

Janet Paterson
President



Peter Page
Recording Secretary

Willy Noiles
Executive Vice President

Robert Larocque
Treasurer

MEDIA RELEASE

UN highlights the unique challenges faced by Disabled Injured Workers during COVID-19

Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights recently gave a statement sounding the alarm that Canadians living with disabilities – including permanently injured workers – face disproportionate challenges during the pandemic. “People with disabilities must often rely on others for help with daily tasks,” she reminded, something that is increasingly difficult during COVID-19 ([9 April 2020](#)). “...our efforts to combat this virus won't work unless we approach it holistically, which means taking great care to protect the most vulnerable and neglected people in society, both medically and economically.” ([6 March 2020](#))

Injured workers – along with all Canadians living with disabilities – face a bevy of unique changes to their day to day life during these difficult times, including:

- a closure of therapy services that had been relied upon for pain management;
- significant reductions in home care;
- increased reliance on family members;
- the heightened costs associated with essential goods delivery and safe transportation.

Here in Canada, financial supports available on disability benefits remain well below the levels offered to other Canadians receiving CERB packages, and significant concerns remain about triage policies for disabled Canadians in emergency situations during medical equipment shortages. At the same time, support for the employers is at an all-time high.

Within days of COVID-19 related business shutdowns, the Province of Ontario and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) delivered a premium-deferral package for employers that offered 1.9 billion dollars in immediate relief. In the six weeks that have followed the bailout for employers, no measures have been adopted to assist injured workers themselves – including those who have become sick with Coronavirus.

In fact, the WSIB has insisted on adjudicating the case of every worker who becomes ill with Coronavirus separately, an arrangement that has resulted in the approval of just 513 out of almost 3500 claims submitted, with more than 2807 sick workers stuck in a very slow moving lineup to get any decision at all.

“Workers who are putting their health on the line to provide critical care and maintain supply chains have to know that they will be cared for – not fought against – if they get the virus,” says Janet Paterson, President of the Ontario Network of Injured Workers’ Groups (ONIWG), an umbrella

organization representing thousands of permanently injured workers in the province. “Imagine coming home from work at a hospital, grocery store, or care home with Coronavirus and, on top of knowing you’re gravely ill and you’ve put your family in serious danger, you need to engage in a battle with the compensation board to prove *where* you got this illness?”

ONIWG is among countless groups in Ontario and across Canada calling on compensation boards to follow the lead of multiple American jurisdictions and institute a “presumption” that would allow those working during the pandemic to receive automatic coverage if they become ill with virus, in much the same way that police and paramedics receive automatic coverage for PTSD.

ONIWG delivered a [submission](#) under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in September of 2019 highlighting some of the most discriminatory practices of the WSIB and the lack of access to justice to resolve these practices.

For example, the WSIB engages in a process called “deeming,” in which they assign “phantom jobs” to injured workers and reduce their benefits by 100% of the wages the Board estimates the worker should be earning – whether they are able to get that job or not. Bafflingly, despite a provincial labour market that has shed half a million jobs in the last month alone, the WSIB continues to pretend permanently disabled workers are out there during a global pandemic working 40 hours a week at jobs that don’t even exist for Canadians with no physical restrictions.

-30-

For questions, interview requests, or to connect with an injured worker affected by the COVID-19 crisis, please contact:

Janet Paterson, President, ONIWG
807-472-6910

More information

ONIWG letter to Premier Ford: https://injuredworkersonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ONIWG-letter-Premier-COVID_20200325.pdf

ONIWG letter to WSIB: https://injuredworkersonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ONIWG-letter-Premier-COVID_20200325.pdf

ONIWG statement/petition on presumptive coverage: <http://change.org/workerscompCOVID>

ONIWG submission to UN

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRPD/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CRPD_IC3_CAN_3584_1_E.docx

UN Statements:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25668&LangID=E>

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25785&LangID=E>