

## Collaborative and Innovative Injury Management Approach, Sydney Water

**Sydney Water is committed to ensuring a safe, timely and sustainable return to work for employees following work related and non-work related injury and illness, Sydney Water achieves highly effective return to work outcomes through an in-house injury management and return to work model that is delivered by health professionals and goes well beyond compliance with legislation. It is supported by a number of initiatives that are implemented in partnership with human resources and other key stakeholders.**

Proactively managing non-work related injuries/illnesses significantly reduced work related injuries

*Annette Halpin, Manager – Injury Management, Sydney Water*

### Overview

Sydney Water is Australia's largest water utility with operations covering 12,700 km<sup>2</sup> across Sydney, Illawarra and Blue Mountains regions.

Sydney Water has three principal objectives:

1. To protect public health
2. To protect the environment
3. To be a successful business.

Sydney Water's Injury Management Department sits under Human Resources. The Injury Management Program encompasses work related and non-work related case management that is delivered by Sydney Water employees to Sydney Water employees. All Sydney Water Injury Management Coordinators and Manager have allied health backgrounds. The IM Advisor is a certified Return to Work Co-ordinator.

Early reporting and intervention with the "if in doubt check it out" approach is the cornerstone of the model. This ensures injured workers receive prompt and appropriate treatment reducing, and sometimes eliminating, lost time injuries.

### Background

In 2012, Sydney Water recognised there was a need to focus on an aging workforce as well as general fitness. Specifically, the following was identified:

- 87% of claims were from workers who had a previous workers compensation claim
- 70% of the most expensive claims were for the Civil Delivery section of the organisation.
- 64% of claims made were from employees over 50 years of age
- There was a high volume of body stressing claims.

Sydney Water identified a strong correlation between employees' personal health practices and non-work related and work related injury and illness. There were occurrences of non-work injuries resulting in work related aggravation and injury as the associated risks of non-work related conditions weren't formally managed.

### Change Journey

In late 2012 Injury Management embarked on a collaborative and innovative approach to delivering work related and non-work related injury / illness programs across the organisation. Injury Management focused on early intervention, high

level engagement with key stakeholders and utilisation of the team's technical expertise.

Implementation consisted of the following initiatives:

- Non Work Related Injury / Illness (NWRI) Program
- Work Related Injury (WRI) Early Intervention Program
- In-house Injury Management Team that engage collaboratively with the business managers, injured workers, the insurer and treating parties.
- Confined Space Medical Assessments
- Pre-employment Medical Assessments in Civil Delivery
- Fitness for Duties Medical Assessments
- Medical Retirement
- Partnering with our insurer around strategic claims management
- Injury Management Awareness/ Education
- Injury Management Cards
- Network Doctors
- Suitable Duties Manuals
- New Injury Management Software System

Sydney Water implemented a proactive case management approach; enabling and encouraging employees' to manage their non-work related injuries / illnesses through adopting healthy lifestyle practices. This has assisted employees to improve their health and fitness for work and minimise the risk of work related injuries.

Non-work related issues that Injury Management focus on include; sick leave management, fitness for duty assessments, health issues identified at failed confined space medical assessments, productivity and performance issues which may arise from an employee present in the workplace, but working at reduced capacity due to injury or illness.

Through increased awareness and utilisation of an innovative Injury Management Card, Sydney Water has significantly changed the injury reporting culture to one of early reporting and

notification. This facilitates early diagnosis, assists with recovery, return to work and prevention of work related injury.

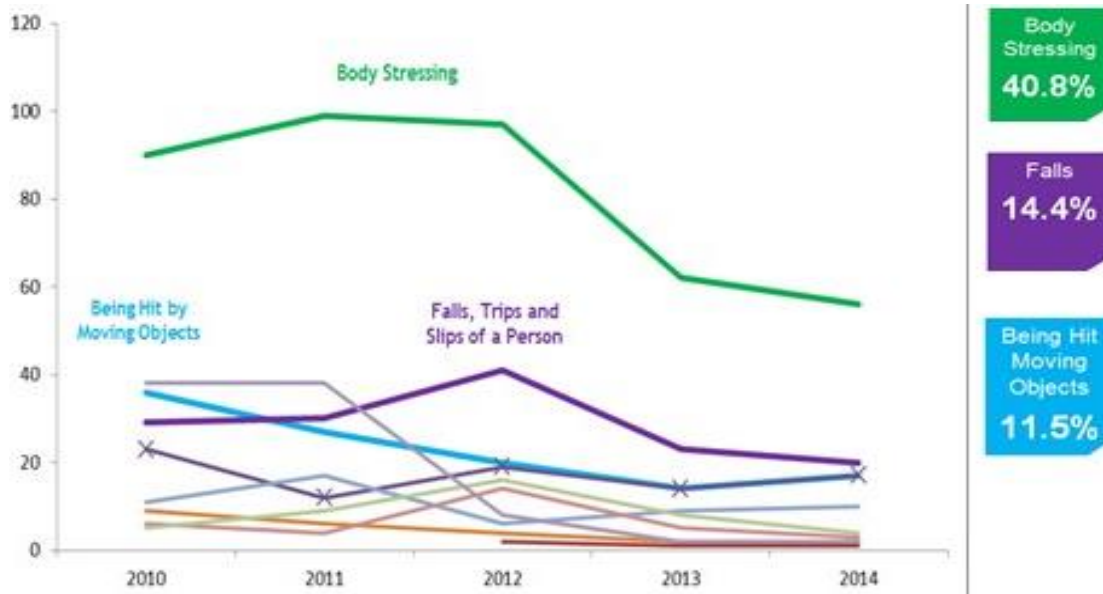
Injured employees are encouraged to see one of the 20 Network Doctors that Injury Management sourced across Sydney Water's area of operations. The Network Doctors are experienced in Workers Compensation, provide quality medical advice and have excellent knowledge of suitable duties from having conducted site visits and having access to the Suitable Duties manuals. This assists reduce lost time injuries and facilitates return to work outcomes.

The Suitable Duties Manuals provide professionally assessed information about job tasks to support the Sydney Water return to work program. The information in the manuals can reduce lost time absences, due to injury or illness, by assisting doctors identify suitable duties. It also assists managers and supervisors make informed decisions about an injured worker's re-entry to the workplace

Most field staff are required to attend an annual confined space fitness assessment which triggers a referral to the NWRI Injury Management program if a fitness issue that is or has potential to impact on overall job fitness is identified. This enables implementation of strategies to manage the risks.

Injury Management developed a fitness assessment standard for Civil Delivery and Treatment Operations, the areas with the highest risk of injury. It outlines the physical demands of the roles and comprises of a functional assessment that assesses the employee against the physical tasks that are inherent requirements of the roles. All incoming field staff in these areas of operations undertake a pre-employment medical assessment which incorporates the fitness assess standard.

Injury Management support managers referring employees for fitness for duty medical assessments when fitness for work concerns are identified.



Sydney Water Injury rates from 2010 to 2014

## Results

The program has yielded successful results including:

- A decrease in work related injuries by over 65% over the last two years
- 96.2% notification of work related injuries within 24 hours, whereas in 2010-11 over 40% of injuries were reported late to our insurer
- 2014 saw a reduction of \$763,654 in Worker’s Compensation payments, with average claim cost reduced by close to \$6,000
- 49.62% decrease in non-work related injuries June 2013-14.

Further, the program has positively impacted work culture, with workers feeling that their employer is invested in their well-being.

## Lessons Learnt

- Proactively managing non-work related injuries/illnesses significantly reduced work related injuries.
- Working in collaboration gets results.
- Early reporting is imperative – so health programs can be implemented speedily.

## Challenges

An integral component of the model includes addressing issues in a holistic manner, engaging the management team and the employee, building trust and working collaboratively with key parties to achieve the desired outcomes. Examples of NWRI issues addressed include management of obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular fitness and psychological matters.

Initially there was some push back from the union and employees with implementation of the NWRI program. However, overtime as the program has provided results and saved lives, it has become embraced as an effective path to improved health and fitness.

## Future strategies

Future strategies for Sydney Water’s Injury Management team include working with Allianz and the Safety Department to identify work related trends and to formulate further prevention strategies and a corporate wide wellness program.

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This brief was prepared by Big Picture Communications based on presented material from Annette Halpin, Manager – Injury Management, Sydney Water and Tamara Mollica, HR Advisor, Sydney Water at the TMF Case studies sharing seminar 29 April 2015. For more information, please contact Annette via [Annette.halpin@sydneywater.com.au](mailto:Annette.halpin@sydneywater.com.au) or Tamara via [Tamara.mollica@sydneywater.com.au](mailto:Tamara.mollica@sydneywater.com.au).

