

Media Release

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MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR INJURED WORKERS FAST-TRACKED

Victorians who suffer a work-related mental injury can now access treatment and support as soon as they need it thanks to changes from the Andrews Labor Government.

Under new laws, anyone seeking compensation for a mental injury in a workplace may be entitled to provisional payments to cover reasonable medical expenses while they await the outcome of their claim.

The *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Provisional Payments) Act 2021* delivers on a key election commitment from the Labor Government to ensure workers can access care faster.

The change will ensure eligible workers and volunteers no longer have to choose between delaying critical care or facing stressful out of pocket costs for GP visits, psychologist or psychiatrist appointments and medication.

Provisional payments will be provided for up to 13 weeks, giving workers certainty of immediate support whether a claim is accepted or not.

Providing better support is important, because mental injury claims are often complex taking an average of 20 days longer to determine than physical injury claims.

The scheme is an expansion of a successful pilot providing provisional payments to police and emergency services workers and volunteers.

Police and emergency services workers were included in the pilot in recognition of the significant mental stress they face in the workplace - they are more likely to suffer serious and debilitating mental illness.

Participants accessing the pilot reported that they were more likely to seek early treatment for their mental injury because of the provisional payments pilot program.

The Labor Government is also developing new regulations to strengthen the occupational health and safety framework to provide clearer guidance to employers on their obligations to protect workers from mental injury.

This work complements the Government's broader priority to ensure Victorians are getting the mental health support they deserve – with the *Victorian Budget 2021-22* delivering landmark investments to build a new mental health system from the ground up following the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Workplace Safety Ingrid Stitt

"We know that giving workers who suffer a mental injury the support and care they need early increases their chances of recovery and a successful return to work."

"With more workers seeking help for mental injuries, it's vital that we remove barriers that prevent workers from accessing treatment and services as soon as they need it."