

School of Public Health and
Preventive Medicine
Monash University

HEALTHY WORKING LIVES RESEARCH GROUP 2024 YEARLY WRAP



MONASH
University



A message from Professor Alex Collie



In 2024 our team has made significant strides across a range of research, education, and outreach activities and we are excited to continue to work on a range of new projects in 2025.

This year we will continue to work on our ARC-funded **Workers' Voice** study, an ambitious project reimagining workers' compensation in Australia. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with 607 injured workers and their supporters completing the survey and more than 30 in-depth interviews conducted.

This project has been both rich and rewarding, and I am inspired by the potential for positive change it offers. The findings from this project will begin to be released this year.

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Another key research highlight was the publication of a study examining the national burden of working time lost to compensable occupational injuries and diseases in Australia between 2012 and 2017.

The findings underscore the urgent need for effective health surveillance and resource allocation to safeguard worker productivity and well-being.

Our team of PhD students have achieved significant progress 2024. Four students passed their confirmation and another two are entering the final 6 months of their candidature. Their research spans a range of work and health topics, with findings published in leading academic journals and presented at a prestigious international conference.

In education, our line-up of post-graduate courses continues to grow. We offer these in collaboration with the Personal Injury Education Foundation as a contribution to capacity building in the personal injury sector. To date, 105 graduates from over 20 organisations across Australia have completed these programs. Looking ahead to 2025, we have launched our two new short courses - **Compensable Health and Medicine and Personal Injury Scheme Evaluation**.

In 2024 our findings received coverage on radio, and social media, amplifying the impact of our work. Our newsletter subscriber base and social media following continue to grow substantially. Workshops, events, seminars, conferences, and webinars have become almost daily occurrences, reflecting the team's dedication to sharing knowledge and engaging with our community.

I want to thank everyone who has contributed to our success so far —our team, collaborators, research and education partners, and the broader Healthy Working Lives community. Your support and enthusiasm fuel our ongoing efforts to improve health and work outcomes for all.

We look forward to continuing this important work together in 2025.

Professor Alex Collie

Director, Healthy Working Lives Research Group
Monash University



About the Healthy Working Lives Research Group

At the Healthy Working Lives Research Group (HWLRG), we are driven by a passion for fostering positive work environments and promoting overall well-being. We believe that the synergy between good work and good health is critical to achieving sustainable and fulfilling lives.

Based within the School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, our work is grounded in rigorous research, practical solutions, and meaningful collaborations.

OUR CORE THEMES

Our research is structured around three core themes that reflect the lifecycle of work and health:

PREVENTION

Proactively addressing workplace factors to prevent injury and illness.

RECOVERY

Enhancing pathways for individuals to return to good health and meaningful work after injury or illness.

SYSTEMS

Investigating and improving the systems that govern workplace health, including compensation schemes, health services, and policy frameworks.

Within each of these thematic areas, we take a leadership role in local, national, and international research initiatives, aiming to create impactful solutions for healthier, more productive working lives.

To learn more about our team [click here](#).



About the Healthy Working Lives Research Group



FOCUS AREAS

High-Quality Research

Our three pillars of research – Prevention, Recovery, and Systems – provide a holistic approach to understanding and addressing the complex interplay between work and health.

Education and Training

We collaborate with industry partners to deliver bespoke educational opportunities, including postgraduate courses and a [Graduate Certificate of Personal Injury Management](#).

We increasingly provide expert advice and research consulting services to government and industry on matters related to work and health and injury compensation. Some examples of our advisory work in 2024 include:

Expert Advice

HWL is currently undertaking a research project to explore how the Comcare scheme can improve outcomes for injured workers. This project titled, [User experiences of the Comcare workers' compensation scheme](#), is part of the review of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 (SRC Act) being conducted by an Independent Panel.

The project is being conducted independently by Monash University to inform the work of the Independent Panel.

Workplace Rehabilitation Provider Evaluation

Urbis Consulting has [partnered](#) with us to perform an outcomes and economic evaluation of WRP services. Dr Di Donato and Professor Collie are leading the quantitative component of the outcomes evaluation.



2024 Our Staff



Professor Alex Collie
Director



Dr Shannon Gray
Deputy Director



Dr Michael Di Donato
Research Fellow



Dr Elizabeth Pritchard
Research Fellow



Dr Asmare Gelaw
Research Fellow



Dr Caryn Van Vreden
Project Coordinator



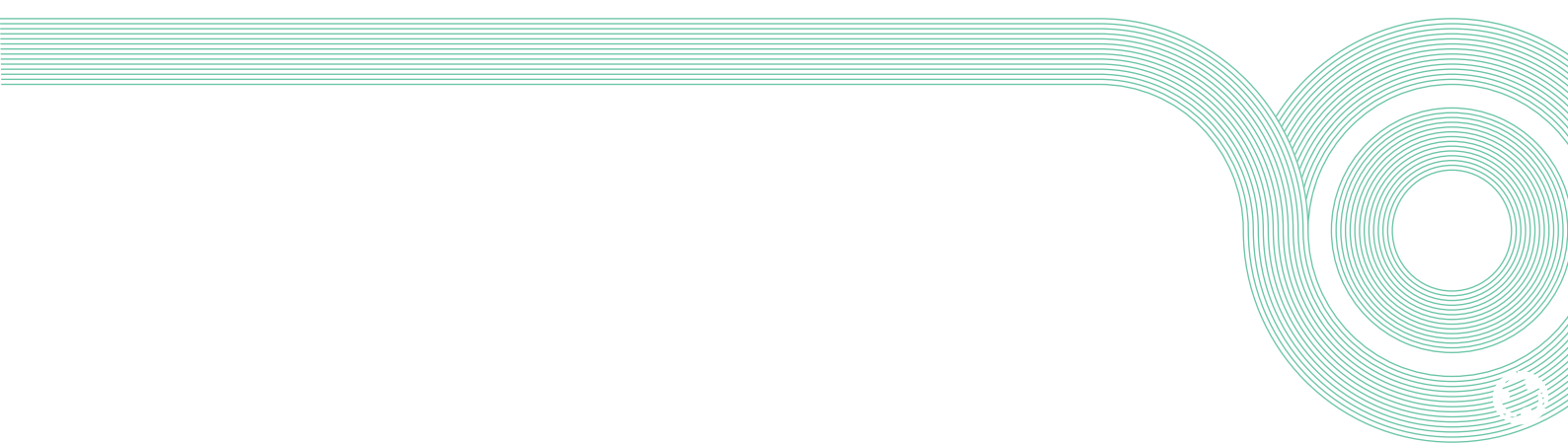
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Research Officer



**Associate Professor
Janneke Berecki-Gisolf**
Design for Care Project



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Communications Manager



Adjunct Staff & PhD Students

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CURRENT STUDENTS

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PhD Student

Emma Doust
PhD Student

Preeti Maharjan
PhD Student

Weizhe Sun
MPhil Student

Yonas Tefera
PhD Student

Simone Yu
PhD Student

Edwina Sekine
PhD Student



Flagship Research Programs

Workers' Voice

The **Workers' Voice** study is funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC), led by Professor Alex Collie. This ambitious three-year project (2023–2026) aims to reimagine Australia's workers' compensation systems from the perspective of lived experience.

Recognising opportunities to improve the management and design of workers' compensation systems, Workers' Voice seeks to create a kinder, fairer, and more effective system that better supports injured workers in their journey to recovery and return to work.

The project's core objective is to design and model a compensation system that reflects the experiences, views, and preferences of individuals who have lodged a workers' compensation claim in the past decade.

By listening to and placing injured workers and their

supporters at the heart of the process, this study is paving the way for transformative change in how claims are managed and systems are structured.

The data collected will inform the development of a new systems model for workers' compensation, identifying key challenges and potential solutions.

In 2025, the research team will host a series of workshops to refine the proposed model. This participatory approach ensures that the final design is both practical and impactful. The new system model will then be compared to the existing framework to explore its potential to improve worker outcomes.

Through the Workers' Voice study, we aim to deliver a future-ready compensation system that truly supports injured workers.

KEY MILESTONES IN 2024

This year, the Workers' Voice team achieved significant progress:

- Conducted a comprehensive survey with 607 respondents, including injured workers and their supporters.
- Completed 33 in-depth interviews to delve deeper into individual experiences and perspectives.



For more information, visit: www.workersvoice.com.au



Flagship Research Programs

NHMRC FUNDED CENTRE OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE: Better health outcomes after compensable injury

NHMRC provides funding over five years for the highest performing researchers. A partnership between Monash University, The University of Sydney, The University of Queensland, The University of Sydney and The University of Melbourne.

We are leading the Data Linkage program of the CRE, including 3 studies led from Monash University (CTP Assist, SWITCH study, and the Transition Study).

Led by the University of Queensland, Professor Alex Collie is a Chief Investigator of the CRE, and Dr Shannon Gray is an Associate Investigator. The Centre of Research Excellence in Better Health Outcomes for Compensable Injury, funded by a \$2.5 million NHMRC grant, will address the urgent need to improve health outcomes for individuals with non-catastrophic road traffic injury through translational research, capacity building and end-user engagement focused on health, compensation and legal systems.

Read more [here](#)



Medicines for compensated Australian workers with low back pain and other musculoskeletal disorders

Dr Michael Di Donato and Professor Alex Collie have continued their work for the NHMRC Australia and New Zealand Low Back Pain Research Network Centre for Research Excellence (ANZBACK).

Dr Di Donato's project for ANZBACK, Medicines for compensated Australian workers with low back pain and other musculoskeletal disorders, brings together researchers from the Monash School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash Addiction Research Centre, and the University of Sydney.

Dr Di Donato is leading this collaboration to describe trends, patterns, and the impact of policy changes on the use of pain medicines (e.g., opioids, gabapentinoids and antidepressants) in Australians with workers' compensation claims for low back pain.

The findings of these analyses started to be published in the first quarter of 2025.



Flagship Research Programs

Design for Care

As part of the Design for Care project, icare has partnered with Monash University to develop case studies on healthcare and social assistance organisations that excel in psychological injury prevention and management.

This study aims to identify best practices that create mentally safe and healthy workplaces by examining:

- Effective policies and strategies used by leading employers
- The role of leadership and organisational culture in fostering mental well-being
- Insights from employees, health professionals, and leadership on what works best

By highlighting real-world examples, this research will provide valuable guidance for organisations looking to improve workplace mental health and prevent psychological injuries.

Read more about the SMART Design for Care project [here](#)

S M A R T

Design for Care



Design for Care is funded by **icare**



Report Highlights

The Health of Australia's Workforce

We released two reports during the year which together, provide a comprehensive national snapshot of Australian workers' health.

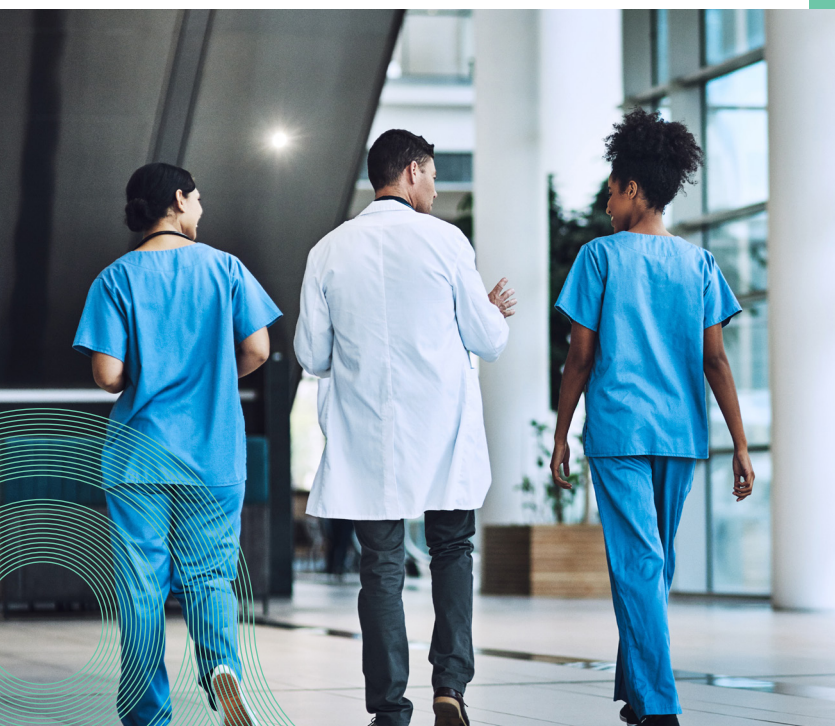
The first of these involved drawing from seven nationally representative datasets to provide a detailed benchmark for tracking and improving workforce health.

The second was published in the Medical Journal of Australia and described, for the first time, the burden of working time lost to compensable occupational injury and disease.

KEY FINDINGS

- Occupational injuries and diseases resulted in a loss equivalent to 41,194 working years annually, impacting over 41,000 full-time jobs
- Men experienced higher losses (23,367 WYL/year) compared to women (15,827 WYL/year). Older workers (45-100 years) were particularly affected, accounting for 52.8% of the total WYL
- The most significant contributors were traumatic joint and muscle injuries (40%), musculoskeletal disorders (20.7%), mental health conditions (13%), fractures (10.4%), and wounds/lacerations (8.4%)
- Poor mental health alone resulted in 42 million lost workdays annually from 2020–22, underscoring the substantial economic and societal costs associated with unwell workers

"The Burden of Working Time Lost to Compensable Occupational Injury and Disease in Australia, 2012–17: A Retrospective Population-Based Study" was published in the Medical Journal of Australia by Prof Alex Collie and Luke Sheehan.



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Healthy workers are more productive at work, live longer, report a better quality of life and use fewer community resources than unhealthy workers.

We also know that being sick and unable to work and working while you're sick, has enormous costs to individuals and society.

Professor Alex Collie

For the full report, visit

https://www.monash.edu/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/3828977/workforce-health-in-australiaa-snapshot-2024.pdf



Education and Training

Our education program, delivered in partnership with the Personal Injury Education Foundation (PIEF), offers three postgraduate micro-credential courses for professionals in personal injury, focusing on scheme design, strategic claims management, and a brand new course on scheme evaluation.

These micro-credentials are for those working in workers' compensation and motor accident compensation industries in Australia.

105 graduates from over 20 organisations across Australia have completed the program.

Additionally, we offer a specialised postgraduate degree, the Graduate Certificate of Personal Injury, for those working in the field.

In 2025, we are also offering a 10-week bespoke course for healthcare professionals working with compensable patients - Compensable Health and Medicine.

Perfect for GPs, physiotherapists, psychologists, and allied health professionals, it combines self-paced modules and a two-day intensive.



Personal Injury
Education Foundation



Community Engagement

In 2024, the Healthy Working Lives Research Group has proudly presented at and attended conferences worldwide, nationally, and virtually. Our work spanned vital topics, including opioid trends, worker mental health, injury rehabilitation, and compensation policy redesign.



INTERNATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

- ICOH, Morocco (April)
- 6th Asian Conference on Pharmacoepidemiology, Tokyo (October)



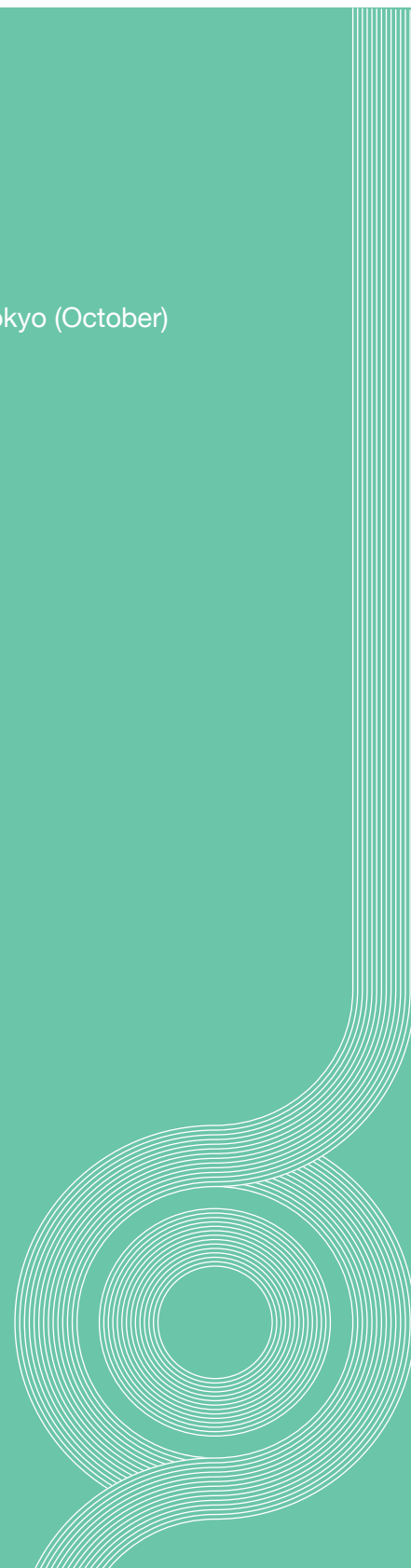
NATIONAL PRESENCE

- PIEF Conference, Perth (October)
- ACOTS 2024, Melbourne (November)
- Sydney Spinal Symposium
- Consumer and Community Involvement Showcase
- Design for Care Breakfast (Sydney)
- Health Services Research Conference



VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENTS

- ISCRRL Learning Series & Podcasts
- Rehabilitation Counsellors' Virtual Conference
- Safe Work Australia SWAAN Presentation
- SIRA Meet the Experts
- HWL Data Interest Groups



Contact Us



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WEBSITES

[Healthy Working Lives - Monash University](#)

[Workers' Voice](#)

[COMPARE Project](#)

[Driving Health](#)

Subscribe to our newsletter [here](#)