

National Return to Work Survey 2018

Headline Measures Report

July 2018



Social
Research
Centre

An ANU Enterprise business

Report prepared for:

Safe Work Australia
GPO Box 641
Canberra ACT 2601

Report prepared by:

The Social Research Centre
Level 9, 277 William Street
MELBOURNE VIC. 3000
Tel: (613) 9236 8500
Fax: (613) 9602 5422
Email: info@srcentre.com.au

www.srcentre.com.au

Version: 19 October 2018



Contents

- 1. **Foreword**1
- 2. **Headline Measures – Balance and Historic cohorts combined**2
 - 2.1. Returned to Work Rate (Total).....2
 - 2.2. Current Return to Work Rate (Total).....3
- 3. **Headline Measures – Historic**5
 - 3.1. Returned to Work Rate (Historic).....5
 - 3.2. Current Return to Work Rate (Historic).....6
 - 3.3. Comparison with Previous Waves (Historic)7
- 4. **Methodological Overview**.....9

1. Foreword

The Social Research Centre has managed the National Return to Work Survey on behalf of Safe Work Australia since 2012, to measure return to work outcomes of injured workers receiving workers' compensation and to better understand the experience of those injured workers and the factors that may influence their return to work.

The 2018 survey questionnaire underwent significant revision. While headline measures were maintained, a substantial portion of the previous questionnaire was removed, to incorporate a range of contemporary scales from surveys of injured workers undertaken elsewhere in Australia and overseas. The development of the new questionnaire was a collaboration between Safe Work Australia, Monash University, the participating Australian workers' compensation authorities (jurisdiction), employee and employer representatives, and the Social Research Centre.

All Australian workers compensation authorities, except for South Australia, took part in the survey in 2018. The Australian Capital Territory participated for the first time in 2018.

The current survey replaced the Return to Work Monitor previously published by the Heads of Workers' Compensation Authorities and was different in survey content and the broader sample frame. The Return to Work Monitor surveyed injured employees, of premium paying organisations, who had 10 or more days off work and whose claim was submitted 7-9 months prior to the survey. The current National Return to Work survey draws sample from the population of injured workers who:

- had at least one day away from work
- submitted a claim in the two years prior to the interview period
- had or did not have payment-related activity within 6 months prior to the sample being drawn
- worked in either premium paying (including own businesses) or self-insured organisations.

In order to maintain the time series for two key measures reported in the Return to Work Monitor, a group with 10 or more days off work and whose claim was submitted 7-9 months prior to the survey was purposefully sampled from within the broader population. This group is referred to as the Historic cohort. Sample members who do not meet the criteria of the Historic cohort but do meet the broader criteria are referred to as the Balance cohort.

This Headline Measures Report includes two key measures namely the:

- Returned to Work Rate (equivalent to the Return to Work Monitor's Return to Work Rate)
- Current Return to Work Rate (equivalent to the Return to Work Monitor's Durable Return to Work Rate).

In previous waves the headline measures report has included results for the Historic cohort only to enable comparison with historic reports. This report includes Historic cohort results, as well as results for the total sample (i.e. Historic and Balance cohorts combined) to provide a more comprehensive picture of return to work outcomes for injured workers nationally.

A more comprehensive *Summary Report* was published on Safe Work Australia's website in October 2018.

2. Headline Measures – Balance and Historic cohorts combined

This section provides the headline measures for the 2018 National Return to Work (NRTW) survey, for the total sample (i.e. the aggregate of Historic and Balance cohorts). For the 2018 survey, a total of 4,602 interviews were completed with Historic and Balance cohort respondents.

2.1. Returned to Work Rate (Total)

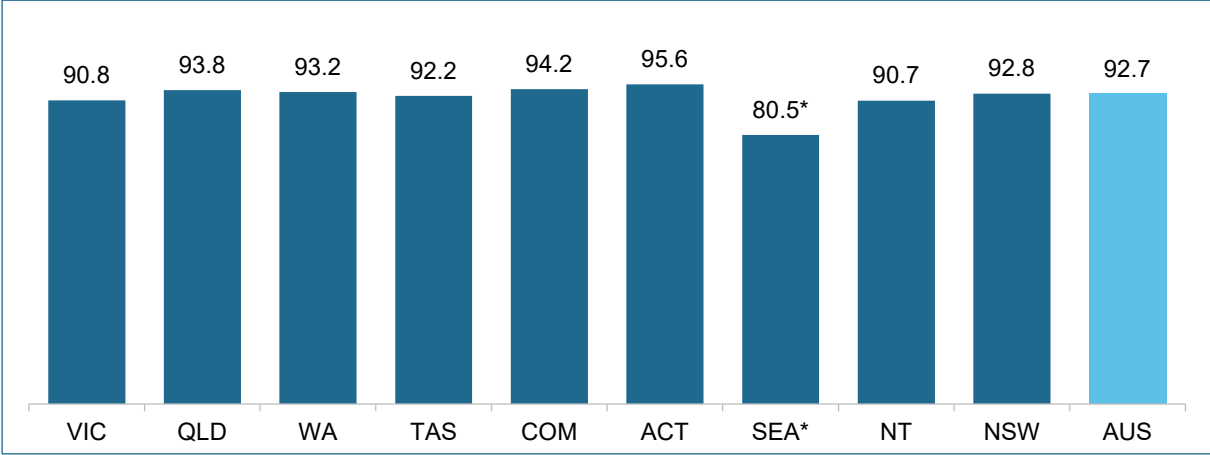
The *Returned to Work Rate* is the proportion of injured workers surveyed who reported having returned to work at any time since their work-related injury or illness. It is based on question RTW1 (previously question C7 prior to 2018) ‘Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?’ and reports the proportion of injured workers who state ‘yes’ (see Figures 1 and 2).

Within Australia, the total *Returned to Work Rate* for ACT (95.6%), Queensland (93.8%) and Comcare (94.2%) was higher than the national rate. NSW (92.8%) and WA (93.2%) were both in line with the national rate. Tasmania (92.2%), Victoria (90.8%) and Northern Territory (90.7%) were all slightly lower than the national rate. The total *Returned to Work Rate* for Seacare was significantly lower than other jurisdictions at 80.5%.

Overall, the total *Returned to Work Rate* was consistent with the past two waves of the NRTW survey and remains significantly higher than the 2013 rate.

Figure 1 Total 2017/18 Returned to Work rate: by Jurisdiction (%)

RTW1. Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?



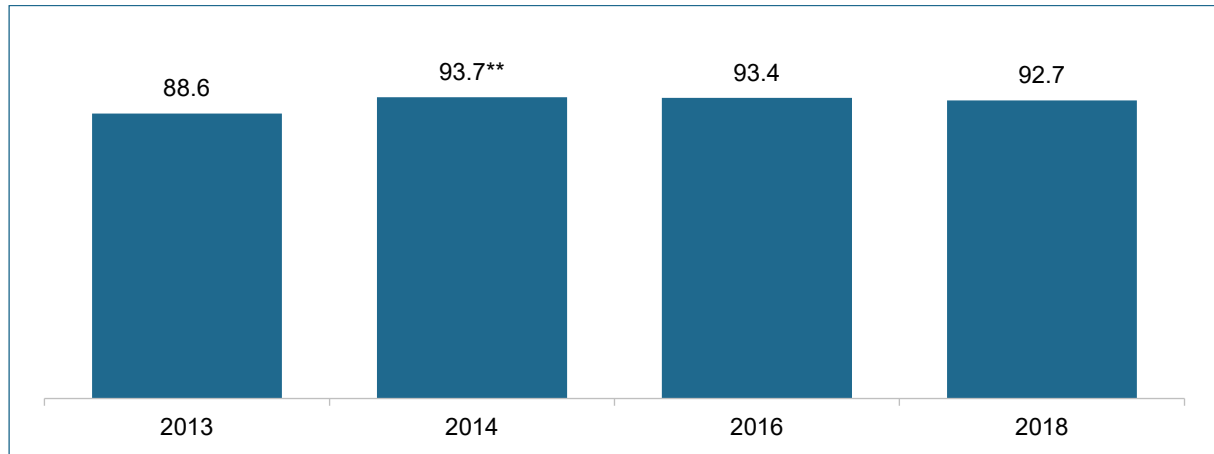
Base Balance and Historic cohorts - those with at least one day off work and whose claim was submitted between 1 February 2016 and 31 January 2018.

Sample sizes: Australia (n=4,602), NSW (n=865), VIC (n=805), QLD (n=809), WA (n=513), TAS (n=482), NT (n=150), ACT (n=150), Comcare (n=770), Seacare (n=58)

Note: Asterisks indicate statistically significant difference between jurisdiction and aggregate of all other jurisdictions (single asterisk (*) indicates a lower proportion; double asterisk (**) indicates a higher proportion).

Figure 2 Total 2017/18 Returned to Work rate: National time series (%)

RTW1. Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?



Base Balance and Historic cohorts - those with at least one day off work and whose claim was submitted between 1 February 2016 and 31 January 2018.

Sample sizes: 2013 (n=4,698), 2014 (n=4,679), 2016 (n=5,124), 2018 (n=4,602)

Note: Asterisks indicate statistically significant difference from the previous year (single asterisk (*) indicates a lower proportion; double asterisk (**) indicates a higher proportion).

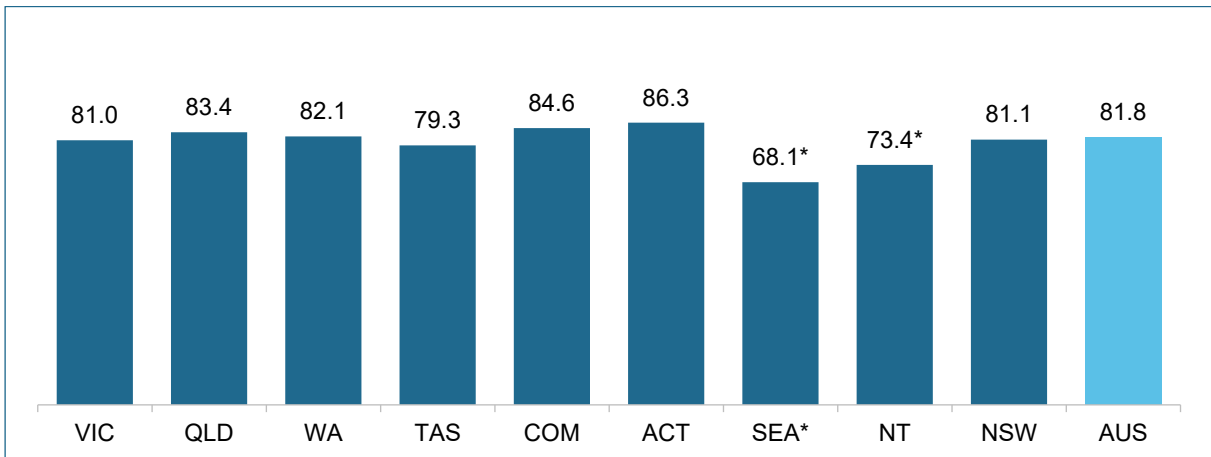
2.2. Current Return to Work Rate (Total)

The *Current Return to Work Rate* is the proportion of injured workers surveyed who reported having returned to work at any time since their work-related injury or illness and being in a paid job at the time of survey. This measure is based on question RTW2 (previously C1) 'Are you currently working in a paid job?' and question RTW 1 (previously C7) 'Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?'. It reports the proportion of injured workers who state 'yes' to both (see Figures 3 and 4). Safe Work Australia reports this measure in the Comparative Performance Monitoring report (Part 3, 19th Edition).

The ACT (86.3%), Comcare (84.6%) and Queensland (83.4%) reported the highest total *Current Return to Work Rate* above the national rate, followed by WA (82.1%), Victoria (81.0%), NSW (81.1%) and Tasmania (79.3%). The Northern Territory (73.4%) and Seacare (68.1%) reported a significantly lower rate than other jurisdictions. Overall the national rate was down slightly from 2015/16 at 81.8%.

Figure 3 Total Current Return to Work rate: by Jurisdiction (%)

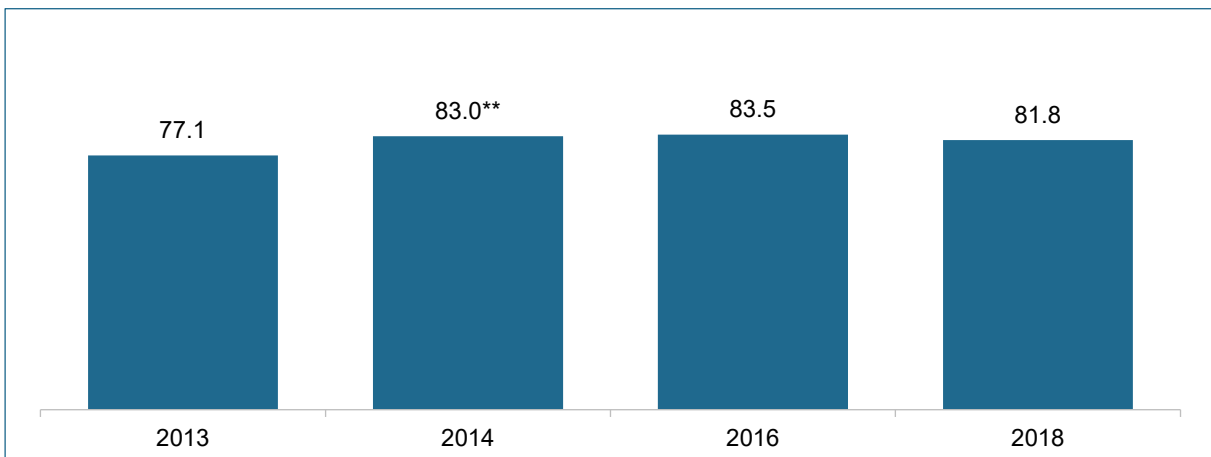
RTW1. Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?
RTW2. Are you currently working in a paid job?



Base Balance and Historic cohorts - those with at least one day off work and whose claim was submitted between 1 February 2016 and 31 January 2018.
 Sample sizes: Australia (n=4,602), NSW (n=865), VIC (n=805), QLD (n=809), WA (n=513), TAS (n=482), NT (n=150), ACT (n=150), Comcare (n=770), Seacare (n=58).
 Note: Asterisks indicate statistically significant difference from the previous year (single asterisk (*) indicates a lower proportion; double asterisk (**) indicates a higher proportion).

Figure 4 Total Current Return to Work rate: National time series (%)

RTW1. Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?
RTW2. Are you currently working in a paid job?



Base Balance and Historic cohorts - those with at least one day off work and whose claim was submitted between 1 February 2016 and 31 January 2018.
 Sample sizes: 2013 (n=4,698), 2014 (n=4,679), 2016 (n=5,124), 2018 (n=4,602).
 Note: Asterisks indicate statistically significant difference from the previous year (single asterisk (*) indicates a lower proportion; double asterisk (**) indicates a higher proportion).

3. Headline Measures – Historic

Consistent with previous waves, the headline measures reported in this section are calculated using the Historic cohort only. For the 2018 survey, a total of 1,889 interviews were completed with Historic cohort respondents.

The Historic cohort quota for the Seacare jurisdiction was not obtained due to insufficient sample and, as such, the headline measures for Seacare are not reported given the small overall sample size.

3.1. Returned to Work Rate (Historic)

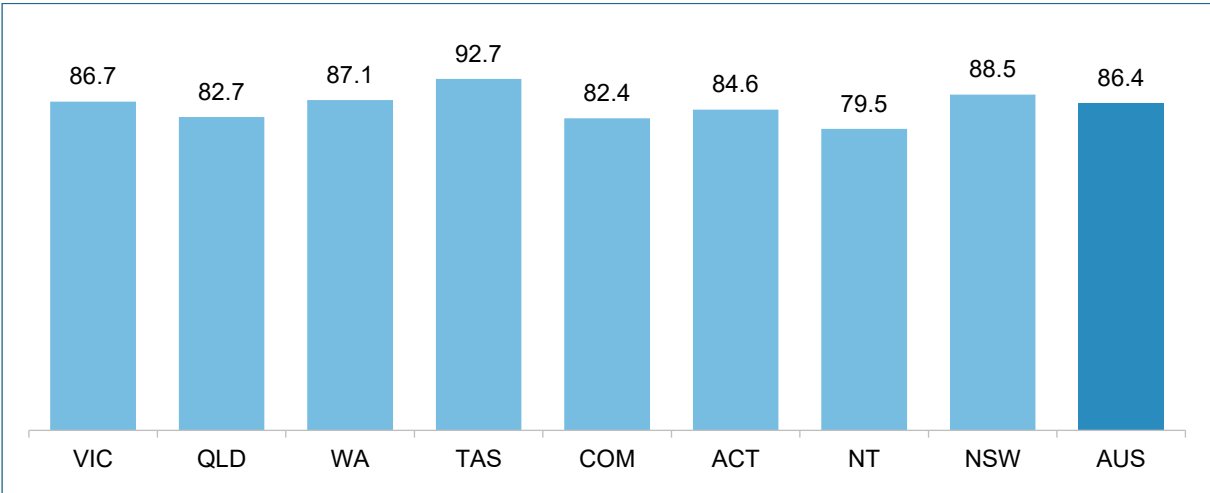
Figure 5 shows that in 2017/18, 86.4% of Australian injured workers had returned to work at some time since their injury or illness. Data is taken from injured workers of premium payers with 10 or more days off work and whose claim was submitted 7-9 months prior to the survey. The measure is equivalent to the previous ‘RTW Rate’ reported in the Return to Work Monitor.

Within Australia, the *Returned to Work Rate* for Tasmania (92.7%), New South Wales (88.5%), Victoria (86.7%) and Western Australia (87.1%) was higher than the national rate. The *Returned to Work Rate* was lower than the national rate for the Australian Capital Territory (84.6%), Queensland (82.7%), Comcare (82.4%) and the Northern Territory (79.5%). However, none of the differences between jurisdictions were statistically significant.

Overall, the *Returned to Work Rate* reduced slightly since the last wave of NRTW survey in 2016 (down 0.6 pp from 87.0% in 2015/16) however the difference is not statistically significant.

Figure 5 Historic Returned to Work Rate 2017/18: by Jurisdiction (%)

RTW1. Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?



Base Historic cohort - those with 10+ days off work and whose claim was submitted 7-9 months prior to the survey.
 Sample sizes: Australia (n=1,889), NSW (n=419), VIC (n=399), QLD (n=439), WA (n=373), TAS (n=123), NT (n=39), ACT (n=39), Comcare (n=51), Seacare (n=7) (not shown).
 Note: No statistically significant differences between jurisdictions.

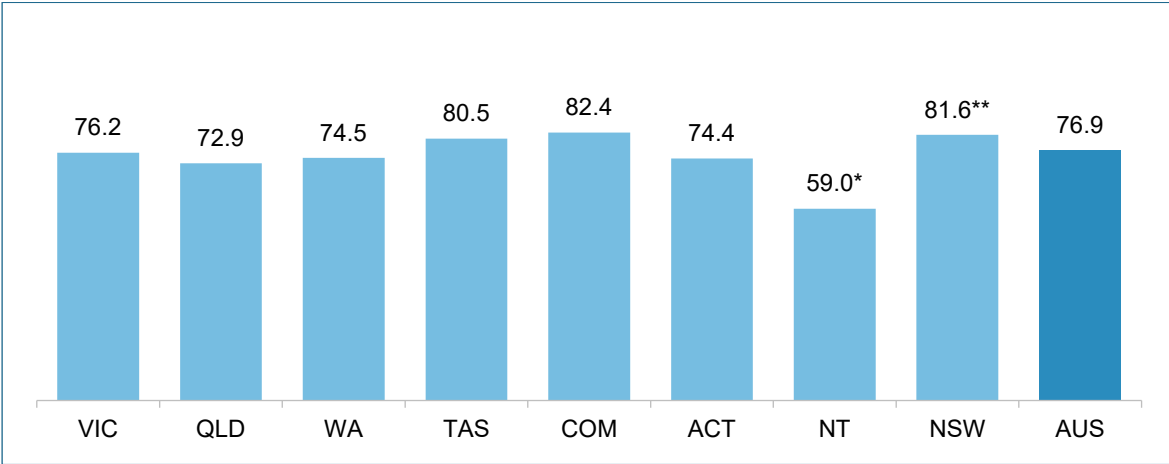
3.2. Current Return to Work Rate (Historic)

Figure 6 shows the *Current Return to Work Rate* overall and for each participating jurisdiction. The measure is equivalent to the previous 'Durable RTW Rate' reported in the Return to Work Monitor.

Comcare (82.4%) and NSW (81.6%) reported the highest *Current Return to Work Rate*, closely followed by Tasmania (80.5%); while the Northern Territory (59.0%) reported the lowest. The results for NSW and the Northern Territory are statistically significant, when compared against the aggregate of all other jurisdictions. Overall the national rate was unchanged from 2015/16 at 76.9%.

Figure 6 Historic Current Return to Work Rate 2017/18: by Jurisdiction (%)

RTW1. Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?
RTW2. Are you currently working in a paid job?



Base: Historic cohort – those with 10+ days off work and whose claim was submitted 7-9 months prior to the survey.

Sample sizes: Australia (n=1,889), NSW (n=419), VIC (n=399), QLD (n=439), WA (n=373), TAS (n=123), NT (n=39), ACT (n=39), Comcare (n=51), Seacare (n=7) (not shown).

Note: 'Don't Know' and 'Refused' responses at RTW2 are excluded from base for calculation. Asterisks indicate statistically significant difference from the previous year (single asterisk (*) indicates a lower proportion; double asterisk (**) indicates a higher proportion).

3.3. Comparison with Previous Waves (Historic)

Table 1 shows the difference between the 2017/18 and 2015/16 Historic headline measures for each jurisdiction.

Table 1 Change in Historic Headline Measures, 2017/18 v 2015/16: by Jurisdiction (percentage point difference)

	RTW Rate	Current RTW Rate
Total	(0.6)	0.0
NSW	(1.1)	(0.4)
VIC	(1.5)	(2.8)
QLD	(3.5)	(1.3)
WA	2.9	1.5
TAS	1.0	(5.7)
NT	(3.4)	(9.6)
ACT	--	--
Comcare	(5.9)	2.4

Note: No statistically significant differences between time periods.

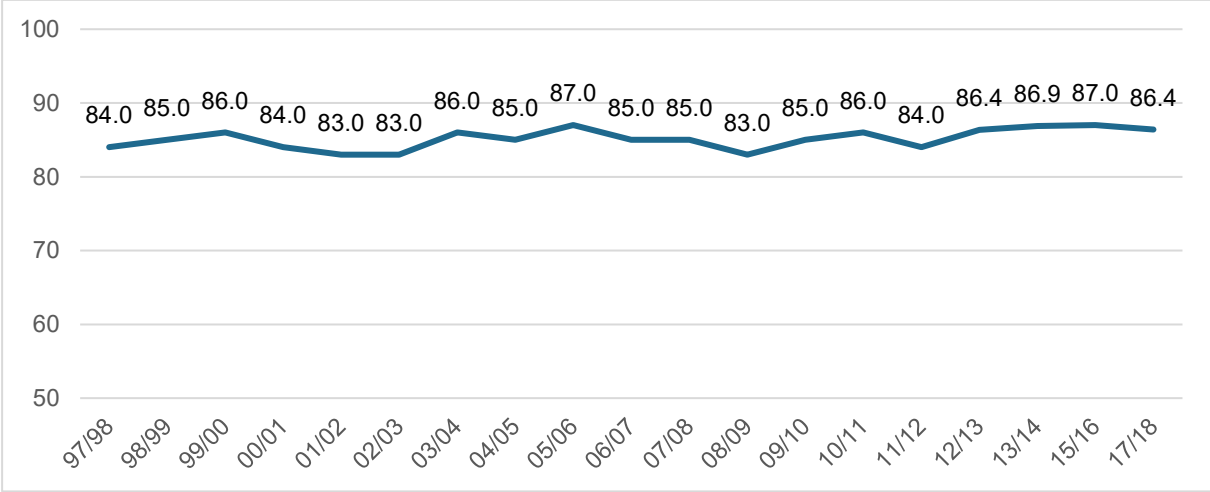
At the national level, there was only a small absolute change in the *Returned to Work Rate*, with the 2017/18 rate 0.6 pp lower than the rate reported in 2015/16, a non-significant difference. This is despite most jurisdictions recording a decline in their 2017/18 *Returned to Work Rate*. Comcare had the biggest change, with its 2017/18 *Returned to Work Rate* 5.9 pp lower than the equivalent 2015/16 rate.

For the *Current Return to Work Rate*, Comcare and WA were the only jurisdictions to record an increase in 2017/18 compared with 2015/16, up 2.4 pp and 1.5 pp respectively. NT had the greatest decline; its 2017/18 rate was 9.6 pp lower than 2015/16. Overall however the 2017/18 *Current Return to Work Rate* was unchanged from 2015/16.

Figure 7 shows the time series trend for the Historic *Returned to Work Rate*, since 1997/98.

Figure 7: Historic Returned to Work Rate: Time series (%)

RTW1. Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?



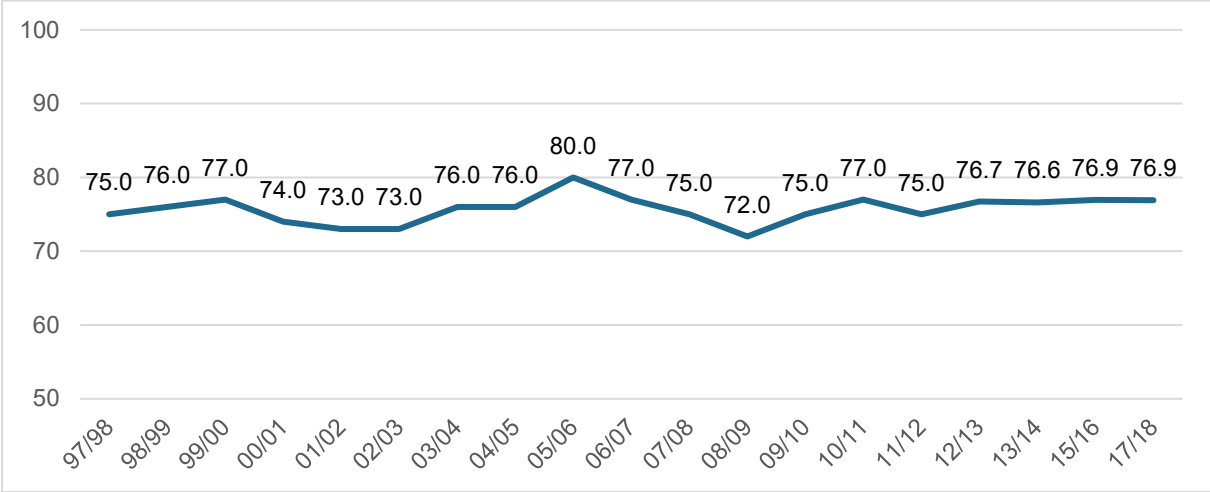
Base: *Historic cohort – those with 10+ days off work and whose claim was submitted 7-9 months prior to the survey.*

Figure 8 shows the time series trend for the Historic *Current Return to Work Rate*, since 1997/98.

Figure 8 Historic Current Return to Work Rate: Time series (%)

RTW1. Have you returned to work at any time since your work-related injury or illness?

RTW2. Are you currently working in a paid job?



Base: *Historic cohort – those with 10+ days off work and whose claim was submitted 7-9 months prior to the survey.*

4. Methodological Overview

Sampling

The sampling strata were derived from the eligible population cases / counts provided by each participating jurisdiction. Within strata, respondents were selected randomly to participate.

Total interviewed

A total of 4,602 telephone interviews were undertaken with injured workers with a claim date between 1 February 2016 and 31 January 2018 across two time-based cohorts. The Historic cohort (n=1,889) refers to injured workers of premium payers who had 10 or more days off work and whose claim was submitted 7-9 months prior to the survey. This refers to a 2-month submission period for large jurisdictions (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, and Western Australia): August and September 2017; and 3-month submission period for small jurisdictions (Comcare, Seacare, the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory and Tasmania): July, August and September 2017. The Balance cohort (n=2,713) refers to injured workers of premium payers or self-insurers who had one or more days compensated and are not members of the Historic cohort.

Interviewing was conducted between 18 April and 10 June 2018.

Table 2 Total Completed Interviews by Cohort and Jurisdiction

	Historic cohort	Balance cohort		Sub-total	Total
		Premium Payer	Self-Insurer		
Australia	1889	1989	724	2713	4602
New South Wales	419	255	191	446	865
Victoria	399	369	37	406	805
Queensland	439	339	31	370	809
Australian Capital Territory	39	96	15	111	150
Western Australia	373	125	15	140	513
Tasmania	123	332	27	359	482
Comcare	51	326	393	719	770
Seacare	7	51	0	51	58
Northern Territory	39	96	15	111	150

Survey length – On average 26.2 minutes.

Response rate – 67.7% of injured workers who were successfully contacted and in scope.

Response rate = Number of interviews / (Number of interviews + Number of refusals)

Significance testing

Throughout this report, statistically significant differences have been reported. Significance testing has been conducted at the 95 per cent confidence level (i.e. a p-value of ≤ 0.05).

Where an estimate is noted as being statistically significant, the interpretation is as follows:

- **Jurisdiction** – the estimate for a given jurisdiction is significantly higher or lower than the equivalent estimate for all other jurisdictions in aggregate. For example, a significant difference for Seacare is significant when compared to the total sample, minus Seacare.
- **Time series** – yearly rates have been tested against previous years to test if increases or decreases are statistically significant, i.e. 2014 vs 2013, 2016 vs 2014 and 2018 vs 2016.

In figures and tables, asterisks have been used to indicate statistically significant differences, with a single asterisk (*) arrows indicating a significantly lower estimate and a double asterisk (**) a significantly higher estimate.