
CHAPTER 7

New Administration Has the Opportunity to Improve Claims Processing

WSCD quickly and efficiently provides benefits to workers with medical-only injuries.

For the last decade, WSCD has focused upon improving its financial condition. It appears this focus has paid off, as the Division has increased its liability funding from 4 to 71 percent. Having a statutory charge to become solvent by 2008 has provided a clear goal for WSCD and DOE officials to strive toward, and against which to measure Division progress.

WSCD needs to follow through to ensure that injured workers needing lost wage benefits receive them quickly.

However, we did not see a similar monitored focus upon improving claims processing. Perhaps this is because the Division meets its responsibility to quickly and efficiently provide benefits to most injured workers: those who need only medical benefits. However, the Division has not done as well in providing timely indemnity benefits, which only the more severe, and fewer, workplace injuries require. It is encouraging that WSCD has set a goal of improving its performance in this area, but it needs to follow through by implementing the systems necessary to measure progress.

Report recommendations will improve claims processing.

Workers' Compensation is a complex and legalistic program, with many aspects that can undermine quick and efficient claims processing. In this report, we chose to look at three that seemed to pose addressable obstacles to WSCD delivering benefits to all injured workers as statute intends. These were staffing, communications, and contested case practices. In each of these areas, we made recommendations for changes that we believe will facilitate efficient claims processing and thereby diminish claimant dissatisfaction.

Finally, we believe the Division would benefit from having some formal outside perspective, such as an advisory council could provide. Left on its own, it does not appear that WSCD has focused to the extent it could on identifying and solving systemic problems with claims processing. An advisory council could involve informed individuals from affected interest groups in monitoring the program.

The Division's new administration can choose to implement these recommendations, as well as others it develops independently, to improve claims processing. As a process that potentially affects nearly all Wyoming workers and employers, it is one that deserves this attention.