

Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee

Annual Report 2024-25



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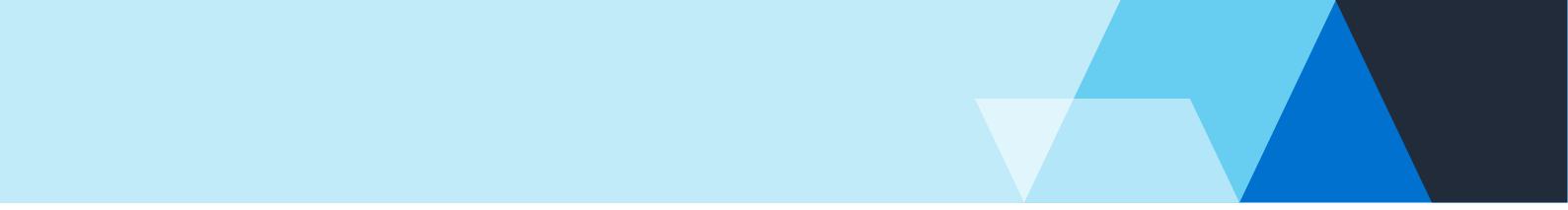
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The Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee (WICC) would like to pay our respects to those killed and injured at work. We recognise the ongoing impact of these events on them and their loved ones. Every worker has the right to come home alive and well, both physically and mentally. We honour the dead and continue to fight for the living.

The WICC acknowledges the First Peoples of Victoria as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and waterways on which we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.



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1. Foreword from Committee Co-Chairs

The Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee (WICC) is pleased to present its fourth annual report to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC (Minister).

The WICC is a ministerially appointed lived experience advisory committee established under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. Our aim is to inform system improvements to prevent workplace incidents and ensure Victorian workers receive the support they need when incidents occur. The Committee includes 13 members with lived experience of a serious workplace incident involving death, serious injury or illness, from a range of professional backgrounds and industries. Our members come from a broad range of backgrounds, experiences and industries, and we are proud to represent these diverse lived experience perspectives.

In our fourth year of operation, the WICC has provided extensive advice to Government and achieved significant milestones including its recommendations for changes to the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation (WIRC) Act. The Committee has collectively advocated for additional entitlements and support for families affected by workplace fatalities. We are proud of our efforts to improve support for individuals who face the most devastating consequences of unsafe work practices.

The Committee also welcomes the release of the Sentencing Advisory Council's *Sentencing Occupational Health and Safety Offences in Victoria: Report and Recommendations*. The WICC has consistently advocated for stronger penalties to reflect the profound and enduring consequences of serious harm caused by occupational health and safety offences. The Committee will continue to call for action to strengthen OHS sentencing practices, including the Courts placing greater value on the experience of victims and providing clearer guidance on the purpose of Victim Impact Statements, more efficient court proceedings, and improved processes for fines to ensure convicted organisations do not continue to evade payment. We look forward to the Government responding to the Council's recommendations.

In collaboration with Monash University, the Committee is proud to have co-designed a project that will use data linkage to quantify the broader social and economic impacts of serious workplace incidents – beyond the direct costs captured by the workers' compensation system. The project will identify the avoided costs associated with improved early intervention. This work represents an internationally unique contribution to research and will strengthen the evidence base for broader government initiatives focused on prevention and targeted support for injured workers.

The Committee also published a series of powerful videos where committee members share their personal stories and key safety messages for both workers and employers. These videos shed light on the impact of workplace incidents and highlight the critical importance of prevention.

We appreciate the Minister's ongoing support of our work and remain committed to providing valued lived experience advice on emerging issues and reform opportunities. Every worker deserves to return home safe and well—physically and mentally. Together, we will continue to drive meaningful change that protects workers and strengthens workplace safety across Victoria.



Brett Struhs

Non-Government Co-Chairperson

Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee



Gary Maas MP

Government Co-Chairperson

Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee

2. List of members

Brett Struhs - Non-Government Co-Chair and lived experience member

Brett was appointed as Non-Government Co-chairperson of the WICC in December 2024. Brett's son, Kyle, died on 30 November 2018 from head injuries sustained falling from a ladder while installing solar panels in Bendigo for a small company called Solar 2.0. He brings valuable experience from being a previous Families Reference Group (FRG) member, and he has experienced the whole WorkCover process from death to court case and brings a regional perspective to the WICC.

Gary Maas MP – Government Co-Chairperson

Gary was appointed as Government Co-Chairperson of the WICC in April 2023. The role was previously held by Ms Bronwyn Halfpenny MP.

Gary was elected as Member for Narre Warren South in 2018. Before entering Parliament, Gary worked as a musician, teacher, lawyer, organiser, union secretary, and board director on commercial and not-for-profit boards.

Samantha Burns – Deputy Co-Chair and lived experience member

Samantha's brother, Shaun Burns, was killed at work in September 2018 when a crane failed, dropping concrete on him and another worker. She brings to the WICC strong advocacy experience as a FRG member and is motivated to improve compensation and support for close family members of persons killed in workplace incidents who are not dependents. As a Clinical Neuropsychologist, she also has experience seeing the issues that arise for workers and families following a serious injury.

Joe Alderuccio – Lived experience member

Joe is an OHS professional with 18 years of experience across both public and private sector workplaces. In that time, Joe has been a first responder and investigated or led crisis response and post-incident support in relation to serious incidents resulting in life changing injuries and/or fatality. Joe has been involved directly and indirectly in three workplace deaths in the construction industry and he is committed to doing what he can to support the prevention of serious and fatal incidents, recognising the trauma and enduring impact it has for everyone on site.

Dave Brownlee – Lived experience member

Dave's son, Jack Brownlee, was killed in the Delacombe trench collapse, along with his friend Charlie Howkins in March 2018 while working for Pipecon Pty Ltd. Dave has considerable experience with WorkCover processes and was a member of the FRG and Taskforce.

Dr Lana Cormie – Lived experience member

Lana was the inaugural lived experience Co-Chair of the WICC and led the WICC through its first three years of operations.

Lana currently works in the Occupational Health and Safety sector. Her background includes work as a Veterinary Surgeon and in Animal Welfare. Lana's husband, Charlie Howkins, was one of two men killed in the Delacombe Trench Collapse while working for Pipecon Pty Ltd. Since 2018, Lana has been an active advocate for workplace safety reform. She brings considerable experience to the WICC as a previous member of the FRG and the Workplace Manslaughter Implementation Taskforce (Taskforce) as well as having relevant OHS qualifications and professional experience.

Sophie Lennard – Lived experience member

Sophie sustained serious burns to her foot while working in a commercial kitchen as a 20 year old and engaged in a return to work process after her recovery. Sophie brings her perspective of having experienced a serious workplace injury and navigating the return to work process as a young person in the casual workforce. She is particularly focused on ensuring policies and initiatives consider the unique contexts and power dynamics experienced by young people and those in insecure work.

Elvis Martin – Lived experience member

Elvis is a young leader who has overcome difficult circumstances and inspires many with his advocacy for social justice. The recipient of awards such as Young Community Achiever of the Year 2021 (India Australia Business and Community Awards), Elvis has worked, volunteered and spoken publicly in many roles, addressing mental health, homelessness, family violence, workplace safety and LGBTIQA+ community issues. He uses his platform, including a large social media following, to promote inclusion, diversity and equality for all. Elvis is particularly passionate about bringing a youth and multicultural lens to inform the WICC's work.

Nick McHugh – Lived experience member

Nick was a police officer for 27 years and has served as an OHS representative and peer support officer. He has supported colleagues through workplace stress and bullying incidents through these roles. In supporting others, it became apparent that being proactive and making changes quickly could prevent further harm. A desire to help speed up response and action has motivated him to join the WICC.

Bette Phillips-Campbell – Lived experience member

Bette's son died in 1991 after being electrocuted while working as an apprentice. While more than 30 years have passed since the incident, Bette has made a significant contribution to workplace safety reform both as a member of the FRG and the WICC. Bette also contributes strong experience working with families affected by workplace fatalities as a counsellor for GriefWork Uniting. She also brings a regional perspective to the WICC.

Jacquie Robertson – Lived experience member

Jacquie's partner died in a workplace incident whilst working at an engineering facility in Bendigo in 2020. Since then, Jacquie has worked to assist others going through the Comcare workers' compensation system and to advocate for change. Jacquie's feedback to Comcare's regulatory area has helped to shape the newly established Family Liaison role. Jacquie has also been assisting Comcare with policies and information guides to be given to families when someone is severely injured or dies at the workplace and she is motivated to contribute to positive change in the Victorian context. Her background is in paediatric nursing.

Ralph Snider – Lived experience member

Ralph suffered pain in his forearms resulting in a chronic pain condition while working as a Senior Analyst Programmer in 1992 and suffered a recurrence in 2004. Ralph has lived experience managing a long-term injury that ultimately led him to change careers in 2005 to become a Disability Employment Consultant. He subsequently worked as a Vocational Consultant in the Occupational Rehabilitation Industry assisting people on WorkCover and Traffic Accident Commission cover to find work. He completed a Graduate Diploma in Careers Education and Development in 2010 and a Feldenkrais Training program in 2001. Ralph is the WICC observer representative at WorkSafe's WorkCover Advisory Committee (WAC).

Abha Somesh – Lived experience member

Abha sustained a serious injury to her back while caring for a patient in her role as a Critical Care Nurse in July 2020. Abha was house-bound for the next year and ultimately had to have spinal fusion surgery. This experience has required adjustments to Abha's everyday life. Her experience of a serious workplace injury and interacting with the WorkCover system has fueled a commitment to use her experience to help optimise processes to support and advocate for injured workers. Abha is passionate about improving OHS awareness among healthcare workers. Abha is the WICC observer representative at WorkSafe's Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee (OHSAC).

Llewellyn Stevens – Lived experience member

Llewellyn suffered a serious psychosocial injury in the workplace. He has also been a carer for someone with a mental health condition caused by workplace bullying. Llewellyn wants to use his experience to help people by advocating for systemic improvements. He brings significant professional experience in market research and insights, and developing strategy at a global consultancy.

3. Establishment and structure

The Committee operates under Part 9A of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and Chapter 7A of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (Regulations). The Committee was established in 2021 to strengthen the voice of Victorians who have been affected by a serious workplace incident. It has an important role in providing a mechanism for lived experience perspectives to directly inform government policy making.

The Committee's model and regulations were informed by the lived experience of members of the FRG, which was convened in October 2019 to support the development of workplace safety reforms, notably new workplace manslaughter laws, introduced in Victoria in 2020.

The Committee can comprise from eight to 15 members with lived experience of a serious workplace incident involving death, serious injury or illness, and one government member. Members are appointed by the Minister.

The Committee's function is to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister about:

- the needs of persons affected by workplace incidents involving death, serious injury or illness – whether those be emotional, financial, physical or other needs; and
- the development, review and improvement of policies, practices, strategies and systems relating to serious workplace incidents and OHS more generally.

The Committee is chaired by a Government Co-Chairperson and a Non-Government Co-Chairperson who is elected from within the lived experience membership.

The Department provides secretariat support to the Committee.

4. Key achievements for the 2024-25 financial year

The Committee provided advice to the Minister on a broad range of issues related to the needs of persons affected by workplace incidents and strengthening workplace incident prevention. The WICC was also directly consulted by WorkSafe and government agencies to provide lived experience input to Victorian Government initiatives.

The Committee's key achievements are outlined in further detail below.

Amendments to the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* to improve support for injured workers and family members

The WICC are very pleased to see the result of their advocacy come to fruition, after raising some of the issues many years ago. The Committee was consulted on the original design of the recommendations of the Family Supports Review, and during development of the reforms, which were incorporated into the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* (WIRC Act) to improve support for injured workers and family members. The changes, which came into effect 6 August 2025, implement recommendations of the WICC's to:

- Introduce additional entitlements for dependents other than partners and children and for non-economic loss for all close family members.
- Extend family member provisional payments from 12 to 26 weeks and remove the prohibition on provisional payments for suicide claims.
- Extend family counselling to include more types of therapy and support services.
- Provide compensation for the cost of forensic cleaning of sites following a work-related death.
- Increase pension payments for children from 5 per cent to 12.5 per cent of their deceased parent's pre-injury earnings per child following a work-related death and retrospectively applying this to accepted claims in the last 5 years.

WICC member videos

The Committee published a series of powerful videos where committee members share their personal stories and key safety messages for both workers and employers. These videos shed light on the impact of workplace incidents and highlight the critical importance of preventive measures:

<https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/workplace-incidents-consultative-committee-brett-struhs-story>
<https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/workplace-incidents-consultative-committee-david-brownlees-story>
<https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/workplace-incidents-consultative-committee-ralph-sniders-story>

The videos are primarily intended to be used for educational and training purposes by employers, educational institutions such as schools, TAFEs, training providers, and other relevant organisations.

Submission to the Sentencing Advisory Council

WICC contributed to the Sentencing Advisory Council's inquiry into the sentencing of occupational health and safety offences in Victoria. This engagement included participation in consultations and a formal written submission in May 2024. The submission highlighted several critical issues, including the need for stronger penalties, the adverse effects of prolonged court proceedings, the importance of clear guidance regarding the purpose of Victim Impact Statements and the effective management of outstanding fines. The Sentencing Advisory Council's final report recognised WICC's perspective on restorative justice, highlighting the value of the Committee's contribution to the inquiry.

WICC data linkage project

The Committee has engaged Monash University to co-design a project that will use data linkage to quantify the social and economic impacts of a serious workplace incident beyond direct costs through the workers' compensation system, and to determine the avoided costs that would accrue from improving early intervention. The project will be an internationally unique contribution to research in this field and will help to build the evidence base to support broader government objectives around improving early intervention.

Engagement with WorkSafe Victoria

WICC have provided advice on improvements to strengthen workplace safety and provide better supports for injured workers, including best practice principles for WorkSafe's Return to Work initiative and changes to strengthen WorkSafe's information sharing protocols with affected individuals and their families following an incident. The Committee contributed to the development of WorkSafe's 5-year strategy and also played a key role in advocating for greater public visibility of convicted organisations, resulting in their increased prominence on the WorkSafe website.

Engagement with Services Victoria to scope an anonymous hazard reporting application

Over the year, the Committee has continued to advocate for the development of an anonymous workplace hazards app. WICC provided advice to Service Victoria over several consultations to inform the proposal to determine costs, implementation considerations and feasibility.

Best Practice Model of Workplace Incident Support

The WICC has continued to provide advice to support Victorian Government actions related to the Committee's report, 'A Best Practice Model of Workplace Incident Support,' which outlines opportunities to improve care for injured workers and co-workers following a serious incident and support affected families.

Engagement with the State Coroner

WICC shared their experiences navigating the coronial system in discussion with the former State Coroner John Cain and families emphasized the importance of publishing cases to enhance transparency, share learnings and drive system improvements.

Fair Jobs Code consultation

WICC provided a submission to the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions on strengthening Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee



accountability of directors in the Fair Jobs Code. This advice was implemented by the Fair Jobs Code Unit. Applicants must now provide Director identification numbers when applying for government tender and procurement contracts valued over \$1 million.

Other consultations

Over the year, the Committee provided advice on a range of other Government policies and services, including:

- the Independent Review of the Modernisation of the WorkCover Scheme.
- Government's response to the Apprenticeships Taskforce and implementation.
- the Review of the Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988, which underpins the Commonwealth workers' compensation scheme.
- the design of a mobility pilot to assist injured workers in the Victorian Public Sector to recover and return to work via temporary alternate working arrangements.

Contribution to the establishment of the federal Family and Injured Workers Advisory Committee

Earlier this year, the federal Government established the Family and Injured Workers Advisory Committee (FIWAC). The WICC has supported the establishment of the FIWAC and shared key documents and resources to assist in its setup, including its reports — *Literature Review on Best Practice Support Models* and *A Best Practice Model for Workplace Incident Support*.

Contribution to WorkSafe's Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee and WorkCover Advisory Committee

Over the 2024-25 financial year, nominated Committee members attended meetings of WorkSafe's Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee (OHSAC) and WORKCOVER Advisory Committee (WAC). Committee members attended as observers, ensuring lived experience representation and linkage between the committees and WICC.

Annual planning day

In February 2025, the Committee held an annual planning day to develop its 2025 Workplan.

Annual report 2023-24 tabled in Parliament

The Committee's Annual Report for 2023-24 was tabled in Parliament on 31 October 2024.

5. Future priorities

In the next financial year (2025-26), the Committee will continue to provide valued lived experience advice to the Minister on emerging issues and reform areas to improve outcomes for people affected by workplace incidents. The Committee will also continue to provide advocacy and advice to support Government actions related to the Committee's report, *A Best Practice Model of Workplace Incident Support*.

The Committee looks forward to commencing its data linkage project in collaboration with WorkSafe and Monash University. There are a number of other priorities the Committee will continue to pursue including exploring the feasibility of delivering an anonymous hazard reporting app and scoping development of a needs-assessment tool for injured workers. The Committee looks forward to providing advice to the Independent Employee Representative Review and welcomes further opportunities to provide lived experience advice to inform Government workplace safety priorities.

6. Financial information

The Committee's work is supported by the Victorian Government's Families and Injured Workers System Reform Fund (Fund), which provides \$4 million over four years to support reforms and initiatives recommended by the Committee.

The Fund provides \$4 million to support reforms and initiatives recommended by the Committee as part of its workplan. Recommendations must support the Fund's objective to improve:

- support for those affected by serious workplace incidents; and
- health and safety outcomes at Victorian workplaces.

A further \$1.4 million in operational funding has been provided to the Committee by WorkSafe to support its operations (including member sitting fees). The Department is responsible for administering this funding through a Memorandum of Understanding with WorkSafe.

7. Conclusion

In its fourth year of operation, the Committee has continued to share lived experience perspectives of its members to influence systemic change for people affected by serious workplace incidents in Victoria and contribute to improving safety for Victorian workers. It looks forward to continuing this work into the next financial year.

The Committee thanks the Minister for WorkSafe and TAC and the Victorian Government for their ongoing recognition of the importance of lived experience in policymaking.

