

Meeting notes: Workers' Compensation Insurers' Task Force (WCTIF)

Date: Sept. 17, 2025

Minutes prepared by: Katrina Namad

Location: Hybrid – Minnesota Room at the Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), 443 Lafayette Road N., St. Paul, MN, and via Webex

Members present

- Gary Westman, co-chair
- Lee Ingrassia, co-chair
- Angie Andresen (remotely)
- Sarah Groskreutz (remotely)
- Stacy Kohlhofer (remotely)
- Deb Norsten
- Michael Schneider (remotely)
- Sherry Staffa (remotely)
- John Wiatros
- Lee Ziegler (remotely)

Members absent

- Matthew Fasse
- Mike Johns
- Steve Patton
- Ryan Shaughnessy

Visitors present

- Bruce Alexander, Ph.D., University of Minnesota
- Andrew Ryan, M.S., University of Minnesota
- Hyun Kim, Sc.D., University of Minnesota
- Stephanie Hooker, Ph.D., University of Minnesota

DLI staff members present

- Abdi Takhal (remotely)
- April DelCastillo
- Jeff Hendrix
- Bretta Hines
- Brian Zaidman
- Cheryl Sherbel
- Denise Holmes
- Elora Leene (remotely)
- Ethan Landy (remotely)
- Hared Mah
- Jeanne Vogel (remotely)
- Jessica Stimac, assistant commissioner
- Joe Lolich
- Karen Kask-Meinke (remotely)
- Katrina Namad
- Laura Zajac
- Lisa Wichterman (remotely)
- Lynne Knowles (remotely)
- Maggie Blanshan
- Mike Solheid
- Nichole Sorenson
- Sandy Stoddard
- Sharon Benkufsky (remotely)
- Tom Garza (remotely)
- Virginia Prax (remotely)

Agenda items

1. **Call to order** – The meeting was called to order by co-chair Lee Ingrassia at 9:03 a.m. Roll call was taken. Brief introductions were made.
2. **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) study report – Dr. Bruce Alexander, University of Minnesota Center for Occupational Health and Safety**
 - This study examined work-related PTSD in Minnesota, focusing on the impact of the rebuttable presumption law. It found a significant rise in PTSD claims – especially among presumption-covered occupations – paired with high denial rates and lower return-to-work outcomes. Stakeholder feedback highlighted data gaps, communication issues and misaligned timelines between clinical diagnosis and administrative processes. Recommendations include improving data quality, expanding provider eligibility, aligning timelines with clinical realities, and enhancing access to care and vocational support. The study also emphasized the need for regular review of treatment protocols and ongoing monitoring of PTSD trends in the workers’ compensation system. A more detailed overview of the presentation is available if requested.
 - The Minnesota Workers’ Compensation Advisory Council, a bipartisan body of labor and business representatives, commissioned a study to inform potential policy changes related to PTSD claims. While the DLI facilitated the report, its recommendations are not part of the department’s policy bill and may be adopted, modified or dismissed by the council. The report was presented Sept. 10, with further discussion expected at the Oct. 8 meeting. Public participation is encouraged, though no immediate decisions are anticipated.
 - Several stakeholders raised concerns during the review. Gary Westman highlighted the lack of data on long-term outcomes for PTSD claimants, which Alexander and Assistant Commissioner Jessica Stimac acknowledged as a significant gap due to high denial rates and limited followup. Deb Norsten inquired about other states including nurses in PTSD presumptions, with Washington identified as the only one. John Wiatros raised issues with the undefined term substantial in claim evaluations, suggesting it may contribute to inconsistent decisions and high denial rates. He also questioned return-to-work outcomes, with data showing workers with denied, uncontested claims often returned to work more quickly than those with accepted or contested claims.
3. **Minnesota Workers’ Compensation System Report – Hared Mah, DLI Research and Data Analytics**
 - The *2023 Workers’ Compensation System Report* for Minnesota highlights long-term declines in benefit costs, with indemnity and medical benefits decreasing by 38% and 50%, respectively, since 2003. COVID-19 temporarily impacted claim trends, but recent data shows a return to pre-pandemic patterns. Wage growth and longer disability durations have contributed to rising average benefits in recent years. Vocational rehabilitation participation and service timelines have improved, while return-to-work rates slightly declined. Dispute-resolution activity shows fewer conferences but more mediations, with legislative changes affecting scheduling timelines. Overall, the system continues to evolve with a focus on efficiency, access and cost control. A more detailed overview of the presentation is available if requested.
4. **Work Comp Campus update – Jeff Hendrix, DLI Business Technology Office**
 - The Work Comp Campus product team provided a brief update highlighting recent system improvements, coming initiatives and key accomplishments. Current efforts focus on enhancing how

benefits data is collected, stored and displayed, including backend data restructuring, improved validation and a redesigned user interface set to launch within weeks. Looking ahead, the team will begin modernizing the assessments process, improving integration with financial systems and enhancing user experience through interface updates in early 2026. The team continues to prioritize stakeholder engagement, having conducted 86 usability sessions since early 2023 and having recently collaborated with the qualified rehabilitation consultant (QRC) community to co-design improvements. Since January 2025, 31 successful code deployments have delivered more than 340 enhancements, reflecting a shift to smaller, more frequent releases that reduce risk and accelerate value delivery. The Campus team remains committed to user-centered development and ongoing system refinement. A more detailed overview of the presentation is available if requested.

5. Rulemaking update – Bretta Hines, DLI Office of General Counsel

1. As required, the workers' compensation medical fee schedule and relative value units (RVUs) are updated every three years, with annual updates to conversion factors. Effective Oct. 1, 2025, updates will be implemented through exempt rulemaking, which does not require a public comment period. The rules have been approved by the Court of Administrative Hearings and will be published in the *State Register* next week. They are currently available on DLI's rulemaking webpage.
2. Key updates include incorporation of the 2025 Medicare RVU and GPCI tables, adjustments to conversion factors to maintain payment consistency across service categories and amendments to Minnesota Rules 5221 to reflect these changes. Conversion factors and maximum fees for independent medical examinations (IMEs) will increase by 1.9%.
3. Additionally, effective Oct. 1:
 - a. The statewide average weekly wage will increase to \$1,423.
 - b. The maximum hourly rate for QRC services will increase by 3% to \$129.98.
 - c. The maximum hourly rate for job development and placement services will increase by 3% to \$104.09.
4. All updates will be posted on DLI's website and shared via the *COMPACT* newsletter and email. Stakeholders are encouraged to subscribe for detailed notifications.

6. Department updates – DLI Assistant Commissioner Jessica Stimac

1. The department has been working with MWCIA on a public-facing website that will display zero-estimated exposure policies and reported construction class codes, effective Jan. 1, 2026. This initiative aligns with the 2025 Workers' Compensation Advisory Council recommendations and legislation. Appreciation is extended to MWCIA for its collaboration.
2. An article with FAQs is also in development and will be published in the fall 2025 edition of the *CCLD Review* newsletter. This content is particularly relevant to construction providers impacted by zero-estimated exposure policies and is expected to be released within the next week.
3. Additionally, a reminder that the Workers' Compensation Forum is scheduled for Oct. 14. Hosted by MWCIA and WCRA, the event includes a panel discussion featuring the Department of Commerce, MWCIA, WCRA and DLI, as well as breakout sessions on topics such as:
 - a. Medicare;
 - b. the state of the Minnesota workers' compensation market;
 - c. orthotics and prosthetics;
 - d. health care trends;

- e. WCRI insights;
- f. multi-generational workforce challenges and opportunities; and
- g. advanced investigations.

DLI and Dr. Alexander will also present findings from the PTSD study. Attendance is encouraged for networking and professional development.

- 7. Future agenda items** – Please reach out to co-chairs Lee Ingrassia and Gary Westman with future agenda item suggestions.
- 8. Next meeting** – The next WCITF meeting will be Nov. 19, 2025.

Adjournment

Ingrassia declared adjournment of the meeting at 10:29 a.m.