

Connect & Care

Background to the program's development

The Connect & Care project kicked off in 2019 as a collaborative initiative involving the Agency Engagement Team at icare New South Wales (icare), QBE Insurance (QBE) and the Department of Community and Justice (DCJ).

The project aimed to improve leader capability to support and optimise the recovery and return to work of employees who have suffered a psychological injury, identify potential interventions and solutions, devise and deliver a comprehensive co-designed intervention program, and evaluate this intervention.

Why Connect & Care was created

Psychological injury claims are amongst those with the highest growth rate and increasing expenditure in the NSW Workers Compensation scheme. To understand the multi-faceted causes for this position, icare conducted quarterly health checks covering claims management practices, medical management, low-value care, portfolio management and customer behaviour.

Customer behaviour was assessed to determine any relationship between workers who have had less than 13 weeks off work due to a workplace injury and employers' behaviours that positively impacted claims outcomes, with a focus on 'return to wellness' and 'return to work'.

During this health check, there was early evidence that employers who actively engaged with their workers immediately following the date of incapacity and maintained contact throughout the liability determination period, had lower rates of worker dissatisfaction, higher perceived positive engagement and increased interest and participation in recovery and return to work.

In response to this evidence, icare consulted with numerous employers to understand why some were not engaging with workers who sustained psychological injury. This engagement revealed the following themes:

- Employers were scared that further contact with workers would aggravate symptoms.
- Employers did not feel confident in how to respond to or manage complex behaviours over the phone (crying, aggression, self-harm etc).
- Employers felt sceptical the psychological injury occurred during employment because there is a lack of tangible evidence available with such injuries.
- Employers felt disempowered to influence return to work on psychological injury claims.

Understanding the reasons behind an employer's reluctance to engage workers with psychological injury was the catalyst for designing a practical tool that provides employers knowledge on when and how to positively engage workers with psychological injuries during the challenging acute injury phase and / or liability determination period, to increase successful and sustained return to work.

The '*Checklist for Employers – Engaging Workers after Psychological Injury*' (renamed to the Connect & Care Checklist) was designed to be interactive, offering employers the opportunity to document early positive interactions with workers covering connection, engagement, support and return to work.

Evidence based

The Checklist was designed based on claims management trends, return to work patterns and employer feedback. Before the Checklist was formally released to employers, icare had the Checklist independently reviewed including a systematic literature review undertaken in January 2019 by the RISE team at Griffith University.

The findings by Griffith University supported the *Checklist for Employers – Engaging Workers after Psychological Injury* as a best practice, evidence-based document. References to the literature were aligned to each action to

demonstrate that these behaviours are evidenced-based and further provides employers with the opportunity to build additional competence for responding to psychological injury claims.

Initial pilot

On 22 July 2019, approximately 20 Youth Justice employees at the Frank Baxter Centre suffered both physical and psychological injuries as the result of an inmate riot. The initial pilot program was run for the Centre to aid recovery and support return to work of these injured workers.

An education intervention was designed to increase leaders' capability to effectively connect, engage and support vulnerable workers by developing participants' theoretical knowledge and practical skills needed to effectively use the Checklist. The intervention relied on co-design principles to tailor the actions required of the line manager to support an injured worker to organisational needs and create a sustainable implementation framework. The intervention consisted of 3 workshops which included presentation of information on complex trauma and workers compensation processes and brainstorming of how to break down the biopsychosocial tools from the checklist to identify who within the organisation would be best fitted to take responsibility of each task.

The pilot was very successful resulting in positive outcomes which included:

1. A reduction in the incidence rate of physical and psychological Injuries by 57% in 2019 Q4 and 2020 Q1 compared to Q2 and Q3 of 2019 when the young offenders' riot of July 2019 occurred. Further analysis comparing the 2019 Q4 and 2020 Q1 to the incidence rate of the year before 2018 Q4 and 2019 Q1 showed a 28% reduction in incidence rates.
2. A reduction of approximately \$60K in overall spend of Psychological Injury claims costs in 2020 Q1 when comparing to 2019 Q4.
3. Further analysis shows the overall reduction of psychological injury claim cost in 2020 Q1 is mainly due to the reduction of weekly benefits paid.
4. Improvement in injured workers' customer experience scores since the first Workshop on November 2019. Frank Baxter are receiving a customer experience scores of 7 and above. Evenly split between passive and promoters with no detractors.

Based on the recommendations and feedback from the pilot, icare, QBE and DCJ further developed the program into a structured and experiential learning and development program which included pre and post-intervention materials that develop the skills to ensure an organisation is ready to deliver and implement their own programs, embed the processes in their workplace, and measure the impact.

Designing the Connect & Care (May 2020 – February 2021)

Following the initial pilot, a diverse project team from icare, QBE and agencies was put together to design, develop and further pilot the program.

Design and development approach

In designing the program, the team followed three key guidelines:

- Base the program on the research and empirical evidence which resulted in the Connect & Care Checklist.
- Leverage design thinking and co-design principles.
- Ensure the program is relevant, practicable and sustainable in the organisational context of participants (time and resource constraints), and adapted to demographic, educational and occupational profile of participants.

The development of the program followed the ADDIE instructional design methodology: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation.

Analysis

As input into the design of the program, the team undertook the following analysis activities:

- Consideration and further development of existing icare resources and research including the Connect & Care Checklist to support an injured worker.
- Analysis of the theories and research used to develop the Checklist in the fields of social, health, organisational and counselling psychology,
- Paper, online, and in-person sources of information and advice regarding practices, culture, and industry knowledge specific to front line team managers.
- Discussions in, and outcomes from regular project group meetings conducted by icare and QBE Insurance.
- Review of key learnings from the initial pilot at Frank Baxter Youth Justice Centre.

Design

The design process started with a facilitated instructional design workshop. This workshop focused on drawing out the experience from the initial pilot. It was built on with a deep dive brainstorm into the purpose, target audience, current and desired capabilities as well as an initial view on the education intervention that could deliver on this.

Development

Two experienced instructional designers from icare Risk Education eXpress and QBE Insurance partnered to develop the pre-work questionnaire and the content for the three two-hour workshops, which are at the core of the Connect & Care program. They were supported by subject matter experts in workers compensation and trauma from both icare and QBE. Other members of the project team played a critical role in reviewing the content and recommending any changes required to ensure a quality program that meets the approved design brief.

Implementation

The next step was to pilot both the face-to-face and virtual versions of the program, using the new designed and developed resources, with the NSW Department of Health and DCJ:

- Face-to face: Two cohorts at Kempsey Hospital and one cohort at John Morony Correctional Centre in Nov/ Dec 2020.
- Virtually: One cohort at South West Community Corrections in Dec 2020.

These four pilots were facilitated by two of the team from icare and QBE, who delivered the initial pilot at Frank Baxter, supported by a Workers Compensation expert from icare. To ensure they were fully prepared and that the program design was robust, the delivery team had several rehearsals and final changes were made to the program before it went live. Minor changes were made after each pilot for ongoing improvement.

Evaluation

The final step was evaluation of the four pilots against program objectives. The purpose of evaluating these pilots was to:

- Inform decision making aimed at improving, adapting, and refining the program.
- Justify further investment in the program scaling and demonstrate achievements and improvement areas.
- Ensure the content delivered is relevant to frontline managers across the NSW Public sector.
- Ensure the program can be successfully delivered virtually.

The evaluation was done via two activities: (1) feedback from participants and their leaders (2) debrief of the delivery team and observers of the pilots. The pilots achieved great results as evidenced by the net promoter score (NPS).

Agency	Version/Date	NPS
NSW Health - MNCLHD Kempsey Hospital	Face to Face Nov 2020 2 cohorts	+86 +100
DCJ - John Morony Correctional Centre	Face to Face Nov/Dec 2020	+89
DCJ - South West Community Corrections	Virtual Dec 2020	+100

Participant comments included:

'Improved knowledge of process but also buddies and engagement options.'

'Putting together a universal toolkit that we can all use as managers will ensure clear process and understanding throughout the organisation.'

'I am a new manager and it helped me with the current workers compensation staff and also will impact on how I treat staff in the future'

'Ability to think differently around certain situations'

'Implementing selfcare program'

'Ensuring contact and empathy with injured workers'

'Will provide better structures to support out injured workers.'

'Improving manager's knowledge on workers compensation injuries.'

'Better informed of process of workers compensation. Will be able to better support my staff. Also networking at the event was helpful.'

Scaling Connect & Care to NSW Government Agencies (April 2021 onwards)

The results of the original pilot resulted in the recommendation Connect & Care should be scaled to NSW Government agencies who are exposed to high risks of psychological injuries. Given the large numbers of line managers in Agencies, a Train the Trainer delivery approach was developed to optimise program scaling.

Access to the one day Connect & Care Train the Trainer is by application only. Interested agencies need to assess their agency's appetite, readiness and capacity to rollout Connect & Care with guidance from the Connect & Care Train the Trainer Application Form.

It is recommended that between three and five people from an agency attend the train the trainer course together to ensure they are sufficiently resourced to plan, deliver and embed Connect & Care. This ideally should include one person from HR, WHS, and RTW / injury or WC claims management and from Learning & Development who is an experienced facilitator/educator. The Train the Trainer course does not include developing facilitation skills. This capability is assumed.

Smaller Agencies, who don't have the internal capacity for the Train the Trainer delivery approach, can apply for an icare or QBE facilitated program to be run for cohorts of line managers in their Agency.

For more information on Connect & Care, contact Rex@icare.nsw.gov.au.