



THE ONTARIO PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKER POST COVID

WOUNDED IN THE CHAOS

Abstract

The lack of a single, clear title for Personal Support Workers causes confusion among employers and the public—and that confusion puts workers and clients at risk.





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Terms of reference

The Personal Support Workers in Ontario are unregulated care providers that carry out delegated tasks by regulated healthcare providers. These duties are defined generally as supporting clients in the carrying out the “activities of daily living”.

Defining what constitutes ‘activities of daily living’ varies considerably from one person to another and can range from general companionship to actively performing complex medical routines daily. These activities technically have no formal limit other than professional opinion of the professional who is delegating the activity.

Introduction: Suddenly Essential

The onset of the COVID 19 Pandemic in 2020 was a pivotal moment in the maturation of the personal support worker profession. 72 hours prior to the outbreak officials with government of Ontario informed the PSW community that the personal support workers, despite our best rationale, were not going to be considered first responders as they were legally not considered an essential workforce.

72 hours later the Personal Support Workers were declared an essential services and the PSWs in Ontario found themselves transitioning from ‘policy irrelevance’ into front-line infantry of health care workers in Ontario battling the most virulent virus of the century.

This report aims to provide an overview of this workforce in Ontario prior to and after the Covid-19 epidemic and to demonstrate a clear understanding of how the absence of title protection for this workforce remains a structural impediment to the future wellbeing of this profession. We will be reviewing first how the province of Ontario educates the PSW workforce, an analysis of the provinces efforts to translate these programs into national classifications and ultimately how national classifications themselves are divided to align with international classifications. These competing and contradictory systems create confusion and contributing to most dangerous working environments in Canada.

Personal Support Worker Post-Secondary Education landscape

Commercial and Educational Classifications: Ontario

From an educational and credentialing perspective post- secondary programs are structured toward earning a certificate as a Personal Support Worker. While post-secondary may run periodically run courses such home support worker, community care providers, residential support workers etc. These programs while encompassing some elements of the personal support worker role are generally held to be companionship oriented.



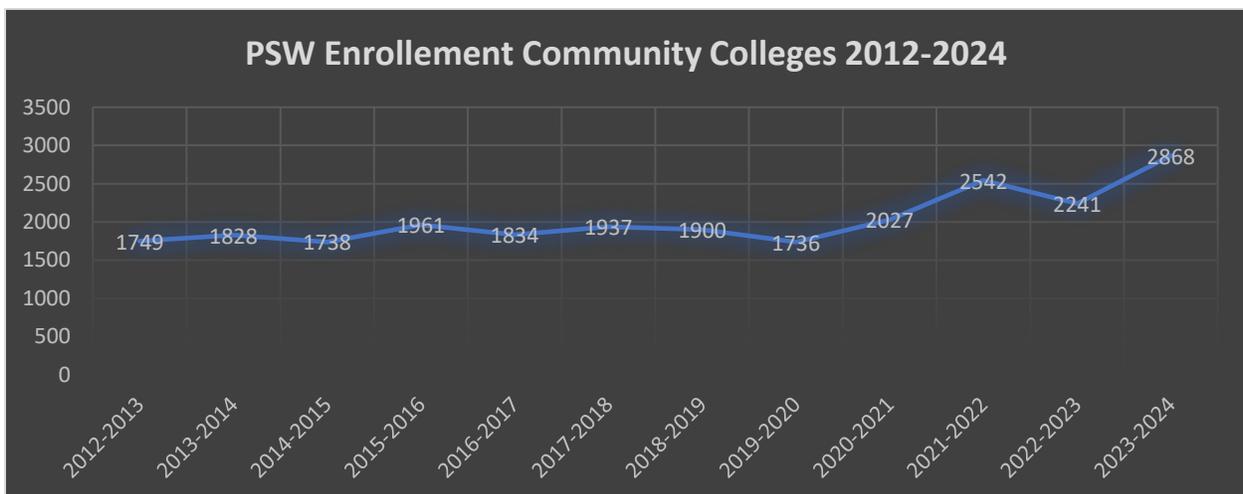
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PSW Post-Secondary Credentialling Routes

In Ontario, there are two professional post-secondary education routes overseen by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. One being the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology and the other being Ontario Private Career colleges which fall under the Private Career Colleges Act, 2005.

Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT)

24 publicly funded CAAT colleges administered the PSW program Between 2012 and 2024 graduating approximately 24361 Personal support workers averaging approximately 2030 psws per year (see Chart 1).



¹Chart 1

¹ <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/college-enrolment/resource/07fdeefd-fe44-4df8-bd7d-5419a79f90ec>



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Pre-Covid 19

Headcount Data from the college enrollment headcount demonstrate that between 2012 – 2017 PSW enrollment was erratic with a general average enrollment rate of 1835.38 reaching a record low of 1736 enrollments in 2019 (see Chart 2) ².

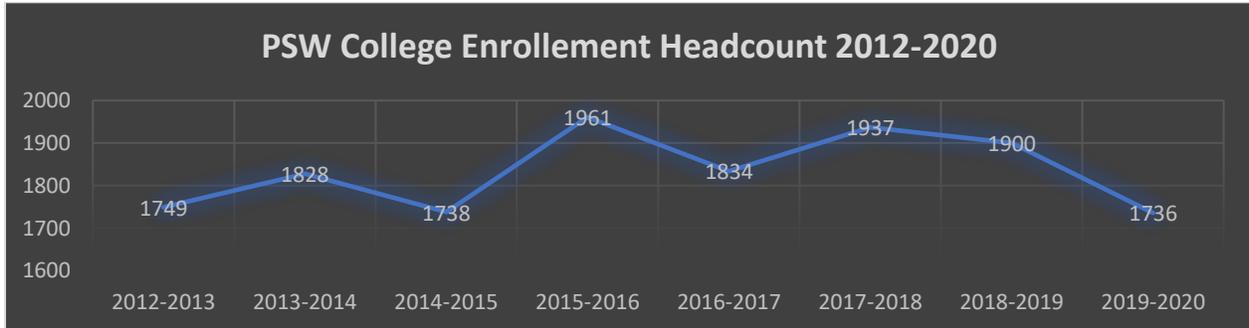


Chart 2

Post Covid 19

The post-covid 19 landscape saw a marked increase in the number of students enrolling in the PSW programs. For example, PSW enrollment increased 16.76 percent in the 2020-2021 academic year from the year prior and increased a further 25.4 percent following academic year. By 2023-2024 Academic year enrollments in the PSW program reached a record 2868, a 65 percent increase in growth from the 2019-20 academic year (see Chart 3).³

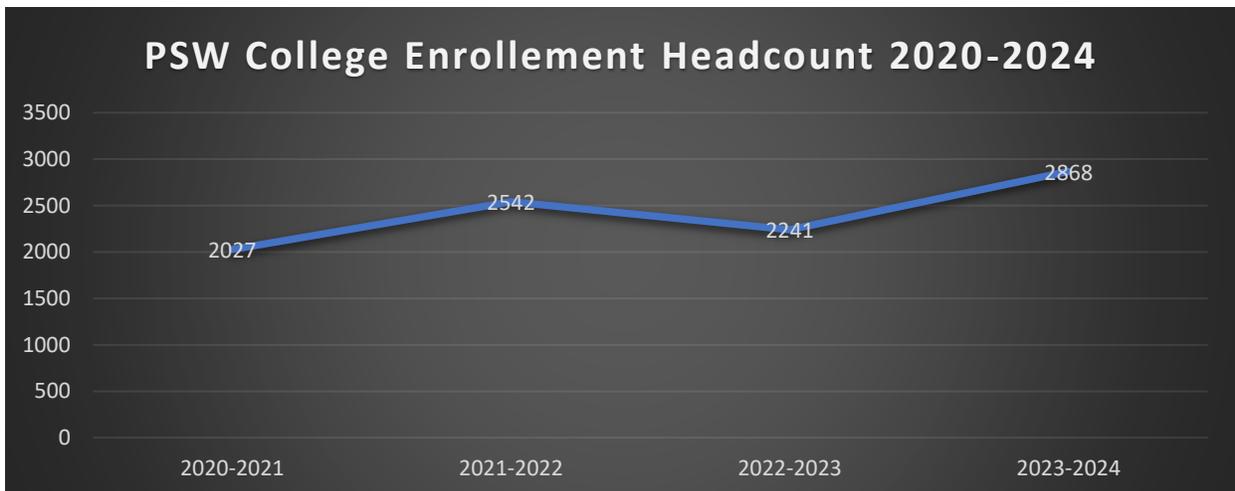


Chart 3

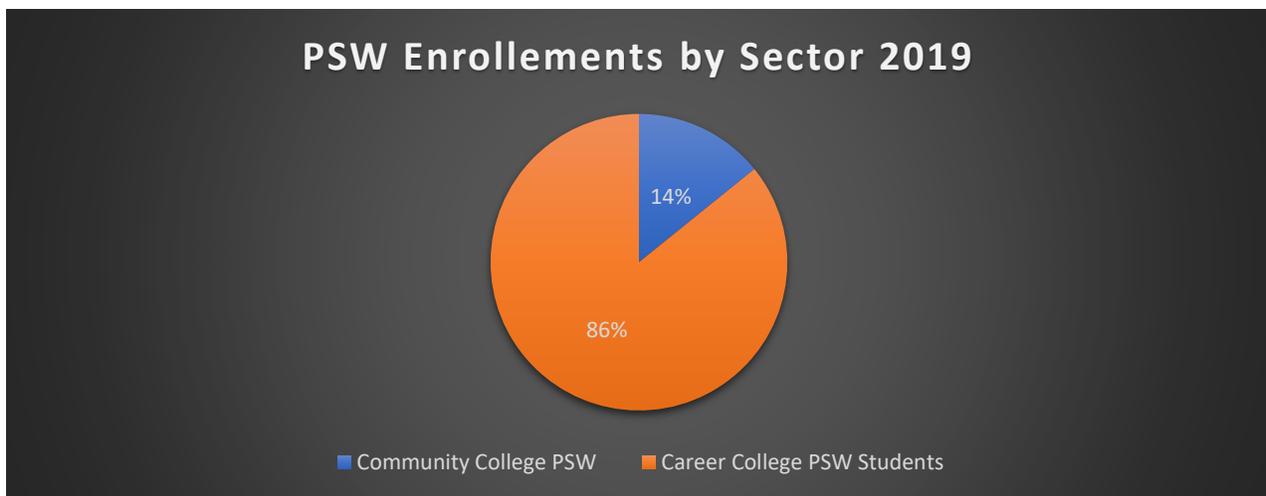
² <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/college-enrolment/resource/07fdeefd-fe44-4df8-bd7d-5419a79f90ec>

³ <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/college-enrolment/resource/07fdeefd-fe44-4df8-bd7d-5419a79f90ec>

Private Career Colleges

Private Career Colleges in Ontario enroll and graduate the majority of Personal Support Workers. This can be seen in the latest data released by the Office of the Auditor General the Ministry of Colleges Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

The 2019 “Office of the Auditor General of Ontario’s Value-for-Money Audit: Private Career Colleges Oversight” reported that career colleges enrolled approximately 66000 students 21000 of which were health services (Personal Support Worker) programs or 32 percent of the student body for that year (see Graph 1).⁴



Graph 1

The importance of the private career college sector cannot be underestimated in terms of pliability and capacity to respond and pivot. Unlike CAAT institutions Career Colleges offer flexible and varying semester starts and alternative learning models. Further to this graduation rates for private career colleges averaged a graduate rate averaged a healthy 73 percent graduation rate spanning over 100 programs.⁵

During the pandemic, for example the need for flexible delivery models to train large numbers of personal support workers became vital and the value of the career college delivery model became clear. This saw several initiatives that sought to leverage the scalability of these delivery systems to promote the graduation of PSWs withing a specific period (see Chart 5).⁶

⁴ https://auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/AR_PrivateColleges_en21.pdf P.12

⁵ <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/private-career-colleges-pcc-key-performance-indicators>

⁶ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001744/ontario-enhancing-personal-support-worker-training>



Chart 5

Labour Market - Terms of Reference: NOC and NAICS

Technical Industrial Classification : Canada

All professions in Canada are group by Industry Canada in various groupings call National Occupation Codes. These numeric codes are used by Industry Canada to track labour market activity, anticipate trends in long term industrial and strategic planning.

The Personal support worker professional role in is no exception and is divided between two national occupation code groups 44101 *Home support workers, care givers and related occupations* and NOC 33102 – *Nurses aides, orderlies and patient services associate* respectively. Together these NOC codes house 94 different job titles being used to describe the same professional role. This however is not new as the number of professional titles used to describe the personal support worker has ranged from a high of 106 in 2011 to its current low of 94.⁷

This variance in titles has held steady since 2006 which saw an average of 99 interchangeable job titles being actively used to describe this role.

⁷ See Appendix A NOC 33102 and NOC 44101 title lists



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Table 1 : North American Industry Classification System

	NAICS	Subsector	Industry Group	Industries	Canadian Industry
Health and Social Assistance	62	621	6216	62161	621610 Home Health Care Services
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	62	623	6231	62311	623110 Nursing Care Facilities
					623210 Residential Facilities for a person with a developmental disability
					623221 Residential facilities for persons with a mental health or substance use condition
					623222 Homes for persons with psychiatric disability

Technical Industrial Classification : Ontario

Defining the personal support worker in Ontario is further complicated in Ontario as the industrial occupational classifications are not used either by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board or the Canadian Federation of Independent Business who refer to this workgroup as “occupations in support of health services” and “Health and Education” respectively (see Table 1).

Job Vacancy Rates Classifications and Trends

The prospective for employment in the publicly funded personal support worker profession remains positive however regional considerations are placing pressure on employment. This is evident when comparing the job vacancy and unemployment rates.

Job vacancy rates for the personal support workers in Ontario are measured using two primary sources, one the Labour Market Vacancy Rate published by the Canadian Federation of Independent business which track private sector job vacancies as Personal Services and in Ontario by Statistics Canada using the NAICS 62 classification.

Between 2020-2025 the job vacancy rate for publicly funded personal support workers fluctuated considerably seeing the job vacancy rate swing from a 3.6 average in 2020 a record high vacancy rate of 6.5 (See Chart 6) percent in a labour market with an unemployment rate of only 5.7⁸. Since 2023 the inverse

⁸ <https://fao-on.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2023-Labour-Market-Report-Presentation-EN.pdf>

of this relationship is being observed as by 2025 the vacancy rate fell to 3.9 while overall unemployment increased to 7.7. ⁹

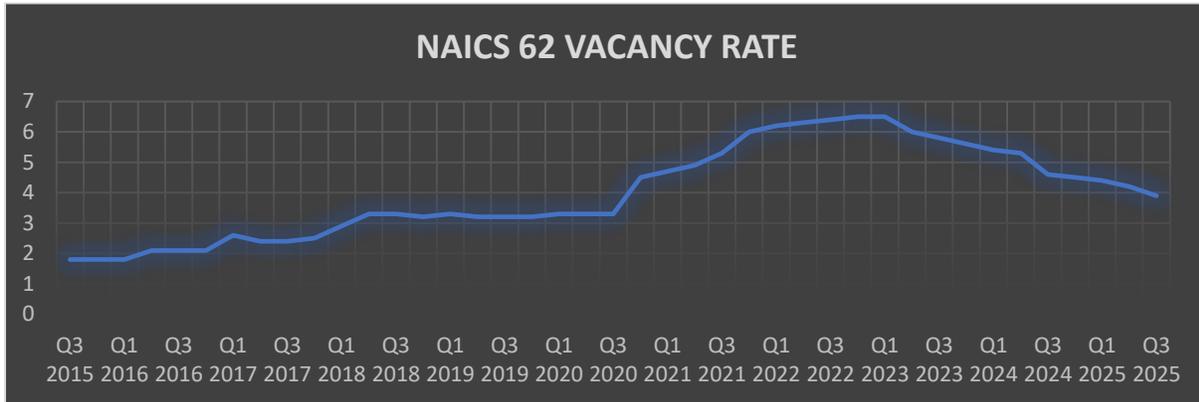
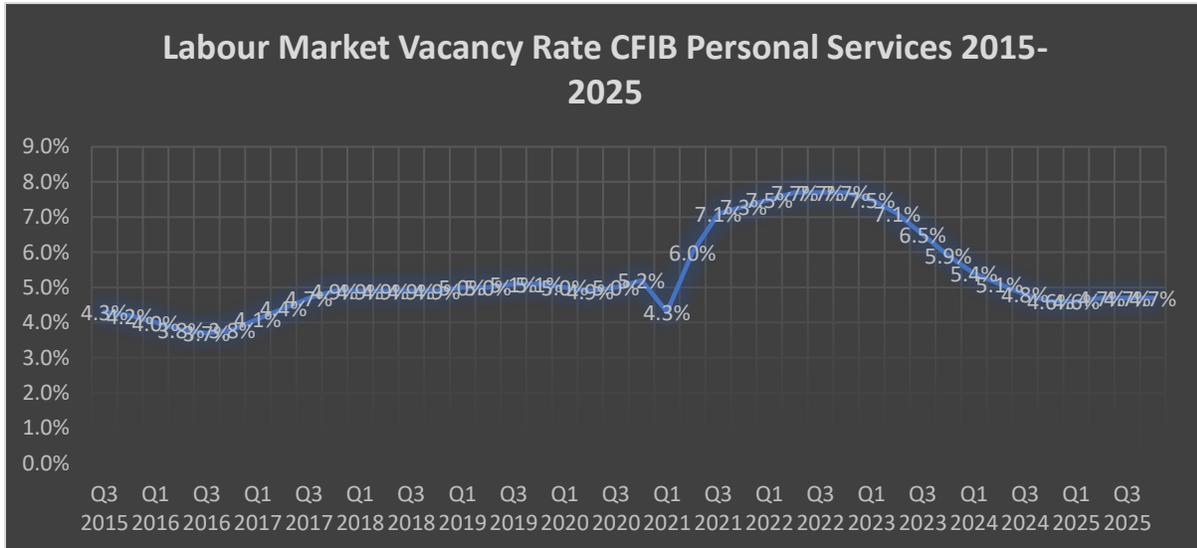


Chart 6

Personal support workers in the private sector saw similar trends with the job vacancy rate peaking at 7.7 percent in 2022 reducing back down to the pre-covid rates of 4.7 percent by 2025 compared to the current unemployment rate of 7.7 percent (see Chart 7).¹⁰

⁹ Statistics Canada: Table 14-10-0442-01 Job vacancies, payroll employees, job vacancy rate, and average hourly rate by industry subsector, quarterly, unadjusted for seasonality c12. Release date: 2025-12-16

¹⁰ <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis/private-sector-job-vacancies-in-canada>



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Chart 7

Workplace Safety Classification and Trends

The safety of the Personal support worker, regardless of industrial classification can best be measured using the data available by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board or WSIB. The WSIB currently “provide(s) wage-loss benefits, medical coverage and support to help get people back to work after a work-related injury or illness”¹². WSIB insured over 75 percent of the provincial workforce and tracks allowed lost time claims by occupation category, this refers to time lost due to an injury that was sustained while on the job.

The WSIB tracking includes the entire range of industries that are active in Ontario including those most generally associated to public health and safety – Police and Fire fighters, Nurses and Assisting Occupations in Support of Health Services (PSW).

Workplace Injuries Trends

Occupations in Support Of Health Services recorded the highest percentage of injuries than any other industrial workgroup in Ontario. Between 2020-2024 this workgroup had the highest injury claims of 7.128 percent¹³ compared to the next highest group which were Agriculture at rate injury rate of 2.59 percent (see Chart 8).¹⁴

¹¹ <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis/private-sector-job-vacancies-in-canada>

¹² <https://www.wsib.ca/en/about-us>

¹³ <https://safetycheck.onlineservices.wsib.on.ca/safetycheck/explore/additional/provincialDownloads?lang=en> see

Injury rates

¹⁴ Ibid

Chart 8: WSIB Injury rates lost time by Industry Sector

Class/subclass	Injury/illness year				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
A: Agriculture	4.63	2.71	2.32	1.62	1.71
B: Mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction	0.82	1.34	1.23	0.87	0.79
C: Utilities	0.39	0.51	0.55	0.36	0.30
D1: Educational services	0.21	0.26	0.32	0.32	0.33
D2: Public administration	1.52	1.68	1.70	1.65	1.44
D3: Hospitals	1.91	2.15	2.54	1.52	1.52
E1: Food, textiles and related manufacturing	1.31	1.64	1.19	0.96	0.92
E2: Non-metallic and mineral manufacturing	1.05	1.53	1.36	1.18	1.11
E3: Printing, petroleum and chemical	0.44	0.59	0.54	0.51	0.47
E4: Metal transportation equipment and furniture	1.10	1.54	1.26	1.09	1.03
E5: Machinery, electrical equipment and	0.90	1.31	1.09	1.06	0.90
E6: Computer and electronic manufacturing	0.35	0.22	0.17	0.15	0.17
F1: Rail, water, truck transportation and postal	1.85	2.00	1.91	1.81	1.71
F2: Air, transit, ground passenger, recreational	1.05	1.57	1.54	1.45	1.37
G1: Residential building construction	0.85	1.35	1.20	1.21	1.19
G2: Infrastructure construction	0.80	1.04	1.03	0.72	0.57
G3: Foundation, structure and building exterior	1.56	1.90	1.73	1.66	1.40
G4: Building equipment construction	0.87	1.22	1.01	0.96	0.86
G5: Specialty trades construction	0.92	1.11	1.00	0.95	0.97
G6: Non-residential building construction	0.00	0.67	0.62	0.59	0.54
H1: Petroleum, food, motor vehicle and	1.05	1.15	1.13	1.10	1.02
H2: Personal and household goods,	0.45	0.54	0.51	0.45	0.41
I1: Motor vehicles, building materials and	1.00	1.17	0.99	1.03	0.97
I2: Furniture, home furnishings, clothing and	0.74	0.76	0.75	0.76	0.86
I3: Electronics, appliances, health and	0.28	0.33	0.27	0.26	0.22
I4: Specialized retail and department stores	1.05	1.47	1.32	1.10	1.14
J: Information and culture	0.35	0.53	0.46	0.37	0.56
K: Finance, management and leasing	0.44	0.47	0.42	0.47	0.44
L: Professional, scientific and technical	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.10	0.10
M: Administration, services to buildings,	1.00	1.19	1.03	1.06	1.05
N1: Ambulatory health care	1.93	2.19	2.52	1.72	1.57
N2: Nursing and residential care facilities	6.93	5.53	11.74	5.86	5.58
N3: Social assistance	1.13	1.80	1.96	1.75	1.64
O: Leisure and hospitality	0.79	1.06	1.03	1.02	0.97
P: Other services	1.07	1.24	1.19	1.12	1.10
Schedule 2	1.60	1.94	2.43	2.24	2.25



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Further to this Between 2020-2025 the WSIB reported that Occupations in Support of Health Services reported a total of 45772 claims of workplace injury dwarfing every other industrial group currently being measured.

To place this number in perspective when once compares the injury rates of professions traditionally associated with the highest risk of injury – Police and Firefighters who reported 3077– to those considered ‘lowest risk’ – Assisted Occupations in Support of Health Services – the risk exposure is striking. In other words, a PSW has a 3000 percent chance of being injured on the job than the police and fire fighters combined.

This variance is statistically concerning as it raises questions about the long-term feasibility of institutional care and may reflect a systemic disconnect between policy development and the lived realities of the industrial workgroup and service targets.

This becomes especially apparent when one realizes that the situation is getting worse since the pandemic as this chart clearly demonstrates.



Workplace Safety and Insurance Board
 Commission de la sécurité professionnelle et de l'assurance contre les accidents du travail

Schedule 1 - allowed lost time claims - leading occupation category by age group

Data Source: Workplace Safety and Insurance Board
 Data Maturity: As at 11/30/2025 for all years displayed
 Data downloaded from WSIB Safety Check tool
 Report downloaded on 1/22/2026, 11:31:48 AM EST

The rate framework classification model came into effect Jan 1, 2020. Under this model all data will be displayed on the "Current" tab by class/subclass. Data that is still under the legacy classification system (industry sector) will be displayed on the current tab under "Legacy Classification". Details by industry sector are provided on the "Legacy" tab.

Age Group	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
15-19	Food Counter Attendants,	Food Counter Attendants,	Food Counter Attendants,	Retail Salespersons	Retail Salespersons	Food Counter Attendants,	Food Counter Attendants,	Food Counter Attendants,	Not Coded					
20-24	Labourers In Processing,	Retail Salespersons	Retail Salespersons	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Longshore Workers And	Assisting Occupations In	Not Coded					
25-29	Labourers In Processing,	Trades Helpers And Labourers	Trades Helpers And Labourers	Longshore Workers And	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Not Coded				
30-34	Labourers In Processing,	Labourers In Processing,	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Labourers In Processing,	Labourers In Processing,	Labourers In Processing,	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Not Coded
35-39	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Not Coded
40-44	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Not Coded				
45-49	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Not Coded					
50-54	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Not Coded					
55-59	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Not Coded					
60-64	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Assisting Occupations In	Not Coded					
65+	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Assisting Occupations In	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Assisting Occupations In	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Motor Vehicle And Transit	Not Coded					

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This disconnect makes it challenging to compare this level of injuries amongst similarly situated professions in Ontario and – as such can more safely be compared to military casualty rates. For example, Notwithstanding the horrific loss of 45 000 soldiers between the 1939-1945 Canada suffered a further 55000 casualties across all military theatres in Europe and Asia.¹⁶ This is 19 percent higher than those PSW who were injured during the covid pandemic and like our wounded servicemen and women will require a lifetime of provincial social supports.

¹⁵ <https://safetycheck.onlineservices.wsib.on.ca/safetycheck/explore/additional/provincialDownloads?lang=en> see Injury rates by age group

¹⁶ <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/en/remembrance/military-history/second-world-war>



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While it is admittedly unusual for an Ontario labour group to be compared to global military operations, we must remember that the Armed Forces of Canada did deploy troops to support our PSWs during this pandemic due to the intensity of the crisis.¹⁷

Conclusion

The personal support workers in Ontario occupy the most vital and dangerous role in Ontario with none of the corresponding plaudits or recognition. The competing and contradictory systems not only structurally entrench confusion, but it appears system leaders may even rely on this confusion to safely distance itself from their own responsibilities. It becomes reasonable to question that if institutional care is so dangerous for the PSW what is the impact to the resident?

¹⁷ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/57468/canadian-armed-forces-depart-ontario-long-term-care-homes>



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9. <https://www.wsib.ca/en/about-us>
10. <https://safetycheck.onlineservices.wsib.on.ca/safetycheck/explore/additional/provincialDownloads?lang=en> see Injury rates
11. <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/en/remembrance/military-history/second-world-war>
12. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/57468/canadian-armed-forces-depart-ontario-long-term-care-homes>