Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board preliminary rate information meeting (2026 rates)

Virtual presentation: Oct. 28, 2025

Gord Dobrowolsky

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for your interest in the WCB and for taking the time to join us today. On behalf of the WCB and my fellow board members, Larry Flowers, Don Malakoff, Judy Henley and Colin Smith-Windsor, it is indeed my pleasure to welcome you to our preliminary rate information meeting. This annual public meeting is part of our rate setting process so we can remain accountable to you. The WCB has exclusive jurisdiction in Saskatchewan and operates as an independent board, fully funded by employer premiums and investment income. Your feedback on proposed rates is important to us.

As always, we appreciate your time and engagement today. Thank you for your ongoing interest in the WCB. Workers' compensation is important because it provides essential, no-fault insurance coverage for work-related injuries and illnesses. The system ensures workers receive financial and medical benefits like lost income and treatment, without having to sue their employers. It also protects employers by providing them with liability coverage from lawsuits and promotes workplace safety by encouraging injury prevention.

At the heart of the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board, it is our vision to eliminate injuries and restore abilities. We want to prevent all workplace injuries and fatalities, but when injuries do occur, we focus on workplace disability prevention and mitigation to support workers in returning back to work safely. At the WCB, we strive to balance the needs of workers and employers to achieve our vision.

Our mission works to protect Saskatchewan workers and employers today and tomorrow through innovative and effective programs and services. This means we are always working with our customers and partners to make the necessary changes to our systems, processes and procedures to enhance our customer service and improve our outcomes. The foundation on which we achieve our vision through our mission is our four corporate values.

These values are the industry standards by which our actions and decisions are to be considered and judged by others. And that includes you, our customers. Our safety value means we relentlessly pursue the health and safety of all current and future workers in Saskatchewan. Our respect value recognizes the value and worth of every individual and we treat all persons fairly with dignity, valuing individual uniqueness and contributions.

Our excellence value means we continuously seek improvement and innovation, and how we carry out our work. Our collaboration value means that we work hand in hand with our customers, partners and each other to meet evolving needs. As a board, it is our legislative obligation to guarantee the future of our compensation system and as such, we are also obligated to be effective and astute financial stewards on behalf of the employers who fund the system.

This slide shows past year's average premium rates and the proposed 2026 average premium rate. Our rate model balances four competing principles of fairness, transparency, collective liability and predictability. The rate model ensures fairness by basing rates on actual risks and claims experience, transparency through publicly available policies and data, collective liability by distributing costs across industries to fund the system and predictability by using historical data to set future rates with unexpected ranges. Thomas Webb, our director of actuarial services, will go into more detail later in the presentation.

Each year, we use our rate model to determine the following year's rates. The rate model is our primary tool to forecast future rates and when we consider our strong-funded position, we are proposing a decrease in our average premium rate.

While we have not exceeded the target range of the sufficiency ratio, we are seeing sustainable growth of the system. For 2026, we are seeing growth in total assessable payroll because of wage inflation and workforce growth. We are continuing to see injury rates improve. However, claim costs are continuing to increase.

As the board balances all of these factors, I'm pleased to announce that the 2026 preliminary average rate is $1.22 per $100 of payroll. This is a six cent decrease from 2025’s average rate of $1.28. Again, Thomas Webb will go into more detail later in the presentation. Our proposed preliminary average premium rate for 2026 positions us to be among the lowest premium rates in all of Canada. Saskatchewan's premium rates have remained among the lowest in Canada for the past several decades. However, our goal is not to have the lowest rate in Canada.

Our goal is to uphold a balance between stable rates that ensure fairness, transparency, collective liability and predictability, and a fully funded compensation system. Employers can influence their industry and individual premium rate through effective injury prevention and return to work programs. The degree to which employers in our industry work to eliminate workplace injuries affects industry premium rates. After all, the least expensive injury is the one that never happens.

Individually, employers who eliminate injuries in their workplace can benefit from lower premium rates through the experience rating program. In 2024, for the fifth year in a row, 90 per cent of employers had zero injuries and zero fatalities in the workplace. This is a remarkable milestone. Congratulations. This means that Saskatchewan workers and employers are making safety a priority in their workplace culture to create safer workplaces in the province. Sincerely, on behalf of the board and everyone at WCB, thank you for all of your health and safety efforts.

Having said that, we know there is still more work to be done to eliminate fatalities, injuries and suffering. We must remain vigilant to eliminate injuries and fatalities. WorkSafe Saskatchewan, the partnership between the WCB and the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, provides employers and workers with online and classroom safety training, as well as safety and prevention tools, and resources and advisory services.

Employer premiums fund a range of benefits for workers and employers. Since 1911, the workers’ compensation system in Canada as we know it has operated according to the Meredith Principles. The Meredith Principles are five basic concepts that underlie all workers’ compensation legislation in Canada today. These principles remain as valid and important today as they ever were. These principles are an historic compromise in which employers fund the workers’ compensation system and in return, workers surrender their right to sue their employer for that injury. The principle stipulates that the WCB will provide no-fault mandatory insurance coverage to protect workers from earnings loss.

Through this no-fault system, employers are protected from legal action arising from workplace injury and collectively fund the compensation system. We remain committed to the Meredith Principles that protect workers, families, employers and communities. I'll now turn it over to Philip Germain, our CEO, who will discuss the economic trends and future funding considerations. Again, thank you very much for attending today's meeting.

Phillip Germain

Thanks, Gord. And good morning everyone, and thank you for joining us for our preliminary rate information meeting for our 2026 preliminary rates. I'm the WCB CEO, Phillip Germain and today, I'd like to thank each of you for taking time to join us. As Gord mentioned, our 2026 proposed average premium rate is $1.22, a six cent decrease from last year's rate.

A number of factors contributed to the decreased rate. This slide shows some of the key contributing factors to the 2026 average preliminary premium rate. In addition to our strong-funded position that Gord referenced, the WCB has also optimized its investment strategy to improve the long term expected return on its investments. Increased investment income potentially benefits employers by reducing premiums needed to operate the compensation system.

The 2026 projected payroll is 7.6 per cent higher than the projection used for the 2025 rates. Assessable payroll is projected to continue its upward trend, reflecting positive economic conditions, wage growth and increased employment across various sectors. High long-term claim costs, as indicated on the slide, are an increasing factor on the rates. Claim costs for long-term benefits to workers and their dependents continue to increase because of a combination of demographic and economic factors. These long-term claims are staying with us longer and becoming more complex.

This is one of the trends that we are attempting to tackle through our Business Transformation Program. Our Timeliness of Adjudication project looks to improve the processes that lead to quicker initial claims decisions. This includes our focus on preventing work disability.

The WCB has continued to focus on developing a culture of preventing and mitigating work disability. Work disability prevention and mitigation represents a cultural transformation and an overall mindset shift in how we communicate, support and partner with our customers, which leads to improved return-to-work outcomes and overall enhance customer experience.

The Saskatchewan workforce continues to grow, driven by both population growth and expanded hiring activity from employers. Saskatchewan's unemployment rate remains below the national average as of September 2025 and the employed population has expanded by 2.2 per cent since the same time last year.

But growth in the workforce is a net positive for the provincial economy. It does increase the exposure of workplace injuries and corresponding costs. Some of the growth in the exposure has been offset by the improved injury rates, reinforcing the value of training and primary injury prevention to keep those costs contained.

The WCB has a legal obligation to be fully funded in order to meet all the current and future obligations to workers and employers. As I noted earlier, the increasing cost per claim and the increasing number of claims have put upward pressure on costs. To meet the current and future obligations, premiums collected from employers are invested to pay future costs on claims that occur in the rate year. Higher investment returns tend to reduce the premium rate we need to collect from employers.

As Gord mentioned, while we have not exceeded the target range of our sufficiency ratio, we are seeing sustainable growth of the system as a whole. The WCB maintains a strong-funded position and we've also optimized our investment strategy to improve the long-term expected return on investments.

Increased investment income benefits employers by reducing the premiums needed to operate the compensation system. This improved investment outlook is reflected in our model. The WCB also relies on investment returns to cover certain costs within the system, such as cost relief and the disaster reserve. Large capital investments like the Business Transformation Program are also funded through investment returns and reserves.

Again, as Gord mentioned, the board balances all of these factors, resulting in a proposed six-cent decrease in our average premium rate for 2026. The WCB funds a portion of the important work that the safety associations do. The WCB works with each of its six safety associations to decide how much funding they receive and why. These safety associations work closely with the members of their industry rate codes to help prevent workplace injuries.

The safety associations provide valuable programs and training to support employers and workers in those rate codes to help them reduce injuries and fatalities through improved safety. Our 2026 average preliminary premium rate includes 4.3 cents for safety associations. These association funding costs are charged to the 18 rate codes depicted on the slide. They are not spread across all 50 rate codes.

The safety associations with support from their board of directors that are represented by workers and employers from those rate codes, submit a strategic and operational plan to confirm how their funding will help employers and workers in those rate codes reduce injuries and fatalities. Within those rate codes that fund the safety associations, the costs range from 6.6 cents to 19.9 cents, which is added to the 18 rate code association member premium rates.

In total, more than $13.3 million of funding are budgeted to fund the safety associations in 2026. You can learn more about the safety associations when you visit the WorkSafe website. I'll now turn it over to Thomas Webb to discuss the rate code setting process.

Thomas Webb

Thank you, Phillip. Good morning, everyone. My name is Thomas Webb and I'm the director of actuarial services for the WCB. The actuarial services team extracts data and analyzes it to create financial models and forecasts, which are used to determine the premium rate. I'd like to provide some insight into the process we use to determine the rates for the 2026 rate year.

The most important concept is that rate setting is a balance between rate stability and sufficiency. Sufficiency means that premiums collected during the rate year must, over the long term, be sufficient to cover the expected cost of injuries within the year, as well as the administration expenses. At the same time, the model must be fair and equitable for all employers.

The objective is to target the just-right zone that ensures costs will be covered without collecting more than the system needs to operate. One of the tools we use to achieve this balance is the sufficiency policy. Introduced in 2023, the sufficiency policy is designed to ensure that funds are available to pay for injuries that have happened in the past, while stabilizing premium rates.

This efficiency ratio is the key measure and the policy establishes a target range of 100 to 140 per cent. At the end of 2024, this efficiency ratio was measured at 137.5 per cent. Though the ratio falls within the target range, there is room to proactively reduce the premium rates paid by employers, as both Gord and Phillip mentioned earlier.

Annual rate setting is governed by a rate setting model policy, which is built around these four foundational principles. Fairness is about equity between groups of employers over time, as well as across different industries and employers within industries. Premiums paid by current employers should cover the costs of injuries involving their workers during the premium period. Current employers should not be paying for claim costs generated by past employers, just as they should not be subsidizing the claim costs of future employers.

In a similar way, employer rate codes that encourage injuries should bear more responsibility for the costs associated with those injuries. A fair rate setting model encourages workplace safety and effective return-to-work policies by financially incentivizing employers' positive behaviors. Rate codes that have been successful in improving workplace safety outcomes should expect to see premium rate reductions over the long term.

Collective liability means that employers are jointly responsible for workers' compensation costs. However, employers should not be excessively punished for unusually costly claims. Therefore, portions of unusually costly or very long-term claims are shared across all employers using a pooling approach. Another balancing rate model principle is stability. Employers should rely on a level of predictability in premium rates to help them plan and budget effectively.

One of the ways we achieve this is by gradually recognizing claim trends in the rate model, rather than overreacting to short term fluctuations. Finally, the principles include transparency. This means employers should be able to understand the factors that went into setting their premiums and the WCB should be able to clearly communicate this information to employers, which is why we're here today. More detail can be found on the WCB's website, wcbsask.com, and in the rate setting model and sufficiency policies.

The determination of industry premium rates is not the only factor that contributes to the rates an individual employer pays. There are really three key steps, including the industry classification, establishing industry premium rates and experience rating, which considers an individual employer's claims experience.

I'll explain a bit more about each one. The first step in the rate setting process is classification, which is the process where similar employers are grouped together to form an industry rate code. Our classification system currently has 50 industry rate codes. Premium rates are set for each rate code based on the collective claims experience of employers within the rate code.

All employers within an industry rate code start with the same industry premium rate. The classification system is not static and each year some employers and some classifications move between rate codes. As industries and the economy evolve, some larger changes to the classification system may become necessary to achieve the rate model principles I described earlier. In particular, the small size of sum rate codes is contributing to year-over-year volatility in industry premium rates.

Employers should expect to see some realignment in the coming years, as the WCB is committed to maintaining a fair and appropriate classification system. You've already heard me talk about the second step. The WCB is funded 100 per cent by the premiums our employer customers pay and the investment income earned from those premiums. Premiums that we collect in a year are intended to cover all costs of claims that happen in the year.

This means we need to forecast all the disability, medical and rehabilitation costs that will ultimately result from each injury. To do this, we study historical trends, develop assumptions and project possible scenarios. Some variation is expected since injuries don't always behave predictably. This is why we take an actuarial approach that attempts to forecast the most likely, or what we call best estimate level of costs.

To determine the rate, we then take the total of expected costs incurred in the rate year, including administration expenses and divide by employer payroll. It's important to note that this model is sensitive to the assumptions that are chosen and real life will always differ from the forecasts. Nevertheless, this model gives us a sound basis for funding decisions and has performed well over the past few years.

Assessable payroll for the 2026 rate year is projected to reach a record high of $30.7 billion. This is an increase of 4.1 per cent over the current 2025 estimate of $29.5 billion. Both private and public sector employers have contributed to this growth, which can be attributed to both workforce and wage growth. The maximum assessable wage for 2025 is indexed to the change in the provincial average weekly wage. Based on the most current estimates, we expect this amount to increase by at least 3.5 per cent from the 2025 level of 104,531.

Once the maximum wage calculations have been completed and approved by the WCB later this fall, the final amount will be announced, posted on the WCB's website and reflected in updated policies.

The last step in the rate setting process applies individual employer experience to the industry premium rate. Employers will receive a discount for positive claims experience and pay a surcharge for poorer claims experience. The experience rating program adjusts your premium rate based on your individual claims experience and provides an incentive to influence injury prevention. Reducing the number and costs of claims through injury prevention and workplace safety can improve your experience rating and reduce the WCB premiums you pay.

There are two programs in the experience rating program. The standard program is for the smaller employers and the advanced program is for the larger employers. The standard program applies to employers with less than 21,000 in premiums over a three-year period, is based on the frequency of time loss injuries and has a maximum discount of 25 per cent and a maximum surcharge of 75 per cent.

It applies to approximately 88 per cent of Saskatchewan employers. The advanced program applies to employers with premiums of at least 21,000 over a three-year period. It is a cost-based program where individual employers are compared to others in their industry. If they're better, they will receive a discount up to a maximum of 30 per cent and if they're worse, they'll receive a surcharge up to a maximum of 200 per cent.

At the highest level, this slide breaks down the costs funded by the premium rates. Claim costs make up the bulk of the premium component at 69 per cent. The WCB's administrative costs account for 23 per cent and include the cost of administering claims in employer accounts, as well as the HR, technology and finance back-office functions needed to operate the system. This 23 per cent also includes internal WCB prevention staff and funding provided to the WorkSafe partnership.

Legislative obligations account for another five per cent and include funding provided to support injured worker appeal services and the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. Safety association funding represents the remaining three per cent. These proportions are largely the same as in the previous year's rate setting.

The pie chart on this slide shows the breakdown of the change to the preliminary 2026 rates from the 2025 rates. Overall, only four per cent of employers and four rate codes will see a higher 2026 preliminary industry premium rate as depicted by the gold section noted on the chart. None of these increases exceed five per cent compared to the 2025 industry rates. 95 per cent of employers from 42 rate codes will see a decrease in their industry preliminary premium rate, as represented in the dark blue section of the chart. The gray section of the chart indicates that one per cent of employers in four rate codes will see no change to the 2026 preliminary industry premium rate.

I will now hand this over to Jennifer Norleen-Beitel to discuss more about the claim costs impacting the 2026 preliminary rate decision.

Jennifer Norleen-Beitel

Thank you, Thomas. Good morning, everyone. I am Jennifer Norleen-Beitel, vice-president of operations for the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board.

Overall, we're continuing to see an increase in claim-related costs projected by the 2026 rate model. The increase in total claims costs can mostly be attributed to growth in the number of workers active in the Saskatchewan workforce and the impact of increased wages, which tend to increase the wage lost benefits paid to workers. This is partly offset by reduced costs related to fatalities and survivor benefits resulting from fewer fatal injuries over the past few years.

Evidence-based approaches to preventing long-term work and medical disability show that early reporting and timely support are key investments in better recovery and return-to-work outcomes. Acting early not only improves the chances of a successful return to work but also helps lower overall claim costs. The longer someone remains off work, the harder it can be to reintegrate them.

That's why it's crucial to support workers as soon as possible, but it must be done thoughtfully and effectively.

This slide shows the overall cost increases from 2020 to 2024, for the years that were used in the 2026 rate setting model. The growth in costs for long-term or pension claims has started to slow in the last two years. While there is still upward pressure related to growth in average wages, there has been some reduction in the number of claims moving on to long-term earnings replacement benefits.

In 2024, there was an increase in medical aid and vocational rehabilitation costs, as shown on this slide. Between 2020 and 2024, the main drivers of increases in medical aid and vocational rehabilitation included tertiary treatment programs and costs related to psychological injuries, with the number of accepted psychological injury claims increasing by 32 per cent from 2021 to 2024.

Tertiary treatment programs bring together a team of health care professionals from various disciplines to deliver comprehensive care. These teams specialize in supporting individuals with lasting impairments or complex challenges related to pain management issues and psychosocial factors. Sometimes an injury becomes a serious case not because the original injury was severe, but because of preventable work disability or extended time away from work. In many cases, long-term disability is more about these factors than the injury itself.

When analyzing rising compensation costs, serious injuries remain a key concern and play a major role in driving those increases.

The Saskatchewan WCB’s definition of serious injury includes the following criteria. If a claim is a fatality; if a claim has more than 50 days of compensation days paid; if a claim has a Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety referral flag—that is, amputations, fractures, head injuries, neck injuries, serious injuries, third-degree burns and more; if a claim is a primary psychological mental health claim; if a claim includes a permanent functional impairment greater than or equal to 10 per cent. Serious injuries represent approximately 11 to 15 per cent of our total claims and account for more than 80 per cent of our claims costs in the province's compensation system each year.

We expect serious injury claims will continue to exert financial pressure on the system. That's why we're implementing a dual strategy aimed at preventing work disability. Firstly, this strategy focuses on preventing serious injuries and fatalities in the first place. Kevin will touch on this more in a few minutes. The second part of the WCB strategy, as part of its claims transformation, is a renewed emphasis on collaboration to prevent work disability and achieve better rehabilitation and return-to-work outcomes.

Work disability arises when an injury or illness prevents a worker from successfully rehabilitating, remaining kor returning to work. It's influenced by a range of factors, including individual circumstances, work environment, broader societal influences, as well as compensation and health care.

Since 2023, the WCB has been advancing a multi-year project, which included a significant investment in staff training to improve communication, collaboration and customer relationships. By working closely with workers, employers and health care providers, we can uncover barriers to return to work and create safe and sustainable return to work plans that prevent work disability and improve outcomes for WCB customers.

Another area of focus is timely decisions, which are important so appropriate action can be taken to support recovery and return to work. Prompt reporting enables access to medical care and support services, reduces the risk of claim disputes and facilitates accurate root cause investigations into the incident.

The legislated obligation for employers to report injuries is within five days of becoming aware of an injury. On average, it takes roughly 14 days for employers and workers to notify the WCB of an injury. To support with reporting requirements when new claims are received, the WCB proactively reaches out to workers and employers to gather all required information to support quicker initial claim decision. When we act quickly, it can lead to better outcomes for all.

Looking ahead, the WCB will work with employers in two key areas. One area is to roll out a practical toolkit for small business owners. The second is to develop risk-based approaches to improve education and support, to help customers understand their rights and obligations. I will now turn it over to Kevin Mooney to share some details on injury prevention and the injury breakdown.

Kevin Mooney

Hello everyone. I'm Kevin Mooney, vice-president of prevention and employer services at the WCB. Over the next several slides, I'll talk about prevention and highlight what unions, employer associations and individual employers can do to improve safety and positively influence premium rates. As well, I'll speak to what the WCB is doing to influence the system on a broader scale.

There are ways to influence and reduce your premium rates. You can do so by making sure you have a culture that values worker safety, an effective safety management system and by supporting sound disability prevention practices. The safety management system prevents injuries and a return-to-work program assists with the worker's recovery.

Preventing injuries is the best way to control the premiums you pay to the WCB and WorkSafe Saskatchewan provides free tools and online training programs to support employers. We offer training for occupational health committee members and supervisors. We offer safety management system assessments, development and action plans, and we offer return-to-work program resources. There are also supports for employers to assist in determining root causes of serious injuries and fatalities, and aids to develop preventive measures to prevent future incidents.

Our prevention team also works one-on-one with employers to implement effective investigation processes and hazard assessments. As Phillip referenced earlier, the WCB funds six safety associations and these associations support businesses with their funded rate codes. They provide assistance and advice to numerous areas such as training, safety management systems, consultation, safety goals, identifying safety gaps in organizations, injury prevention strategies and much more.

The province's total injury rate decreased to 3.91 per 100 workers in 2024, compared to 3.95 per 100 workers in 2023. This is the result of the safety and prevention focus and efforts by workers, employers, safety associations and our many partners across this province. The 2024 Time Loss injury rate decreased to 1.72 injuries per 100 workers, from 1.78 injuries per 100 workers in 2023.

These are the lowest total and Time Loss injury rates in Saskatchewan's history.

In fact, the WCB total injury rate has dropped by more than 65 per cent since 2002. Our 2025 injury rates are continuing a downward trend for 2024. As of August 31st, the 2025 total injury rate is projected at 3.65 per 100 workers and the Time Loss injury rate is projected at 1.58 per 100 workers.

Through the WorkSafe Saskatchewan partnership with the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, as a province, we're on the right track as we see our total and Time Loss injury rates continue to decline. WorkSafe Saskatchewan continues to monitor the injury trends through data analysis, research and jurisdictional scans, which inform our strategic direction.

The fatality and serious injury strategy is focused on preventing fatalities and serious injuries. The number of serious injury claims in Saskatchewan remain persistent at approximately 2400 each year. This indicates that together, we must not rest until Saskatchewan has no workplace fatalities and serious injuries are prevented. As of August 31st, 2025, the preliminary total number of registered serious injuries in 2024 was 2,587, which represents a 6.42 per cent increase over 2431 serious injuries in 2023. Serious injuries are reported at a one-year lag because it may take time for claims to mature into serious injuries.

Annually, As Jennifer mentioned, serious injuries represent approximately 11 to 15 per cent of our total claims and account for more than 80 per cent of our claims cost in the province's compensation system each year. As a result, this is why we remain focused on preventing serious injuries in workplaces across the province.

While the number of serious injuries continue to remain consistent, as noted on the previous slide, the serious injury rate, however, is showing some signs of improvement. Across the province, our workforce is growing. The number of full-time workers has grown to 443,344 in 2024, which is a 10.2 per cent increase in the last five years. This means that the number of serious injuries, while concerning, has remained steady, while the number of workers in the workplace has increased. The number of workers in Saskatchewan is increasing at a faster rate than the number of serious injuries being reported.

Every year, workplace fatalities continue to take place in Saskatchewan and without question, this has a profound impact on coworkers, employers, families and communities. As of August 31st, 2025, we've had 20 workplace fatalities in the province. Nine fatalities were due to occupational diseases and four fatalities were due to motor vehicle collisions. The remaining seven fatalities resulted from being crushed by equipment, falls from buildings, being crushed by collapsing materials, assaults, falls from ladders and one heart attack. It appears that no industry is exempt when it comes to workplace fatalities. From 2019 to 2024, workplace fatalities occurred in 41 of 50 rate codes covered by the Workers' Compensation Board.

Workplace fatalities caused devastating emotional and psychological impacts on the families and coworkers. Financial burdens reduced productivity, damaged reputations and a weakened safety culture that can lead to more incidents. Organizations experienced lost productivity and higher premiums while the broader community sees a decline in public trust and increased stress. Each workplace fatality creates a ripple effect in our province. This is why the prevention of fatalities and serious injuries is our primary focus.

Ongoing, innovative and focused injury prevention efforts as outlined in our fatalities and serious injuries strategy, are necessary to drive rates even lower.

The 2023 to 2028 fatalities and serious injury strategy has challenged the traditional approach to preventing serious injuries and fatalities. As mentioned earlier, we've placed a greater emphasis on preventing serious injuries and fatalities in the province.

Building from the 2019 strategy, the 2023 to 2028 strategy is focused on eliminating and preventing serious injuries and fatalities through the five pillars of a solid health and safety system. These pillars include awareness, education, targeting and consulting, partnerships and enforcement. Under this strategy, WorkSafe Saskatchewan is focused on three main workplace sectors with the highest injury rates, which are health care, transportation and construction.

WorkSafe also identified in the strategy seven common issues affecting Saskatchewan workplaces. These common factors which can lead to injury include motor vehicle collisions, asbestos exposure, falls, industrial ergonomics, machinery, violence and psychological health. The strategy brings industry together into learning collaboratives to share best practices to mitigate serious injuries. WorkSafe has established nine learning collaboratives and you can learn more about them by visiting the WorkSafe website.

The strategy sets out targets to measure our provincial performance through the number of workplace fatalities and serious injuries and includes the total Time Loss and No Time Loss injury rates. You can read the most recent status report of the 2023 to 2028 fatalities and serious injury strategy on the WorkSafe website.

Led by our provincial fatalities and serious injury strategy, WorkSafe Saskatchewan is endeavoring to strengthen Saskatchewan's safety culture in the future by engaging safety leadership, next generation workers and the public to create safer workplaces. Through its next-generation prevention initiative, WorkSafe's future workplace prevention and safety efforts are being shaped by advancing technologies, addressing evolving workforce needs and broadening its understanding of health and well-being. WorkSafe Saskatchewan is embracing these advances that are revolutionizing workplace safety across the country; traditional approaches focused on injuries after they have happened.

Led by our provincial fatalities and serious injury strategy, WorkSafe Saskatchewan is endeavoring to strengthen Saskatchewan's safety culture in the future by engaging safety leadership, next-generation workers and the public to create safer workplaces. Through its next-generation prevention initiative, WorkSafe's future workplace prevention and safety efforts are being shaped by advancing technology, addressing evolving workplace needs and broadening its understanding of health and well-being. WorkSafe Saskatchewan is embracing these advances that are revolutionizing workplace safety across the country.

Traditional approaches focus on injuries after they happen. Now we're relying on leading indicators, predictive analytics and human and organizational performance principles to spot risks early and act before injuries and illnesses happen. There's also recognition that physical safety must include psychological health and overall well-being of workers.

WorkSafe Saskatchewan, in partnership with Doctor Joti Samra at My Workplace Health, has created a resource centre to support you in navigating through the key principles and best practices associated with psychological health and safety. The resource centre is available at www.worksafesask.ca.

We continue to invest in building the capacity of WCB's prevention team to move to a consulting role from a training role. We support customers as they investigate and learn from past events. Use risk assessments to plan safe work and proactively develop serious injury prevention plans. I'll now pass it over to Phillip, to walk us through the long-term outlook.

Phillip Germain

Thank you, Kevin. Saskatchewan's economic outlook is positive with forecasts predicting growth exceeding the national average. Driven by continued strong performance in construction, resource sectors and public services. Despite global economic uncertainties and trade challenges, Saskatchewan is well positioned to manage headwinds and maintain its fiscal stability.

For the WCB, despite claims cost increasing, we are seeing growth in total assessable payroll. Strong economic performance in the province and return to more moderate inflation rates, as well as strong workforce growth and we are seeing injury rates continue to improve. All factored in this has resulted in a decrease in the 2026 preliminary average premium rate. As noted, premiums collected from employers are invested to pay future costs on claims that occur in that rate year.

Where possible, the WCB strategically plans to minimize impacts that could push premium rates upward. Our focus on reducing serious injuries and fatalities, and improving rehabilitation and return-to-work outcomes are part of the strategic plan. As Kevin mentioned earlier, WorkSafe Saskatchewan's 2023 to 2028 fatalities and serious injury strategy is designed to address the injury rates that are having the most impact.

The updated strategy utilizes customer feedback and engagement, as well as claims and injury data to target specific industries and employers with the highest serious injury rates and reoccurring injury types. I've often said the least expensive injury is the one that doesn't happen, but when an injury does occur, we need to have robust systems that allow us to effectively and efficiently partner with the worker, employer and health care providers to rehabilitate the worker so that they can return to work.

We know that this outcome is what is in the best interests of the worker and the employer. For the past number of years, our premium rates have remained steady. And today, I'm very pleased to announce a six-cent reduction in our premium rates. But we could see this reverse in the future, which is one of the reasons we must work together to reduce serious injuries, reduce fatalities and improve return to work outcomes.

To accomplish this, we must support and partner together with employers, workers, employer associations, safety associations, labour organizations and the health care community to improve the compensation system together. This is a good reason. No, it's a great reason to try and reduce the system costs by investing in work disability prevention and the business transformation program.

Like every organization, we face risks and are presented with opportunities. As part of the thorough enterprise risk assessment process, we adjust our strategic plan each year and as needed, to focus on value-added strategies and opportunities. As a board and executive, we've identified and evaluated nine key risks that are in our 2024 annual report, which is available on the WCB’s website. Aligned with the WCB’s strategic initiatives, the WCB’s business transformation objectives aim to improve the customer experience, improve key indicators and outcomes, and support the long-term efficacy and health of the Saskatchewan Workers’ Compensation system.

Since its launch in 2021, the WCB has an invested significant energy, time and resources in advancing the business transformation program. It is designed to enable an organization-wide technology modernization and support improvements in business processes and our service delivery model as part of our overarching strategic direction.

In the program's formative years, the WCB focused on building the delivery infrastructure to enable and sustain transformational change. This infrastructure included processes and frameworks for effective governance, customer and partner engagement, organizational change management and program and project delivery. This approach, which enables coordinated planning and delivery of the transformation objectives, allows the organization to monitor and manage dependencies, identify and respond to key risks, advance and embed change at the appropriate pace and realize benefits at various points during and after the transformation.

The most complex project within the business transformation program is the replacement of the core workers’ compensation systems, which aims to increase operational efficiency through simplified processes and automation of workflows. In 2025, significant strides were made to advance the first phase of the core solution project: the replacement of the Workers’ Compensation Board’s employer accounts’ functionality. This is scheduled to go live before the end of 2025.

As part of this core solution project, the WCB also launched phase two, which focuses on the claims and case management side of the core system.

Throughout the remainder of 2025 and into the next couple of years, the WCB will continue to seek out and advance opportunities to deliver benefits and value to all of its customers. If you'd like to learn more about the business transformation program, please visit the WCB's website at wcbsask.com.

Based on customer feedback, successfully navigating through our province's compensation system can be challenging for some employers. So, based on a recommendation from the 2016 committee of review, the WCB created an employer resource centre in 2019. Further feedback from employers resulted in replacing the resource centre and establishing an independent employer advisory centre. The advisory centre offers a greater level of service for employers, including education and support, and expert appeal support.

With the objective of ensuring that WCB actively supports employers who fund the system, we believe this independent, confidential service will better support the needs of employers as well as workers. Learn more about the employer advisory centre on their website at saskemployeradvisory.ca.

Today, we're sharing preliminary premium rate information with employers. After this meeting, the WCB holds a 30-day public consultation period for feedback into those preliminary premium rates. We welcome your feedback as part of the public rate consultation process. Please email askwcb@wcbsask.com with any feedback you may have. In November, we gather all your feedback into the preliminary premium rates and the board members consider this feedback before they approve those final rates. After this public consultation process in

December, following the launch of our business transformation core system, employers' 2026 premium rate notices will be available online at wcbsask.com through your secure WCB online account.

We will be sharing more targeted information to employers as part of the launch of the new system. You'll want to ensure your business has the WCB online account for early access to your premium rate notice. Industry rate sheets will be available on our website following today's public meeting. This information includes summary statistics as well as premium rate information.

WCB representatives are also available if you have any questions. You may also want to talk to our prevention account managers to discuss workplace safety and injury prevention. As a reminder, a recording of this information presented today will be available on our website at www.wcbsask.com and on our YouTube channel. Just search for Sask. Workers' Compensation Board.

This brings the formal part of our presentation to a close. I'll now pass it over to our chair to lead our question-and-answer period.