing research to support workers psychological response to injury and their associated return to work,
- ↳ completing research on the causes and impact of stigma in workplaces, and approaches to creating positive workplace cultures that support return to work,
- ↳ launching research initiative on workers' understanding of workers' compensation systems and return to work,
- ↳ progressing stage 2 of the National Employer Survey project. This involves development of the survey in accordance with the policy intent. The National Employer Survey Working Group will provide subject matter expertise and guide the survey's development. The survey is scheduled to be piloted in 2022, and
- ↳ finalise the scope and delivery of online repository to share and showcase best practice approaches to return to work, early intervention, innovative claims management models including mobile case management, and case management pathways based on risk factors.

## Other projects

### National Return to Work Survey – delayed in 2020 due to COVID-19

The National Return to Work Survey (the Survey) is undertaken on a biannual basis and explores the return to work experiences and outcomes of injured workers. The Survey is usually run every second year. However, in 2020 Safe Work Australia decided to delay the Survey by a year in light of COVID-19. This decision reflects the need to not exacerbate pressures experienced by workers during a rapidly evolving crisis.

As a result the Survey will be run in 2021 and it is anticipated to run on odd years going forward. The Headline Measures report will be available in July 2021 with the full report available in September 2021. Safe Work Australia is testing a question asking workers how COVID-19 has affected their return to work outcomes. This will allow us to analyse past survey results against this year's survey and assist jurisdictions to understand the impact of COVID-19 on return to work performance.

### Compensation Policy and Return to work Effectiveness (COMPARE)

The Compensation Policy and Return to work Effectiveness (COMPARE) Study was established in 2014 by Monash University with funding from Safe Work Australia and WorkSafe Victoria and with workers' compensation claims data underpinning the research. The first phase of the study concluded in 2018.

Phase 2 commenced in 2019 through an Australian Research Council (ARC) grant and additional funding from Safe Work Australia. The study has four broad objectives to:

1. create a major new national data infrastructure that can support knowledge generation, policy and practice improvement,
2. characterise the variation in work disability in society by geographic, socioeconomic, occupation and demographic factors, thus identifying cohorts of workers most amenable to work disability prevention interventions,
3. determine if the factors affecting work disability in the Australian labour force are replicated in the Canadian labour force, and
4. determine the impact of policy and practice on work disability in the Australian labour force, and identify specific policy settings and workers' compensation claims handling practices that have positive and negative impacts on work disability.

The project will continue to build on existing evidence through the delivery of study outputs including journal articles and reports. These are available on the COMPARE website -

<https://www.returntowork.net/>.

### COVID-19 and the Strategy

The Strategy along with the Measurement Framework was developed and finalised prior to the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted on all aspects of our lives. Safe Work Australia is investigating how/if the Strategy and related initiatives need to adapt and respond to the impacts of the pandemic including mental health.

Safe Work Australia is monitoring research and workers' compensation claims related to COVID-19 and has published a snapshot of [COVID-19 related workers' compensation claims data to 31 July 2020](#). Work is underway to collate data for the remainder of 2020.



# Scorecard: All National Performance Measures

The following indicators measure our progress against the strategic outcomes of the Strategy as established through the measurement framework.

Measure and Source	Description	Baseline measures
<b>Strategic Outcome 1: Increase in workers staying in or returning to good work following a work-related injury or illness</b>		
<b>a. Safe return to work</b> NRTWS (2016 and 2018 average)	Measures the percentage of workers who had returned to work and required additional time off because of their work-related injury or illness.	<b>17.5%</b> of returning workers indicated they required additional time off
<b>b. Durable return to work</b> NRTWS (2016 and 2018 average)	Measures the percentage of workers with time loss claims back at work for at least 3 months.	<b>65.5%</b> of workers returned to work for at least 3 months
<b>c. General health</b> NRTWS (2016 and 2018 average)	This indicator reports on respondents with good to excellent self-rated health.	<b>73.4%</b> of workers had good to excellent self-rated health
<b>d. Work Role Functioning</b> NRTWS (2018)	This indicator collates average Work Role Functioning questionnaire scores in workers who had returned to work.	<b>50.8%</b> of workers had no difficulty at any time with Work Role Functioning
<b>e. Timely return to work</b> NDS (2015-16 to 2017-18 average)	This indicator presents the rate of accepted claims with time loss at 13 weeks, 26 weeks and 52 weeks.	<b>13 weeks: 151 per 1,000 claims</b> <b>26 weeks: 93 per 1,000 claims</b> <b>52 weeks: 53 per 1,000 claims</b>
<b>f. Stay at work</b> NDS (2015-16 to 2017-18 average)	This indicator presents the rate of accepted claims that do not involve any time loss.	<b>4 per 1,000 claims</b>
<b>Strategic Outcome 2: Increase in positive return to work experiences for workers with a work-related injury or illness</b>		
<b>g. Perceived fairness</b> NRTWS (2018)	To gauge the respondents' experience with obtaining compensation for their work-related injury or illness.	<b>61.2%</b> of workers had a positive experience overall
<b>h. Work-focused healthcare</b> NRTWS (2018)	This indicator collates yes or no responses from all workers, for six different work-focused healthcare questions around healthcare provider communications.	<b>80.8%</b> of workers experienced positive communications from their main healthcare provider
<b>i. Healthcare stress</b> NRTWS (2018)	The participants indicated their level of stress against a response scale, for the interactions with their healthcare provider(s).	<b>30.7%</b> of workers found interactions with their healthcare provider stressful
<b>j. Insurer decision time</b> NDS (2015-16 to 2017-18 average)	This indicator presents the average time, in weeks, between claim receipt by an insurer and their decision to accept a claim	<b>4 weeks</b>
<b>Strategic Outcome 3: Increase in employers preparing for, effectively responding to and managing work-related injury and illness in the workplace</b>		
<b>k. Employer response</b> NRTWS (2016 and 2018 average)	This indicator shows the percentage of all workers agreeing that their employer supported them following their injury.	<b>65.2%</b> of workers agreed their employer supported them
<b>l. Employer contact</b> NRTWS (2016 and 2018 average)	The participants indicated if they were contacted by their employers since their work-related injury or illness.	<b>61.9%</b> of workers were contacted by their employer
<b>m. Return to work planning**</b> NRTWS (2016 and 2018 average)	This indicator shows the percentage of workers who reported that they had a return to work plan <sup>2</sup> .	<b>65.3%</b> of workers reported they had a return to work plan
<b>n. Workplace accommodations</b> NRTWS (2016 and 2018 average)	This indicator denotes the proportion of workers who had returned to work and reported that they returned with modified hours or modified duties.	<b>35.5%</b> of workers returned to slightly different duties <b>17.6%</b> performed completely different duties <b>36.1%</b> of workers returned to modified hours (2018)
<b>o. Return to work self-efficacy</b> Source: NRTWS	This indicator presents the average score of all workers on the return to work self-efficacy scale.	<b>76.7%</b> of workers felt positively about their ability to return to work

## Explanatory notes:

For more detail on the measures please refer to the National Return to Work Strategy 2020-2030 Measurement Framework.

\* NRTWS refers to the National Return to Work Survey which collates information from injured and ill workers on their experience of the workers' compensation system and return to work processes. To account for changes in methodology across different waves of the NRTW Survey, indicators from the NRTW Survey use a two-year rolling average. For the baseline, the averages of 2016 (where available) and 2018 data for each indicator has been used when available. When 2016 data has not been available, only 2018 data has been used.

# NDS refers to the National Data Set of Workers' Compensation Claims which includes information on national accepted workers' compensation claims. Please note, workers' compensation claims only covers those workers that are eligible for workers' compensation and where a claim has been made and accepted. Indicators drawn from the NDS use a rolling baseline average of 3 years' data to reduce the effect of year on year variability in the data skewing the results. For the baseline, the averages of 2015-16 to 2017-18 data has been used for each indicator.

\*\*The return to work plan is an agreement setting out the steps to get back to work. An employer or insurer develops this in consultation with the injured or sick worker, and the plan can be written or verbal.

## Appendix A: National Return to Work Strategy 2020-2030 – Snapshot



### WHAT WILL THE STRATEGY DO?

- 🔗 Drive & leverage national action
- 🔗 Centre on issues of national significance
- 🔗 Recognise the worker as the primary beneficiary
- 🔗 Recognise the importance of the relationship between the worker & their employer



### WHO IS IT AIMED AT?

- 🔗 Policy makers
- 🔗 Workers' compensation authorities
- 🔗 Employers
- 🔗 Union & industry groups
- 🔗 Insurers & claims management organisations
- 🔗 Treating health practitioners
- 🔗 Workplace rehabilitation providers
- 🔗 Other worker advocates

### HOW WILL SUCCESS BE MEASURED?

- 🔗 Return to work measures across the worker, employer, healthcare & insurance systems
- 🔗 Combination of quantitative & qualitative data
- 🔗 National targets set progressively as baselines established
- 🔗 National progress reporting, mid-term review & full-term evaluation

### WHO WILL OVERSEE & DRIVE ACTION?

- 🔗 Safe Work Australia Members have collective strategic oversight
- 🔗 Strategic Issues Group on Workers' Compensation have operational oversight
- 🔗 Safe Work Australia coordinates implementation & progresses national initiatives
- 🔗 Individual Safe Work Australia Members progress their own initiatives & share learnings