



## Case study

# Alex and Lee's story

### Overcoming judgement and stigma around workers' compensation

#### Lack of support

Alex was injured at his job on a commercial construction site when a large piece of equipment he was operating fell on his leg. The poor culture at Alex's workplace meant workers were discouraged from reporting safety issues, so work health and safety risks were not managed effectively. From the moment he was injured, Alex felt like his employer didn't prioritise his health and recovery — his supervisor appeared more concerned with finding another worker to replace Alex once it was clear he would need time off work.

Alex knew a bit about his right to workers' compensation from a friend, but found it hard to get information from his employer about how to claim and what assistance his employer could provide. He was also worried that making a claim might impact his reputation as a hard worker, and that his employer might cut his hours or even fire him because they didn't want to deal with the claim. After seeking independent advice, Alex eventually made a workers' compensation claim, which was accepted.

#### Impacts of isolation and exclusion

Alex didn't hear from his employer when he made the claim, which made him feel excluded and ashamed. While a few of his colleagues checked in on him Alex heard others thought he was exaggerating the seriousness of his injury to get time off. They were annoyed that they had to pick up Alex's tasks on site and speculated he got injured because he was being careless and not following safety procedures.

Alex's supervisor contacted him a few weeks after his claim, but only to ask when he was coming back to work because they were short staffed and under pressure to meet a deadline.

The social exclusion, bullying and lack of support made Alex's experience with workers' compensation extremely challenging. It also affected Alex's mental health and impacted his recovery. At times, Alex wondered if he had done the wrong thing by claiming and if he would ever be ok to go back to work.

Keep reading to see how Alex's new supervisor Lee took action to address stigma and support Alex's return to work.



I worried about being judged and treated differently because I was on workers' compensation.

Having a supportive supervisor and team made all the difference to my recovery

*Alex,  
construction worker*



### Supporting sick and injured workers benefits everyone

**Support injured workers**  
to claim workers' compensation

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### Taking action improves outcomes for everyone



Leading by example is so important for changing the workplace culture.

By supporting Alex to recover from his injury and return to work, we all see the benefits.

*Lee,  
construction manager*



#### Benefits of building a positive workplace culture

While Alex was away from work recovering from his injury, there was a change in leadership on the construction site. Alex's new supervisor, Lee, proactively contacted Alex to see how he was going, and to ask if there was any support he could provide. Lee kept in touch with Alex regularly throughout his recovery, making him feel less isolated. Lee ensured Alex remained part of the team even while he was off work, including him in staff training and social events. Lee also took other steps to improve the workplace culture, including sharing information about workers' compensation with workers and implementing new policies to encourage reporting safety issues and injuries.

Lee and Alex developed a return to work plan together which meant Alex's skills would be used while doing duties that were appropriate following his injury. Lee's leadership approach influenced other workers to show support to Alex and welcome him back, which made him feel part of the team. Being supported meant Alex felt able to speak openly and honestly about his experience with his workmates, which helped change the negative perceptions some had about workers' compensation. Lee's effective leadership created a positive workplace culture, free from stigma, which meant Alex felt supported in his recovery. There were also positive outcomes for his workmates and the business as the result of retaining a skilled worker.



For information about how to create a supportive and inclusive workplace, visit the Safe Work Australia website: [swa.gov.au/workerscompensationstigma](http://swa.gov.au/workerscompensationstigma).

#### Safe Work Australia develops national policy about workers' compensation.

If you would like further information or have questions about workers' compensation, whether you are covered or when you can claim, contact the workers' compensation authority in your state or territory at [swa.gov.au/workers-compensation](http://swa.gov.au/workers-compensation).



### Supporting sick and injured workers benefits everyone