

Strategic Plan 2010-2014



Safer Workplaces in Nova Scotia's Future

For the past three years, with the support of our stakeholders and partners, the WCB has had a clear focus on reducing workplace injuries and their human and financial impacts. Plus, for those who are injured at work, the WCB is a champion for safe and timely return to work.

This strategy of injury prevention and safe and timely return to work is a solid foundation – giving WCB employees, our partners and our stakeholders a strong sense of direction and a passion to achieve a different tomorrow.

There has been significant progress. Since 2005, the number of serious workplace injuries (resulting in time lost from work) has gone down by 11%. Through return to work efforts, injured workers were off the job for less time by 17%. And the vast majority of injured workers returned to work at the same wages they were earning before their injury.

In the past few years the WCB has introduced a number of new programs and services focused on supporting injury prevention and return to work – helping workplaces (workers and employers) engage in workplace safety programs and safe and timely return to work, and ensuring more timely access to appropriate health care services. These services, with the engagement and participation of workers, employers, unions and partners in the safety community have delivered positive results to date.

But while there was progress in some areas, there are challenges – including the rising cost of health care and long term disability and the recent large negative swings in the investment markets which, as we write this plan, are challenging our long term funding strategy.

Reducing injury and helping injured workers return to work in a safe and timely manner are the most effective ways to reduce the human and financial costs of the workers' compensation system. After extensive consultation with stakeholders in the fall of 2008 and having carefully considered the challenges ahead, the WCB has developed the attached strategic plan to drive change for the next five years.

The WCB has established six key strategic themes to help us achieve a new culture of workplace safety and safe and timely return to work in Nova Scotia. Injury prevention and return to work remain our top priorities, yet the success of these goals will be driven by the WCB building stakeholder and public confidence, achieving financial sustainability and making ongoing service improvements for workers and employers. And perhaps most importantly, as a community, we will achieve greater success if we work together – workers, employers, the WCB, our partners.

By working with our stakeholders and partners toward a shared vision, the future will see us living in a province where workplaces are safer and there is more security for workers and their families.



Chris Power
Acting Chair



Nancy MacCready-Williams
CEO



Table of Contents

Vision and Mission	1
Values	1
Six Key Strategic Themes	2
Workplace injury prevention	3
Safe and timely return to work	5
Building confidence in the WCB	6
Working with others	7
Service improvements	9
Financial sustainability	10
Implementation	11
Five Year Outcomes	12
Meredith Principles	inside back cover

Meredith Principles

The genesis of workers' compensation is the historic compromise which rests on the principle of mutual protection – workers gave up their right to sue over workplace injuries and, in return, employers agreed to fund a no-fault insurance system.

The no-fault aspect of workers' compensation is a founding principle of workers' compensation in Canada.

The *Meredith Principles* can be found on the inside back cover of this plan.



Vision and Mission

Our Vision

Nova Scotians – safe and secure from workplace injury.

Our Mission

We set the standard for workplace injury insurance. We inform and inspire Nova Scotians in the prevention of workplace injury, but if it occurs, we support those whose lives it touches by championing a timely return to safe and healthy work.

Working in concert with workers, employers and our partners, our goals are to:

- Build a workplace safety culture.
- Improve outcomes for safe and timely return to work.
- Be an organization with a skilled and committed team of employees with the knowledge and tools to provide excellent service, and who are proud of what they do.
- Be an organization providing excellent and efficient service that is open and accountable to the people we serve and the public.
- Be an organization that is financially stable and sustainable.

Values

The WCB's role is to lead by example – as a partner, a service provider and an employer. To that end, our actions are guided by the following values:

Can-do Attitude

We will deliver on our promises and provide top-notch service.

Safety Champions

We will be a champion for workplace safety through our relationships and innovative solutions, and by keeping prevention and return to work at the heart of our business.

Caring and Compassionate

We will strive to walk a mile in workers' and employers' shoes. We will serve as we like to be served and provide those we serve with the respect and support they need to be successful.

Over the next five years, we will build on our successes and focus on elements of our existing plan that stakeholders agree make sense to continue – injury prevention, safe and timely return to work, building confidence in the WCB and ensuring financial sustainability of the system. In addition, we will focus on two new elements – working with others and making service improvements.

Six Key Strategic Themes

To achieve our vision and mission, the following six key strategic themes will guide the WCB and provide focus for our service delivery:

- 1 An unwavering focus on **workplace injury prevention**.
- 2 Helping injured workers and employers plan a safe and timely **return to work**.
- 3 Building **confidence** in the WCB by engaging workers and employers in creating safer workplaces.
- 4 **Working with others** to expand the commitment to injury prevention and return to work across the province thereby further improving outcomes for Nova Scotians.
- 5 Making **service improvements** to provide workers and employers with a higher level of service tailored to meet their needs – supportive, compassionate service.
- 6 Maintaining our current strategy to reach full funding and bring **financial sustainability** to the Workplace Safety and Insurance System.



First Strategic Theme: An unwavering focus on workplace injury prevention.

Five Year Strategic Direction

There can be no compromise. Work-related deaths and injuries are unacceptable. Stakeholders have consistently said the WCB's primary focus must be on injury prevention – above everything else. The best outcome for Nova Scotia is that no one is injured on the job.

When we achieve this new reality, Nova Scotia will be a leader in workplace safety. Workplace safety is a key to productivity and an essential economic driver in the fiscal health of our province.

Creating safer workplaces will not only reduce the human toll of workplace injury, it will help employers attract top-notch employees, improve employee retention, generate positive morale, decrease retraining costs, and increase efficiency. These are especially important factors as competition for skilled labour in Nova Scotia increases.

Unlike today where over 30,000 workers are injured on the job every year, we can live in a province where being injured at work is a rare occurrence. In the future, injured workers will always work together with their employer to return to work in a timely manner because everyone will recognize that their contribution is so valuable – to their family, their employer and to the province.

Anyone involved in today's workplace will recognize that achieving this requires significant cultural change. As a champion of workplace safety, the WCB will work with our partners and be a catalyst to change societal attitudes so that injuries are no longer acceptable. Raising awareness, changing attitudes and changing behaviour is a multi-year commitment. The outcomes we are seeking can only be achieved with the engagement of workplaces across the province. All Nova Scotians must understand how it can be different, and take steps in their workplaces to achieve different results.

The prevention imperative drives our strategy and we will focus on the following:

- **Youth:** ensure young people have the awareness, education, training and understanding of the importance of workplace safety before they enter the workforce.
- **Training:** ensure workers and employers are aware of and have access to occupational health and safety training.
- **Financial incentives and disincentives:** review the WCB's rate setting system to ensure it provides adequate and appropriate incentives for companies that adopt best practice and are making progress in their occupational health and safety and return to work programs; and provide disincentives for those firms with high costs.
- **Service:** working with the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development, focus on industries and firms with high rates of injuries to help them put in place programs to meet their workplace safety needs and to ensure they are complying with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and regulation made under that Act.



- **Workplace Services:** develop tools, resources and services specifically designed to help small, medium and large businesses meet their workers' compensation and occupational health and safety responsibilities.
- **Partnerships:** work with our partners in the Workplace Safety and Insurance System, employers, workers, unions and all other partners in safety to continue to build a workplace safety culture and be champions for health and safety in Nova Scotia.

Going forward, we will continue social marketing campaigns to ensure the right message is getting to the right people. Our messages will be effective if they are timely, meaningful, relevant and reinforced with appropriate actions. As part of that effort, we must reach young workers and help them take an interest in safety on the job. We have to help them realize that workplace safety should be a concern for their whole working life – starting now.

Second Strategic Theme: Helping injured workers and employers plan a safe and timely return to work.

Five Year Strategic Direction

People care for people. Tailored, compassionate service will be the hallmark of the WCB and working with employers, workers, unions and health care providers our shared focus will be to see workers safely return to work in a timely manner following a workplace injury.

We will work with injured workers, their employers, their union and their health care providers to achieve a shared understanding of the recovery and return to work process. Work is healthy and a key aspect of injury recovery. When a worker is injured, our priority will be to meet the needs of that worker and their employer from the moment of first contact with the WCB through to return to work.

To achieve this, the WCB will focus on a number of priorities:

- **Timely return to safe work:** engage all parties – workers, employers, unions, health care providers, and the WCB – to ensure that injured workers have a safe and timely return to work and that they understand the process and their rights, roles and responsibilities in that process. As they participate in transitional duties, injured workers will make a contribution to the workplace.
- **Health care:** clarify the role of health care providers (physician and physiotherapist) immediately following an injury in determining a worker's readiness to return to work and in determining transitional work.
- **Service:** increase collaboration among the WCB, employers, workers, unions, and health care providers on return to work management.

- **Apply best practices:** expand the application of best practices in return to work and help workplace parties understand how this could help in their workplace.

We will listen to injured workers and employers and respond to their needs from a position of skill and knowledge. The success of our strategy requires a team effort and the WCB's team of professional, compassionate and highly trained employees working together to deliver quality service is essential.

Third Strategic Theme: Build confidence in the WCB by engaging workers and employers in creating safer workplaces.

Five Year Strategic Direction

The notion of confidence in an organization is hard to define but stakeholders and the public must have confidence in the WCB if we are to reach our goals. At the core of building confidence is the need for the WCB to achieve our business objectives in the short and long term. By listening to workers and employers, and working with our partners to help create safer workplaces, we believe confidence in the WCB will grow. Areas of focus in building confidence are:

- **Awareness and knowledge of the System:** ensure greater understanding of the role of the partners within the Workplace Safety and Insurance System, including programs and services available to workplaces, and create forums for sharing and learning.
- **Collaboration:** increase collaboration across the Workplace Safety and Insurance System to deliver programs and services.
- **Partnerships:** be champions for health and safety by working with partners and engaging leaders across the province in changing the workplace safety culture.
- **Transparency:** ensure resources are available to help workers and employers navigate the workers' compensation and occupational health and safety systems; continue to engage with stakeholders to understand concerns and be responsive to issues.
- **Enterprise Risk Management:** in addition to focusing externally, expand on the internal processes the WCB uses to manage risks or seize opportunities related to the achievement of our business objectives.
- **Legislative change:** recognizing the varied points of view stakeholders may hold about appropriate changes to the *Workers' Compensation Act*, engage stakeholders in a discussion about an appropriate process to develop an agenda for legislative change.

Over the past few years, the board of directors has tried different approaches to ensure stakeholder input into the development of program policies – to better understand stakeholders’ priorities for which topics should be explored and ensuring stakeholders have the opportunity to provide input into the content of new and revised policies.

In 2008, the board of directors put in place a new policy consultation approach to both streamline the process and to create a forum for stakeholders to have face-to-face interaction. To provide greater flexibility and responsiveness to the process (and appreciating the complexities involved in developing program policy) the board has decided that rather than setting the program policy agenda on an annual basis, it will be instead a “rolling agenda”. As the list of priority topics reaches completion, stakeholders will be invited to provide input on the next ideas/issues to be explored.

Fourth Strategic Theme: Work with others to expand the commitment to injury prevention and return to work across the province thereby further improving outcomes for Nova Scotians.

Five Year Strategic Direction

In carrying out our work, the WCB will add value to the workers’ compensation system and our stakeholders by fostering a co-operative and consultative relationship with workers and employers that encourages ongoing feedback and advice, and leveraging the efforts of others who are passionate about safety and return to work to further improve outcomes for Nova Scotians.

Together, we can prevent workplace injuries from occurring in the first place. The WCB will spend more time in workplaces and better understand their specific needs. Workers and employers have said the WCB’s one-size-fits-all approach to serving workplaces is not sufficient. Small businesses have very different needs than their larger counterparts. For the small business person, the WCB will develop a broader range of service channels that can be easily accessed at times convenient for small business. Large workplaces want the WCB to spend more time with them in their work environment and better understand their industry and the challenges they are facing. Unlike small businesses where injuries typically occur infrequently, large businesses may experience multiple injuries each year and thus require more sophisticated injury prevention and return to work services. They want to establish stronger relationships with WCB employees so we can more effectively work together to improve the large workplace’s safety and return to work performance.

Many other Nova Scotians are also enthusiastic advocates of workplace safety. The WCB will build on its relationships with established safety associations and work with industry partners towards the creation of more industry specific safety associations. We also will seek out many more partnership opportunities to ensure the entire safety community works together effectively and efficiently. We are part of a system that is driven by a number of essential partners: workers, employers, unions, industry and safety associations, the OH&S Advisory Council, government, health care providers, and our partner agencies in the System. We will be successful by being sensitive to the strategic priorities of our partners and working with them in the development and implementation of our plans, policies and programs.



We will focus on:

- **Working with stakeholders:** provide workplaces – large or small – with the service they need and continuing to work with industry to develop and support industry funded safety associations.
- **Working with partner agencies:** work with the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development, and the Occupational Health and Safety Division in particular, to share information, align resources, target workplaces and support initiatives such as the Internal Responsibility System, ergonomics and skills development. As an extension of that process we will build a common visual identity so that every interaction or communication comes with it the promise of workplace safety.
- **Working with workplaces:** ensure workplaces have access to relevant information and statistics on workplace health and safety and return to work.

Employees in the workplace and their families have the right to be protected from workplace injury and death. It should be a promise that employers make to their employees and it should be the societal norm. By working with others, we will identify partners who can help us develop powerful programs to bring the message to all Nova Scotians that workplace injury is unacceptable and unnecessary.

Fifth Strategic Theme: Make service improvements to provide workers and employers with a higher level of service tailored to meet their needs – supportive, compassionate service.

Five Year Strategic Direction

The WCB will develop programs, tools and services to encourage and support workplaces. We are committed to making service improvements to ensure our services are well co-ordinated, accessible and supportive to help achieve the best results for workplaces in Nova Scotia.

Recent stakeholder feedback supports the WCB's return to work philosophy but concerns were raised with the application of some elements of the program, in particular re-injury during treatment and direct access to physiotherapy in the absence of a physician's diagnosis.

As a result, as we move forward, our areas of focus will be:

- **Health care:** ensure workers have timely access to quality health care services, including expedited surgeries, and ensure a quality assurance system is in place for health care service delivery.
- **Refine health care programs:** continue to develop and refine health care programs and agreements designed to improve safe and timely return to work such as direct access to physiotherapy and improved information from physicians.
- **Investigate re-injury during treatment:** ensure investigation and follow up on occurrences of re-injury during treatment and return to work with the goal of preventing this from happening in the first place.

- **Quality decision-making and issue resolution:** make the system less litigious – make the right decision at the earliest time with issue resolution at early stages. Ensure a quality assurance system is in place for decision-making.
- **Service excellence:** ensure workplaces have greater continuity in service from the WCB and ensure WCB employees have the training and experience they need to meet the expectations of workers and employers.
- **Technology:** leverage technology and resources to enable the WCB to better meet stakeholder expectations.

Within these strategic areas of focus we will undertake activities and initiatives to improve service over the next five years to be reflected in operational business plans for each of the years from 2010 – 2014. Continuous scanning of emerging issues and responding to stakeholder concerns will be fundamental to our future success.

Sixth Strategic Theme: Maintain our current strategy to reach full funding and bring financial sustainability to the Workplace Safety and Insurance System

Five Year Strategic Direction

The WCB maintains a funding strategy to manage the risks and uncertainties that may result from financial pressures on the system. The WCB's strategy is to become fully funded so that future generations of employers will no longer have to fund shortfalls in the Accident Fund on top of their regular premiums. Ensuring solid financial stewardship of the Accident Fund also means the WCB can live up to its commitment to compensate workers and their families now and into the future. As we move forward, our focus will be on:

- **Funding and balance:** maintain the financial sustainability of the system, while balancing the needs of workers and employers.
- **Achieve full funding:** eliminate the unfunded liability.

Our unfunded status has been an albatross for the system for many years and it limits the choices we have available. There has been progress in moving from being only 27% funded in 1992 to being 75% funded in 2007 – although our funded position has gone down to 60% in 2008 due to volatility in the financial markets. However, as much as we understand this situation continues to be a source of frustration for everyone in the system, due to recent challenges in the investment markets, the epitaph of the unfunded liability will not be written for many years. Based on the WCB's financial results for 2008 and a recent asset/liability study, the board believes we may need to revisit the funding strategy with stakeholders.

Implementation

This strategy was developed in consultation with stakeholders and our partners. We recognize the increasingly complex and changing world of work and that the new economic environment in which we live could result in increasingly difficult challenges to overcome as we strive toward our vision of *Nova Scotians – safe and secure from workplace injury*.

We also recognize that successfully implementing this strategy requires the commitment and proactive involvement of all workplace influencers; everyone must believe that workplace injury is unacceptable and helping injured workers return to work in a safe and timely manner is of paramount importance.

This plan covers a period of five years and it defines in broad terms the strategies that will carry the WCB into the future. Some of the initiatives described in this plan will be in place shortly (2010) while others will evolve over time. For initiatives planned into the future, less detail is known at this point. The development of major initiatives will involve further consultation with stakeholders and some of the initiatives described in this plan will evolve and change as they are investigated and developed.

For each of the five years covered in this plan, our focus will be on delivering the six key strategic themes. Each year, the board of directors will approve an operational business plan that crystallizes the details of the initiatives the WCB will undertake to advance these themes.

Resources will be allocated and aligned in the most effective way – with targets set and results measured. In order to respond to changing workforce pressures and dynamics, there is flexibility built into this plan. Our progress in implementing this strategy will be reported to Nova Scotians in our annual report published each spring.

Five Year Outcomes

Work gives us the means to put food on our tables and a roof above our heads. It also gives us structure and sense of belonging to a group. Success at work fuels a sense of confidence and through work we can all realize aspects of our potential.

The benefits of injury prevention and return to work are substantive. For workers, families, and communities, there is continued quality of life, ongoing participation in work, leisure and educational activities and preservation of income. For businesses, ensuring employees are safe and on the job means more profits, reduced disruption to operations, increased productivity and competitiveness, retention of valued employees and reduced exposure to rising workers' compensation costs.

It is so encouraging to have witnessed the drop in Nova Scotia's injury rate and the length of time injured workers are off work due to their injuries over the past few years. But it's hardly good news yet. Workplace injuries continue to take too great a toll on Nova Scotia.

Our job at the WCB is to collaborate with our partners to help the tens of thousands of workers who are injured in the workplace each year and the people they work for. We need to do all that we can to prevent injuries and to help keep injured workers connected to their work communities while they are off, so they can take up their valued place again as soon as they are able.

The successful implementation of this plan will mean that since 2005, approximately 6,800 fewer people will be injured on the job and 1,800 fewer people will lose time from work each year. Additionally, those workers who are injured will return to work an average of 35 days sooner than workers with injuries in 2005 or prior years. That translates into 520,000 more days at work or the equivalent of about 1425 people working for a year. In financial terms, the cost of workplace injury insurance will be reduced by \$35 million annually and we will be that much closer to finally eliminating the unfunded liability.

Small business owners and their employees will have greater access to WCB services while large workplaces will receive excellent service from dedicated teams of WCB employees that have a greater understanding of their workplace and their industry.

There is reason for optimism. Workplace injury is totally avoidable in Nova Scotia. By working together, we can make safer workplaces a reality.

Meredith Principles

In 1910, Mr. Justice William Meredith was appointed to a Royal Commission to study workers' compensation. His final report, known as the Meredith Report was produced in 1913.

The Meredith Report outlined a trade-off in which workers relinquish their right to sue in exchange for compensation benefits. Meredith advocated for no-fault insurance, collective liability, independent administration, and exclusive jurisdiction. The system exists at arms-length from the government and is shielded from political influence, allowing only limited powers to the Minister responsible.

There were five basic cornerstones to the original workers' compensation laws; cornerstones which have survived, to a greater or lesser extent, as follows:

1. **No-fault compensation:** Workplace injuries are compensated regardless of fault. The worker and employer waive the right to sue. There is no argument over responsibility or liability for an injury. Fault becomes irrelevant, and providing compensation becomes the focus.
2. **Collective liability:** The total cost of the compensation system is shared by all employers. All employers contribute to a common fund. Financial liability becomes their collective responsibility.
3. **Security of payment:** A fund is established to guarantee that compensation monies will be available. Injured workers are assured of prompt compensation and future benefits.
4. **Exclusive jurisdiction:** All compensation claims are directed solely to the compensation board. The board is the decision-maker and final authority for all claims. The board is not bound by legal precedent; it has the power and authority to judge each case on its individual merits.
5. **Independent board:** The governing board is both autonomous and non-political. The board is financially independent of government or any special interest group. The administration of the system is focused on the needs of its employer and worker clients, providing service with efficiency and impartiality.

WORK SAFE. FOR LIFE.

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