Our Data. Your Stories.

September 2025

Analysis

Work health and safety across Australia's regions

Work-related injuries and illnesses can occur anywhere across the country, in urban, regional or remote areas. This analysis uses national workers' compensation claims data to provide new perspectives on the different incidence of injured or ill workers across these regions.

The data show that, overall, the incidence rate of serious claims and the time lost burden of work-related injuries and illnesses are greater in the most remote areas of Australia compared to the major cities.

However, there are key differences across urban, regional and remote areas. For example, in Outer regional and Remote or Very remote areas, there are higher concentrations of serious claims for Traumatic joint/ligament and muscle/tendon injury and Fractures, and lower concentrations of serious claims for Mental health conditions.

The figures in this report are adapted from interactive dashboards available on the Data website. [View this report online](#) to interact with the data.

Claims data

Safe Work Australia compiles and publishes national workers' compensation statistics using claims data obtained from workers' compensation authorities in each state, territory, and the Commonwealth. These data are collated into the National Dataset for compensation-based Statistics (NDS), which is the Agency's primary source of information on work-related injuries and diseases.

This dataset includes the postcode of the workplace at which the worker was injured or exposed to disease. This allows analysis of injury or disease rates by location – for example, comparing urban and rural outcomes.

This analysis should be interpreted with caution, as workers' compensation claims do not capture all work-related injuries or illnesses that occur across the country[1]. The incidence and impacts of work-related injuries are not spread evenly across Regional Australia due to a range of factors, including sectoral differences, workers' eligibility to make a workers' compensation claim, and differences in scheme design features[2], to name a few.

[1] The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data from the Work-related injuries survey for 2021-22 shows that around one-third of workers who experience a work-related injury or illness make a workers' compensation claim.

[2] Safe Work Australia, Comparison of Workers' Compensation Arrangements in Australia and New Zealand 2023, April 2024, https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/comparison-workers-compensation-arrangements-australia-and-new-zealand-2023.

Measuring remoteness

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses a specific classification for urban, regional and remote areas, called the Remoteness Areas (Australian Statistical Geographic Standard, 3rd edition).

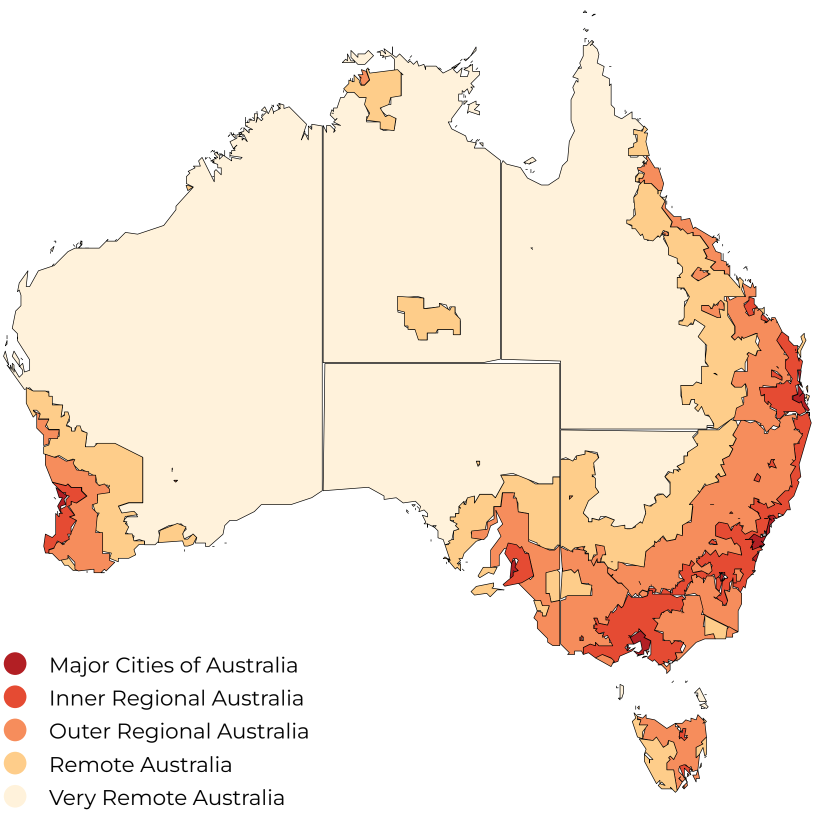
Remoteness Areas divide Australia into 5 classes of remoteness:

- Major Cities of Australia
- Inner Regional Australia
- Outer Regional Australia
- Remote Australia
- Very Remote Australia

The classes are derived by measuring the road distance from populated locations to 5 different categories of service centre, using population as a proxy measure for service availability.

NDS data can be analysed by Remoteness Areas by mapping postcodes to this geographic structure.

Figure 1: Map of workers' compensation data by Remoteness Area, 2019-20 to 2021-22



All states/territories - All remoteness areas: 2019-20 to 2021-22

360,103
Serious claims (count)

7.8
Median time lost (weeks)

$15,289
Median compensation ($)

10.67
Serious claims (incidence rate)

268.4
Time lost burden (weeks)

View the web version of this report to interact with this figure.

Work-related injuries and illnesses in urban, regional and remote areas

Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that people living in rural and remote areas of Australia have higher rates of hospitalisations, deaths and injury, and also have poorer access to primary health care services, than people living in Major cities[3]. This means that the effects of work-related injuries or illnesses can vary widely, including for the worker, their workplace, and amongst the broader community.

At the national level, workers in 'Very remote Australia' (the most remote areas, in terms of relative access to services in the ABS classification) faced a number of distinct WHS challenges compared to workers in 'Major cities of Australia' (see Table 1).

- The serious claims incidence rate[4] was 56.7% higher in Very remote Australia (16.6 claims per 1,000 employees), compared to the Major cities of Australia (10.6 claims per 1,000 employees).
- The serious claims time lost burden[5] was 40.1% higher in Very remote Australia (384.0 weeks per 1,000 employees), compared to the Major cities of Australia (274.2 weeks per 1,000 employees).

While there is not a clear trend in these measures across the Remoteness Area categories, national data highlight that increased remoteness does not necessarily correlate with higher incidence of serious claims or time lost burden. Further, the most remote regions did not consistently show the poorest WHS outcomes at the state/territory level.

Table 1: Workers' compensation data by Remoteness Area, key WHS statistics, 2019-20 to 2021-22

Remoteness Area	Serious claims (count)	Median time lost (weeks)	Median compensation ($)	Serious claims (incidence rate)	Time lost burden (weeks)
Major Cities of Australia	265,011	7.8	$15,587	10.59	274.2
Inner Regional Australia	59,548	7.2	$13,434	11.13	267.6
Outer Regional Australia	25,508	7.0	$13,759	9.91	209.4
Remote Australia	4,383	8.4	$21,329	9.67	205.9
Very Remote Australia	5,653	10.6	$34,346	16.59	384.0
Total	**360,103**	**7.8**	**$15,289**	**10.67**	**268.4**

Table 1 shows that both Outer regional Australia and Remote Australia had lower serious claim incidence rates and time lost burden compared to Major cities of Australia.

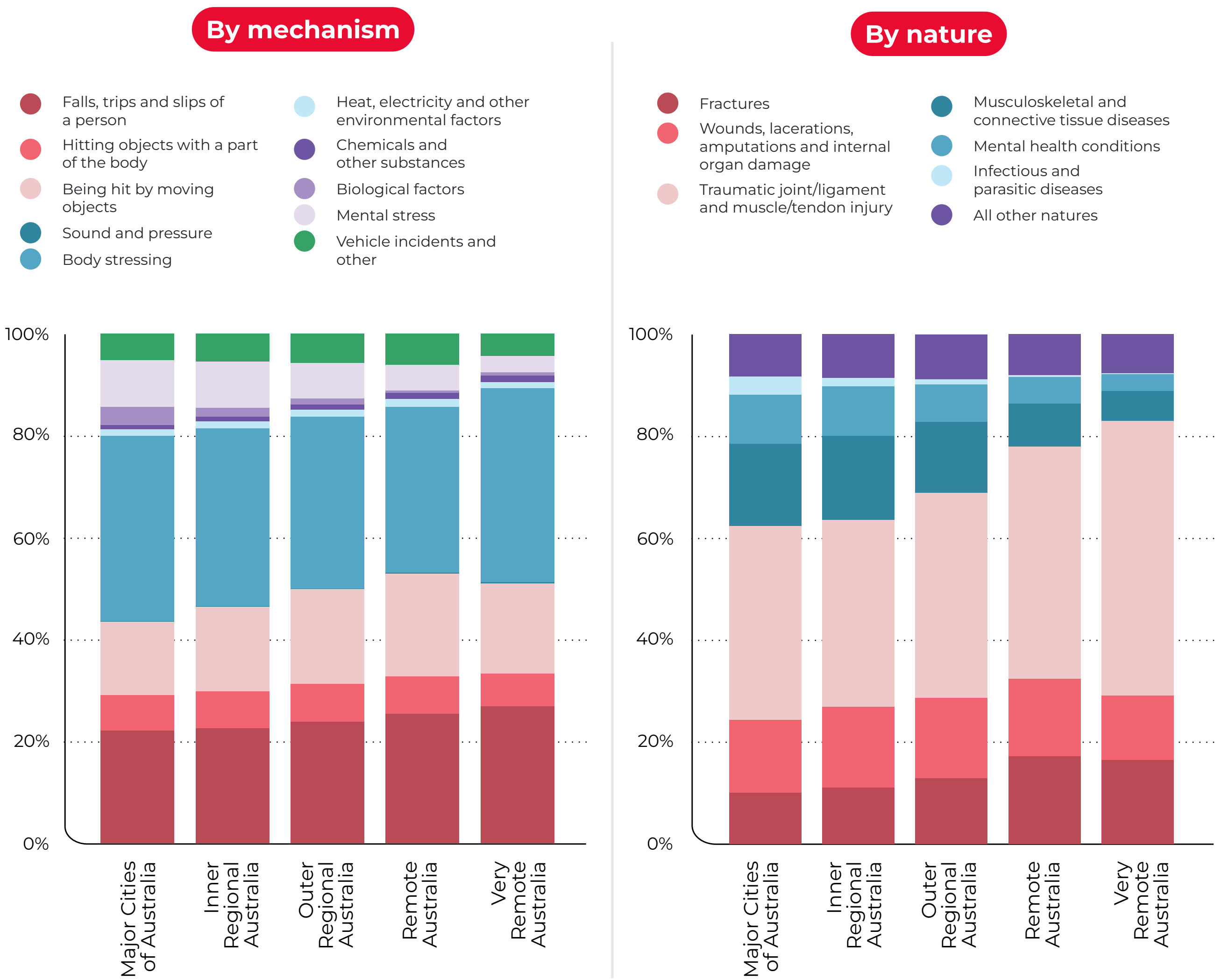
The incident type of claims, rather than frequency, appear to better correlate with remoteness.

[3]Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Rural and remote health, 30 April 2024, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/rural-and-remote-health.

[4] For comparative purposes, a proxy 'serious claims incidence rate' (measuring serious claims per 1,000 employed persons) was derived using 2021 Census Place of Work (PoW) data for this analysis.

[5] To provide a measure of injury severity by remoteness, the 'serious claims time lost burden' was calculated (measuring the total number of weeks of paid compensation expressed per 1,000 employed persons).

Figure 2: Workers' compensation data by Remoteness Area and incident type, 2019-20 to 2021-22



As shown in Figure 2, the proportion of serious claims for some Mechanisms of incident increases with remoteness, such as 'Falls, trips and slips of a person' and 'Chemicals and other substances'. Conversely, the proportion of serious claims for Mechanisms such as 'Mental stress' and 'Biological factors' decreases in more remote areas.

Similar patterns can be seen in the Nature of injury and illness by remoteness area. The proportion of serious claims for 'Mental health conditions' and 'Infectious and parasitic diseases' decreases in more remote areas, while 'Traumatic joint/ligament and muscle/tendon injury' and 'Fractures' make up a higher proportion of serious claims in these areas.

Figure 3: Employment composition by Remoteness Area, 2019-20 to 2021-22

Industries

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Mining
- Manufacturing
- Electricity, gas, water and waste services
- Construction
- Wholesale trade
- Retail trade
- Accommodation and food services
- Transport, postal and warehousing
- Information media and telecommunications
- Financial and insurance services
- Rental, hiring and real estate services
- Professional, scientific and technical services
- Administrative and support services
- Public administration and safety
- Education and training
- Health care and social assistance
- Arts and recreation services
- Other services

A factor that may contribute to some of these differences is that employment in specific industries is far more concentrated in less remote areas.

Major Cities in Australia

For example, in Major cities of Australia:

The Financial and insurance services industry accounts for

5.0% of employment

compared to 0.2% in Very remote Australia

Professional, scientific and technical services accounts for

9.8% of employment

compared to 1.5% in Very remote Australia

Retail trade accounts for

10.0% of employment

compared to 4.1% in Very remote Australia

Health care and social assistance accounts for

15.5% of employment

compared to 7.2% in Very remote Australia

Very Remote Australia

Conversely, in Very remote Australia, employment is more highly concentrated in industries such as:

The Mining industry accounts for

36.9% of employment

compared to 0.9% in Major Cities of Australia

Agriculture, forestry and fishing accounts for

9.0% of employment

compared to 0.5% in Major Cities of Australia

Whilst this analysis sheds new light on the incidence of work-related injuries and illnesses across Australia, more data is needed to understand how the experiences of injured workers differs in urban, regional and remote areas. For example, exploring the implications on return-to-work would help tailor how compensation systems can best assist injured workers following an incident, taking into account potential disparities in access to primary health care and other services.

About the data

Safe Work Australia has undertaken analysis of the data available through the NDS for serious claims by postcode of workplace, to explore WHS outcomes for urban, regional and remote areas across the country.

The claims data used in this analysis are typically reported by workers' compensation jurisdiction rather than geographic location. For more information, see the Jurisdictional comparison dashboard.

To account for year-to-year volatility in claims data for regions with relatively small working populations, this analysis uses a three-year reference period (2019-20 to 2021-22).

The analysis also focuses on 'serious claims'[6] with the following additional exclusions:

- Claims with missing postcode data or no matching Remoteness Area postcode values (4.1% of serious claims from 2019-20 to 2021-22).
- ACT claims, as there was insufficient data outside of the 'Major Cities of Australia' category in the Remoteness Areas structure to assess the impact of remoteness in the ACT.

The ABS Remoteness Areas classification provides meaningful insights into the experience of Australians living in remote or regional areas. However, the findings should be interpreted carefully as other factors also influence the calculation and comparability of these statistics. These factors include the concentration of Australia's population in major cities, different workforce populations, and different industry compositions across jurisdictions.

[6] Serious workers compensation claims are accepted claims involving one or more working weeks lost.