



WHS Profile

August 2026

Sales and service workers

More than 2.3 million people are employed as Sales and Service Workers¹ in Australia. These workers are typically customer-facing and are more likely to be younger, female and employed on a casual basis, with variable hours and income. These workforce characteristics are associated with increased work health and safety (WHS) vulnerability and may reduce workers' willingness or capacity to raise safety concerns or lodge compensation claims

This profile brings together data from multiple sources to highlight the most common physical and psychosocial risks faced by Sales and Service Workers. The findings show that while these workers face substantial physical and psychosocial risks, the extent of harm is not fully captured in workers' compensation data alone. Industry-level data and national surveys highlight patterns of exposure, under-reporting and structural barriers for WHS that are less visible in claims statistics.

This profile shows that Sales and Service Workers are routinely exposed to harmful behaviours such as bullying, violence and aggression, as well as job design factors including high job demands, low job control and limited support. Together, these risks shape workers' wellbeing overall and increase the risk of work-related harm.

Key findings



Sales and Service Workers experience significant physical and psychosocial risks that are not fully reflected in workers' compensation data alone.



Patterns across claims, survey and hazard exposure data indicate persistent barriers to reporting, particularly among younger and insecure workers.



Body stressing remains the leading cause of serious injury, while psychosocial hazards contribute to poor mental health outcomes, characterised by longer time away from work and higher compensation costs when claims occur.

¹ Sales and Service Workers include seven ANZSCO 2-digit occupations with the highest number of claims for physical injuries, physical diseases and mental health condition across all industries.

- Hospitality workers
- Food trades workers
- Food preparation assistants
- Hospitality, retail and service managers

- Sales assistants and salespersons
- Storepersons
- Sales support workers



Workforce overviewⁱ



The latest Labour Force data shows that there were over

2.3M

people employed in the Sales and Service Worker occupational group in 2025.

Sales and Service Workers have a workforce profile that differs from other occupations, particularly for young and insecure workers.



A younger workforce

36%

are aged between 15-24 years, compared to 15% for all other occupations



Predominantly female

52%

are female, compared to 48% for all other occupations



Irregular scheduled hours

25%

did not have the same scheduled hours, compared to 20% for all other occupations



Income variability

38%

reported that income varied from one pay period to the next, compared to 28% for all other occupations



Limited guaranteed hours

65%

had guaranteed hours, lower than 82% for all other occupations



Highly casualised

46%

are casually employed, compared to 22% for all other occupations



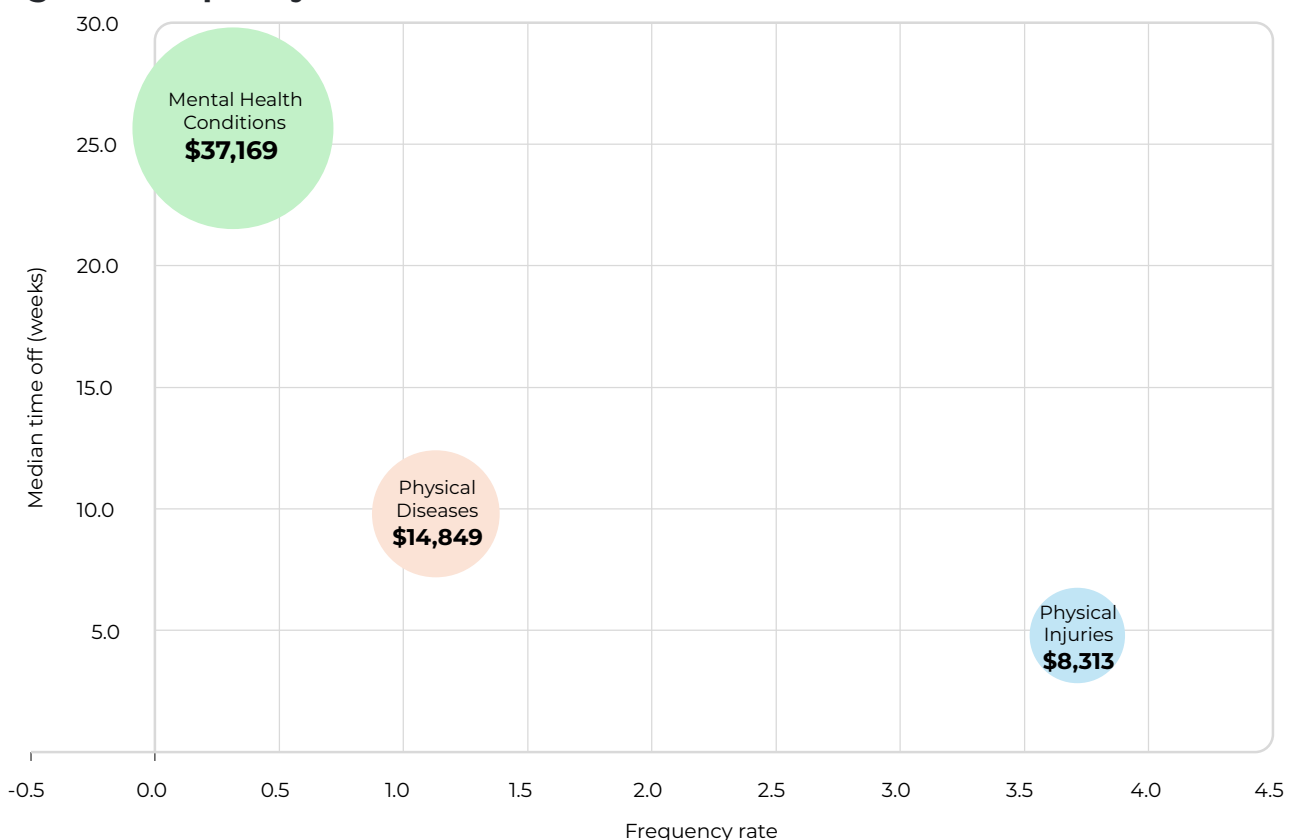
Occupational risk profile

Sales and Service Workers are exposed to a range of physical and psychosocial hazards in the workplace

This Occupational Risk Profile shows that psychosocial risks are less visible in workers' compensation claims, yet when they do occur, they are associated with longer periods away from work and higher compensation costs, indicating more severe impacts (Figure 1). At the same time, physical risks remain common, accounting for the majority of serious claims among these workers (Figure 2).

Findings from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare highlights a significant association between musculoskeletal conditions and mental health disorders, suggesting an underlying relationship between physical injury and psychosocial harm². In this context, the high volume of joint/ligament and tendon injury claims (Figure 2) may be linked to higher levels of psychosocial harm reported among Sales and Service Workers in non-claims data.

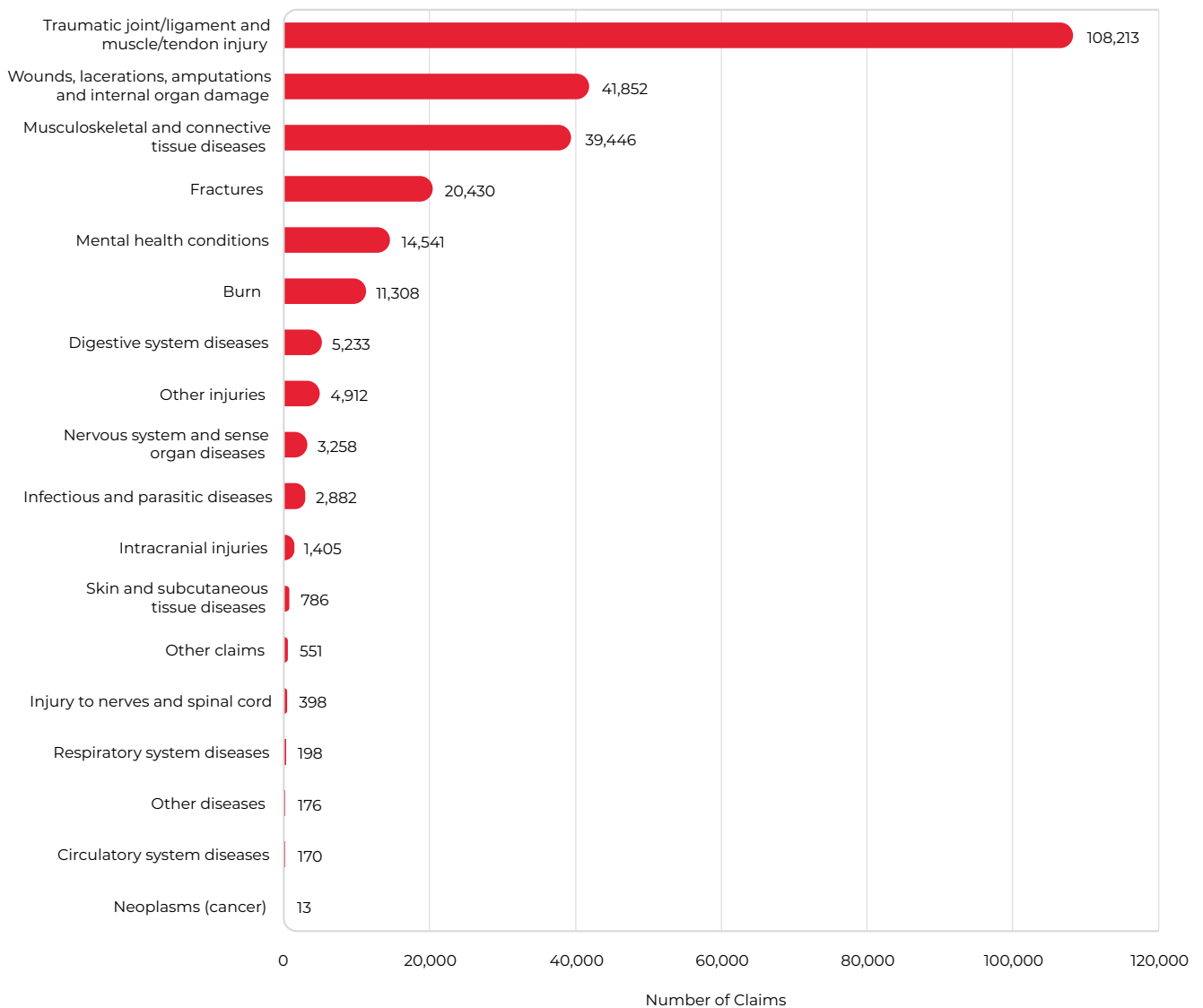
Figure 1: Frequency of serious claims for Sales and Service Workers



-  This chart shows grouped physical injuries by grouped physical injuries, physical diseases, and mental health conditions, plotted against median time lost (weeks). Bubble size represents median compensation paidⁱⁱ
-  Serious mental health claims among Sales and Service Workers occur less frequently than physical injuries and diseases but are associated with substantially longer median time off work and higher median compensation costs.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2010). *When musculoskeletal conditions and mental disorders occur together*. AIHW Bulletin no. 80. <https://www.aihw.gov.au>

Figure 2: Number of Serious Claims by Nature for Sales and Service Workers (2008-09 to 2023-24p)ⁱⁱ



 Traumatic joint/ligament and muscle/tendon injury had the highest number of serious claims among Sales and Service Workers. These injuries occur approximately 2.6 times more often than the next most common type, being Wounds, lacerations, amputations and internal organ damage.

Psychosocial hazards and mental health

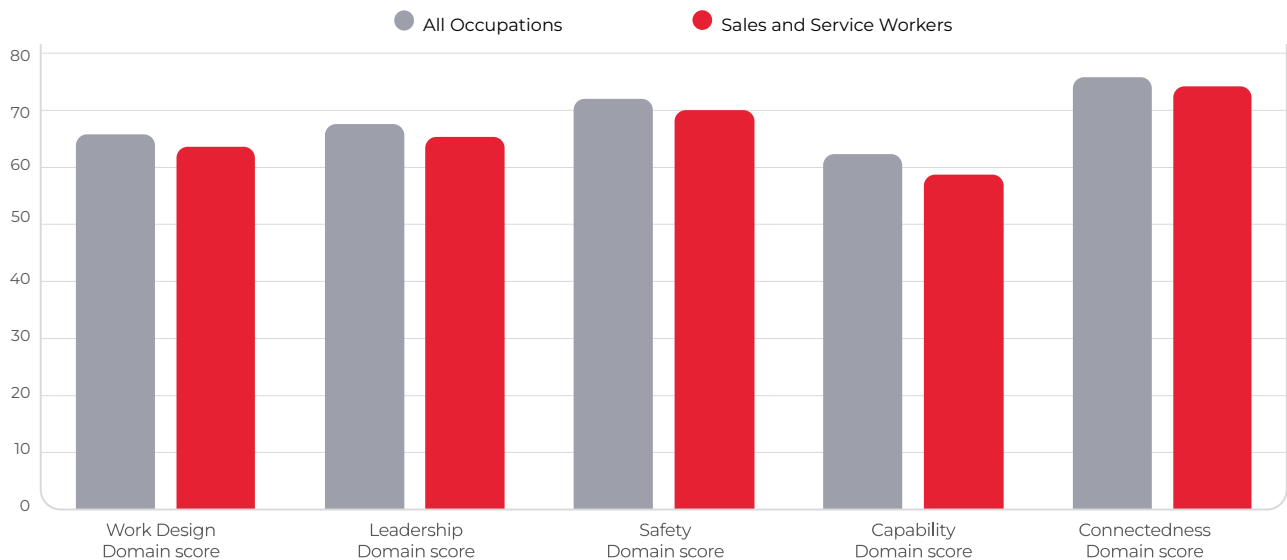
A psychosocial hazard is anything that could cause psychological harm (though they can also cause physical harm), including job demands, low job control and poor support, as well as harmful behaviours like violence, aggression, bullying and harassment. While all these hazards contribute to the risk of harm, this section focuses on harmful behaviours, alongside broader indicators of work design and leadership.

The SuperFriend Indicators of a Thriving Workplace (ITW) Survey^v provides proxy measures of psychosocial risk through domains such as Work Design and Leadership, which reflect job demands, job control, supervision and support.

- The Work Design domain includes how roles, tasks and responsibilities are organised.
- The Leadership domain measures how managers enable their teams to achieve shared goals, provide feedback and nurture a culture where workers can leverage individual strengths.

Sales and Service Workers score lower than workers in all occupations across both domains (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Domain scores from the SuperFriend Indicators of a Thriving Workplace survey from March 2024 to June 2025.^v



 Sales and Service Workers consistently score lower than All Occupations across all domains. The gap is most pronounced in Capability – a measure of a workplace’s ability to reduce risks, address harm, and promote well-being – where their score was 6% lower than All Occupations. Connectedness – a measure of the quality of workplace relationships and sense of belonging – showed the smallest gap at only 2%, indicating that interpersonal support and collaboration are relatively consistent across both groups.^v

These lower scores are mirrored in higher levels of self reported absenteeism due to psychological distress, with 25% of Sales and Service Workers reporting at least one day off in the past month, compared with 20% across all occupations.

The ITW survey^v also shows lower scores for Sales and Service Workers in the Safety domain, which measures workplace processes to prevent harassment, bullying, discrimination and violence (Figure 3).

Consistent with this, the Beta Occupational Hazards Dataset (BOHD)^{iv} indicates higher exposure among Sales and Service Workers to harmful behaviours including (Figure 4):

- unpleasant or angry people
- conflict situations, and
- physically aggressive people.

Across the compensation data, work-related harassment and/or bullying, work pressure, and exposure to occupational violence account for 73% of serious mental health condition claims.

Overall, the data points to elevated psychosocial harm facing Sales and Service Workers. While serious mental health condition claims occur less frequently than physical injuries, they result in substantially longer recovery times and higher median compensation costs – indicating more severe impacts when harm does occur. This is reinforced by SuperFriend's ITW Survey^v which shows that Sales and Service Workers had a higher proportion of workers experiencing high or very high levels of burnout compared to the national average (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Conflictual contact hazards

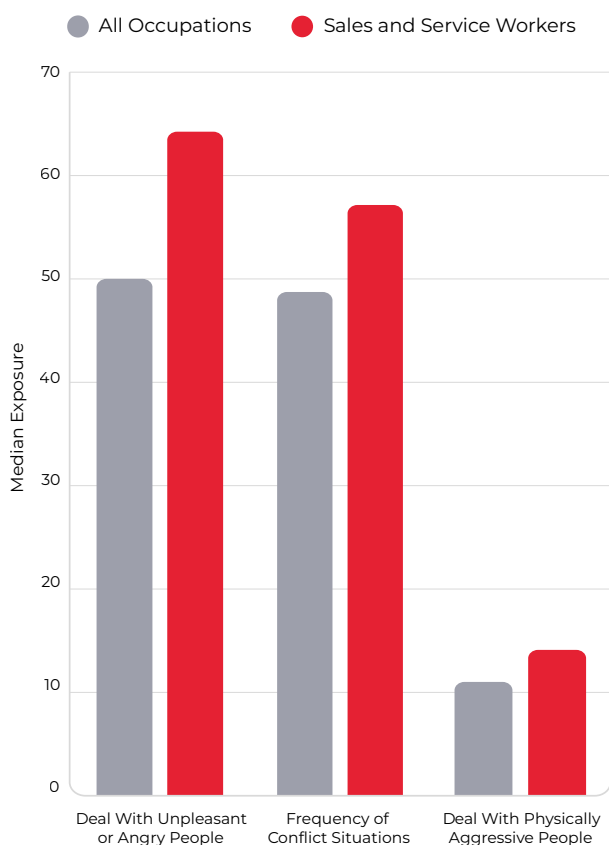
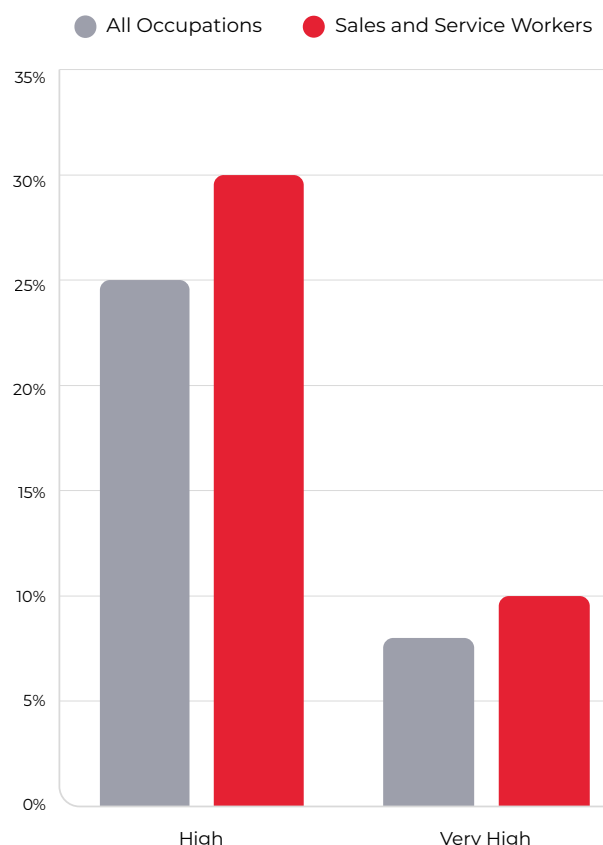


Figure 5: Proportion of workers reporting high and very high rates of burnout





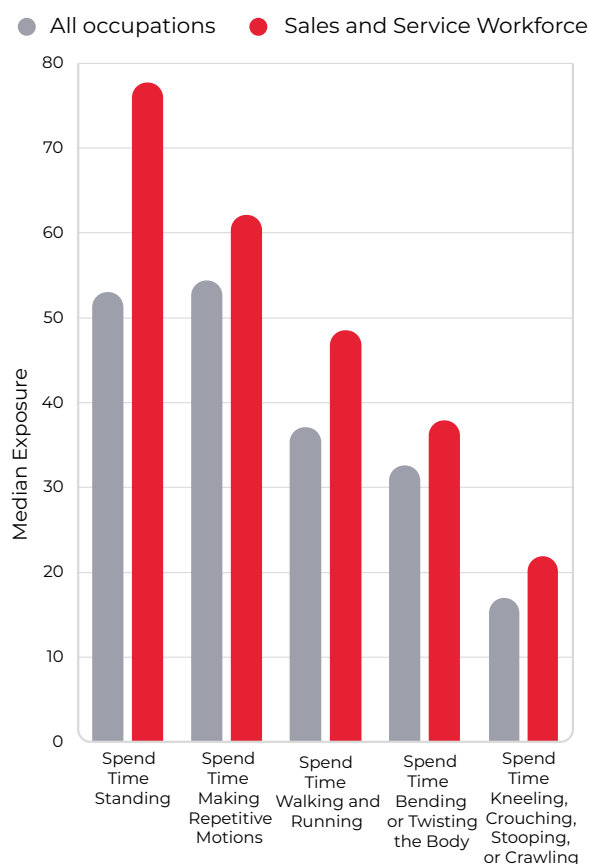
Physical risks and injuries

Physical risks remain a common issue of Sales and Service work. Workers' compensation data show that physical injuries account for the majority of serious claims (Figure 2).

The BOHD^{iv} indicates particularly high exposures to Body stressing risks, including 'prolonged standing', 'making repetitive motions', 'walking and running', 'bending or twisting the body' and 'kneeling, crouching, stooping, or crawling' (Figure 6).

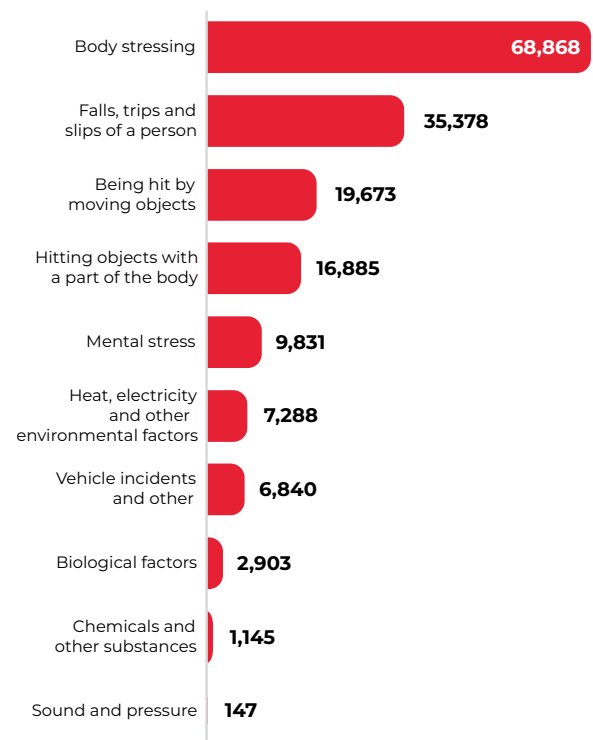
Since 2013-14, Body stressing has consistently been the most common type of work-related injury or illness for Sales and Service Workers, accounting for 40.8% of all serious claims, compared to 36.5% across All Occupations (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Median exposure to body stress risks



Sales and Service Workers experience higher median exposure scores for Body stressing risks compared to All Occupations.

Figure 7: Serious claims by Mechanism (2013-14 to 2023-24p)ⁱⁱ



'Body stressing' is the leading cause of serious workers' compensation claims, almost double the next most common mechanism of 'Falls, Trips and Slips of a person'. Other top 5 mechanisms include 'Being hit by moving objects', 'Hitting objects with part of the body' and 'Mental stress'. Collectively, these highlight the significant physical and mental demands Sales and Service workers face.

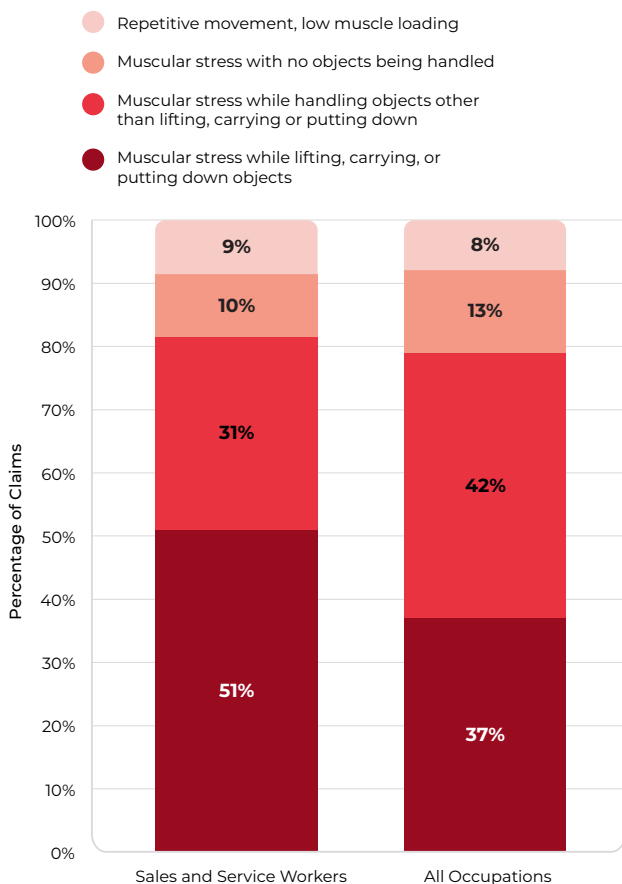
More than half of these claims are attributed to 'Muscular stress while lifting, carrying, or putting down objects' (51.0%) most commonly crates, cartons, boxes, cases, drums, kegs, and barrels (31.2%).

Notably, while muscular stress is the most common mechanism for serious claims, claims involving the mechanism 'repetitive movement, low muscle loading' resulted in higher median time lost and median compensation paid (Figure 9).

These injuries take almost 6 weeks longer than the median for other types of Body stressing injuries, and the median compensation paid is almost \$10,000 greater than the median for other types of body stressing injuries (Figure 9).

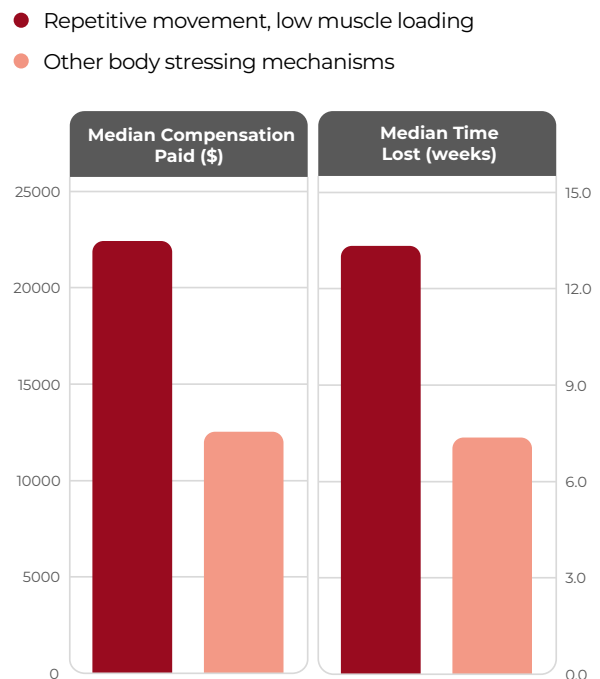
These injuries involve tasks that involve repeated actions performed with minimal force over extended periods, such as continuously wiping surfaces, stocking shelves with small items or scanning items.

Figure 8: Percentage of Serious Claims by Mechanism (2013-14 to 2023-24p)ⁱⁱ



 Sales and Service Workers are more likely to experience muscular stress from lifting and carrying objects (51%) compared to All Occupations.

Figure 9: Median compensation paid and time lost for serious claims related to 'repetitive movement, low muscle loading' (2012-13 to 2022-23)ⁱⁱ



 Among Body stressing claims in the Sales and Service Workforce, those involving repetitive movement, low muscle loading were the costliest and resulted in the greatest amount of time off work.

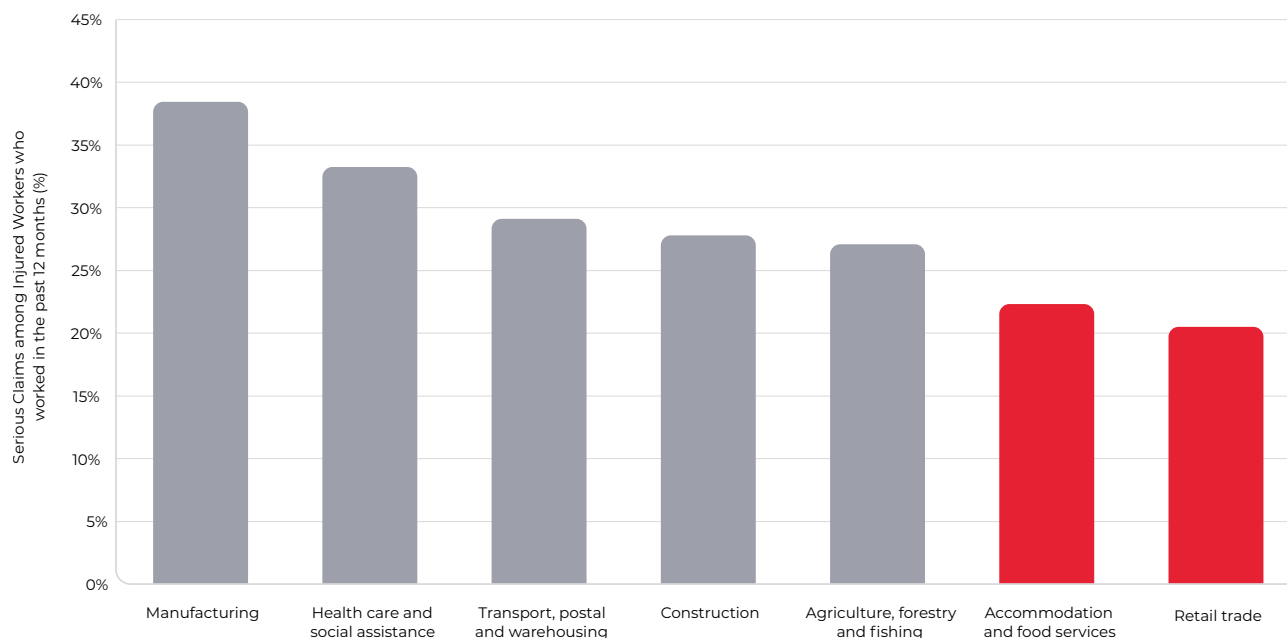
Industry context: Work Health and Safety in Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services

A high proportion of Sales and Service Workers are employed in the Retail Trade (38%) and Accommodation and Food Services (34%) industries. Presenting industry-based findings alongside occupation-level analysis provides critical context for how work is performed, how injuries occur, and how risks are experienced.

Data from the ABS Work-related Injuries Survey (2021-22) and the National Dataset for Compensation-based Statistics (NDS) show that both Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services have a lower claim-to-injury ratio than other priority industries identified in the *Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023-2033* (Figure 10).

This indicates that while work-related injuries are common, a smaller proportion result in serious workers' compensation claims. This pattern suggests that the extent of work-related harm in these industries may not be fully reflected in compensation data, potentially due to differences in injury severity, reporting behaviour, or barriers to claim submission.

Figure 10: Proportion of Serious Claims among workers that experienced a workplace injury in the prior 12 months (2021-22)^{ii, iii}



 Industries such as Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services show a lower percentage of serious claims among workers who experienced a work-related injury, suggesting potential barriers to claim submission or differences in injury severity and reporting culture.

Survey evidence supports this interpretation. The ACTU Work Shouldn't Hurt Survey (2023) found that retail workers cited that common reasons for not lodging a workers' compensation claim were either that injured workers only needed a short time off, feared it would negatively impact employment in the future, or they didn't think they were entitled to workers compensation³. Earlier survey results from 2021 showed that 28% of retail workers had experienced intimidation or bullying by management when raising health and safety concerns, compared to 18% of all workers.

Consistent with these findings, evidence suggests that younger workers - who make up a large proportion of

the Sales and Service Workforce - may also be exposed to harmful workplace behaviours. The Employee Experiences of Age Inclusion in the Workplace survey (2026) found that 39% of younger workers reported experiencing discrimination or harassment, and 36% reported experiencing sexual harassment in the previous 12 months⁴.

High workforce mobility may further compound these issues. ABS labour mobility data show that Accommodation and Food Services and Retail Trade have among the highest rates of job movement in the Australian Workforce (first and third, respectively).

³ Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), *Work Shouldn't Hurt: The State of Work Health and Safety in Australia 2023*, ACTU D No. 38/2024, Melbourne: ACTU, 2024

⁴ Diversity Council Australia & Australian Human Rights Commission. (2026). Age, assumptions and access at work: Employee experiences of age inclusion in the workplace. Diversity Council Australia

Appendix

Data Sources

ⁱ The Sales and Service roles Overview has been derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Labour Force Survey (LFS) which provides quarterly data about the labour market activity of Australia's resident civilian population aged 15 years and over from August 2025.

ⁱⁱ Safe Work Australia compiles national workers' compensation statistics using data obtained from workers' compensation authorities in each state, territory, and the Commonwealth government. These data are collated into the NDS, which is Safe Work Australia's primary source of information on work-related injuries and diseases. See [Explanatory Notes: National Data Set for Compensation-based Statistics](#) for detailed information.

ⁱⁱⁱ Work-related injuries data has been derived from the ABS Work-related injuries microdata, released 15 February 2023.

^{iv} The BOHD contains information on the 'work context' of occupations. Part of this includes information on how often occupations are exposed to, or involve doing, things which may result in injury or illness. Safe Work Australia constructed this dataset by mapping selected fields from the United States' O*NET database onto the Australian occupational classification (ANZSCO) and combining this contextual information about the nature of work that occurs in different occupations with Safe Work Australia's workers' compensation claims data, alongside ABS employment levels for each occupation to reflect the composition of the Australian labour market.

^v The SuperFriend Indicators of a Thriving Workplace (ITW) Survey captures Australian workers' experiences of mental health, wellbeing, and psychosocial safety at work. Further information on the ITW Survey can be found at <https://www.superfriend.com.au/research/workplace-mental-health-statistics>. The data presented in this profile were presented as averaged totals from data collected quarterly, from March 2024 to June 2025.

Relevant Resources

-  [Managing the risk of psychosocial hazards in retail - case study | Safe Work Australia](#)
-  [Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work | Safe Work Australia](#)
-  [Psychosocial hazards | Safe Work Australia](#)