

Research Services: Insights into injury and illness in the workplace

Through its Research Services department, WorkSafeBC supports the best scientific evidence on a range of occupational health and safety issues and, where possible, direct application of associated findings to the shop floor. For medical practitioners the findings hold implications for the evolving care and treatment of patients who are injured or ill at work. As new information comes to light through currently funded research projects, physicians have the opportunity to align their thinking about workplace health and safety accordingly. Physicians are also encouraged to take part in WorkSafeBC research projects, either by submitting their own funding proposals or by directly supporting proposed areas of inquiry through research partnerships.

Funding opportunities

Through rigorously evaluated, competitive processes, WorkSafeBC Research Services provides funding for academic scientific study and practical, innovative projects aimed at answering pressing questions and finding real-world solutions regarding workplace health and safety. Research funding for 2015 is available through the following four specialized streams:

- **Innovation at work:** Open to all Canadian residents, the stream is intended to provide funding for small-scale projects that promote increased collaboration between workplace parties, organizations, and researchers and lead to practical shop-floor solutions. Recent projects include

evaluating vibration-damping technology for the trucking industry, designing and implementing a workplace participatory ergonomics guide, and developing an effective cleaning agent for cytotoxic drugs.

- **Research training awards:** Available to master's and doctoral students, competitions for these awards typically occur in late spring when Research Services invites applications from top BC students pursuing training in occupational health and safety and workers' compensation research.
- **Systematic reviews:** Competitions, which are held as needed, are designed to identify the best evidence addressing critical issues in policy and practice and are open to researchers worldwide. WorkSafeBC identifies specific research questions or issues and uses a thorough evaluation process to select researchers. Systematic reviews contribute to better understand existing evidence on priority issues, synthesize existing research, provide critical assessment of current knowledge, and identify knowledge gaps in a range of key areas such as plantar fasciopathy, carpal/cubital tunnel syndrome, skin cancer, and low back pain.
- **Specific priorities research:** The stream was launched in 2014 to answer occupational health and safety questions with immediate relevance for WorkSafeBC, with findings to have clear application in policy and practice. In the inaugural competition funding was awarded to researchers looking at return-to-work delays following mild traumatic brain injury, potential for workplace exposure to nanomaterials through contact transfer, and violence pre-

vention indicators in health care. Future competitions will focus on other priority questions for WorkSafeBC stakeholders and will be open to all Canadian residents.

Partnerships

Research Services has developed partnerships with workers' compensation organizations and governments across the country to support research benefiting all Canadian workers. These collaborations leverage funds to support a broader pool of researchers and encourage cross-provincial initiatives. The Partnership for Work, Health, and Safety established in 2005 between WorkSafeBC and researchers at the University of British Columbia fosters occupational health and safety research derived from a variety of data sources through Population Data BC with the goal of capturing comprehensive health trends for all workers in the province.

About Research Services

By supporting independent scientific research, the department contributes to WorkSafeBC's objectives to improve health and safety in BC workplaces, foster successful rehabilitation and return to work for injured workers, and ensure fair compensation for workers suffering injury or illness on the job.

To learn more about the department, its currently funded research, and upcoming funding opportunities, visit worksafebc.com and click Research on the Quick Links menu, or e-mail resquery@worksafebc.com.

—Susan Dixon

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This article is the opinion of WorkSafeBC and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.