

Meeting minutes: Workers' Compensation Advisory Council

Date: Nov. 12, 2025

Minutes prepared by: Alyssa Westergard, executive secretary to the Workers' Compensation Advisory Council

Location: Department of Labor and Industry, Minnesota Room, 443 Lafayette Road N., St. Paul, MN

Attendance

Members attended

Bill Gschwind
Bob Ryan
David Henrich
Doug Loon
Gary Thaden
Hannah Alstead
John Thorson
Maggie Hobbs
Matthew Schmidt
Melissa Hysing
Rep. Dave Baker
Sen. Jennifer McEwen

DLI staff members attended

Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach
Assistant Commissioner Jessica Stimac
Alyssa Westergard
Alexis Johnson
April DelCastillo
Bretta Hines
Brian Zaidman
Carey Wagner
Denise Holmes
Donna Olson
Elisabeth Griswold
Ender Kavas
Ethan Landy
Hared Mah
Jeanne Vogel
Jerrica Walker
Joe Lolich
Josiah Moore

Karen Kask-Meinke
Ken McGurran
Kristin Osiecki
Laura Zajac
Melissa Parish
Michelle Doheny
Nichole Sorenson
Sandy Stoddard
Sharon Benkufsky
Tom Garza

Visitors attended

Adam Wolkoff, Court of Administrative Hearings
Ames Gascoigne, Wilson McShane
Andrea Everling, MWCIA
Anna Kim, LMC
Auntara De, MWCIA
Bill Marshall, UCWCP
Carla Ferrucci, MAJ
Celina Vang, LMC
Danny Ackert, Minnesota Hospitals
Jerry Sisk, Mottaz Sisk
Joel Carlson, MAJ
Jonathan Boesche, NFIB
Kara Huberty, LMC
Kathleen Moulton, Allina
Kathy Bray, SFM
Lauryn Schothorst, Minnesota Chamber of
Commerce
Mark Freeman, Teplinsky Law Group
Rebecca Yang, WCRI
Steve Hollander, Voc Rehab Associates
Tori Kee, LMC

Call to order and roll call

Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach called the meeting to order at 9:39 a.m. A roll call was taken and a quorum was present.

Approval of the minutes and agenda

Doug Loon moved to accept today's agenda and the minutes from Oct. 8, 2025. Hannah Alstead seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the motion carried.

Announcements

Commissioner Blissenbach advised the council that the December Workers' Compensation Advisory Council (WCAC) meeting is canceled and the council will plan to reconvene at the regularly scheduled meeting Jan. 14, 2026. The commissioner also noted the agency had issued a revised report about the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) study and it was published on the agency's website at the end of October. The commissioner said the reason for this revision was that they had been made aware of potentially improperly generated citations in section eight of the study. She also noted the revisions did not have an impact on the analysis of the PTSD claims contained in the report, nor the policy recommendations. Commissioner Blissenbach's final announcement was that this WCAC meeting would be the last for Brian Zaidman, Research and Data Analytics, because he is retiring in January after almost 41 years of state service. She acknowledged all the work he has done with the agency and the council and wished him the best in his retirement.

Agenda items

1. Work Comp Campus Update

Michelle Doheny, director, Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) Business Technology Office (BTO), addressed the council regarding some updates to Work Comp Campus and what the unit is working on. Doheny began by recapping what her unit had been working on in 2024, which was mainly system upgrades to Campus. They also worked on documents in Campus, including how they are accessed and viewed by users, data cleanup and access between the Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals and DLI. Doheny also said they hired a user-experience expert, a user-interface designer and a second product owner, as well as securing some additional funding to invest in user experience. The additional funding has allowed BTO to deploy Campus updates every two weeks, whereas before it was doing them quarterly. Deploying every two weeks allows updates to go out sooner and lets BTO find other problems faster and fix them quicker. Doheny noted the other thing her unit has really been focusing on is usability studies and relationship building with stakeholders.

One main area BTO focused on updating and improving in 2025 was the qualified rehabilitation consultant (QRC) user enhancement. They worked closely with QRCs to determine the issues they were having, problem solving and then testing the improvements prior to making them live. Doheny said BTO received very positive feedback about the process, as well as the new features.

Another feature BTO has been focusing on this past year is the search and navigation function.

Previously, the search feature was case sensitive and would not recognize extra spaces. Now, if you have any sort of extra space or improper capitalization, you will get results back from your search instead of an error.

The next update BTO is working on is to the benefit data contained in Campus. The goal is to improve the data quality, as well as how users see and interact with the benefit data. This will also positively impact monitoring compliance and the ability to create meaningful reports.

A few other areas the unit is working on are some compliance-related improvements to the system to make sure we are complying with our statutes, data quality and automated testing. Doheny said she and the BTO staff members also have an ongoing collaboration with the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) for sharing workers' compensation data related to paid family leave.

Gary Thaden and Loon had some questions regarding the data and information exchange between DLI and DEED, and additional discussion ensued.

2. Permanent partial disability presentation

Hared Mah, DLI Research and Data Analytics, addressed the council to give an overview of permanent partial disability (PPD) benefit schedule increases, a comparison of PPD benefit growth to commonly used inflation indices and wage growth in Minnesota, and the consequences of non-indexing. Mah noted that in October 2023, PPD benefits increased by different proportionate amounts for different impairment ratings, resulting in an estimated overall increase of 38%. The previous increases to PPD ratings had been made in 2000, with an overall estimated increase of 14.1%, and in 2018 with a 5% increase.

Mah said the PPD benefit schedule increased by 65% from 1984 to 2024, with the state average weekly wage (SAWW) for Minnesota increasing by 418%. He also noted that due to the largely stationary level of the PPD benefit schedule, and the rising levels of the wage and price increases, the adjusted levels of the PPD benefit schedule are generally falling over time.

Mah also pointed out the absence of indexing exerted a downward effect on system cost relative to payroll that became progressively larger over time. This downward trend was temporarily reversed in 2023 to 2024 due to the one-time increase in PPD benefits. However, by 2024, the PPD schedule was 60.5% lower than if it had been indexed to the SAWW.

Mah summarized the preliminary result of the impact of the 2023 PPD schedule increase, noting the median payment increased 45% from 2023 to 2024, while the average PPD payment remained stable from 2020 to 2023, but increased by 11% from 2023 to 2024. He also noted the median impairment rating has remained at 3% since 2021, while the average rating has ranged between 5.5% and 6% during the same period.

Several council members had questions for Mah and additional discussion ensued.

Other business

The next Workers' Compensation Advisory Council meeting will be Jan. 14, 2026.

Adjournment

Bob Ryan moved to adjourn the meeting and Thaden seconded. A vote was taken and the meeting adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Alyssa Westergard, executive secretary