

The Future of Work and Health: Workers' Compensation

On May 14, 2019, 60 Chicagoans of the public health community came together at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health for "On The Table" conversations around the Future of Work in Chicago. Participants composed memos on the Future of Work to Mayor Lightfoot to let her know what issues we want her to prioritize for action.

Describe the Topic: Workers' Compensation for City of Chicago Employees

Specific Groups Discussed: All city employees

Neighborhoods/Communities of Focus: All neighborhoods

Who was at the table: Linda Forst, UIC School of Public Health; Lee Friedman, UIC School of Public Health; Tessa Bonney, UIC School of Public Health; Emily Szwiec, UIC School of Public Health; Isabel Fischbein, Latino Union.

Views and opinions represented in this document are those of individuals not the organizations.

What about the topic or issue should be a priority for the mayor?

Mayor Lightfoot should follow through on her commitment to introduce an ordinance to **move the workers' compensation program to the Executive branch** and increase transparency in government. She also should **establish a board to adjudicate Chicago employees' workers' compensation claims**.

Existing data show that government employees suffer higher rates of workplace injury and illness than those working in the private sector. The reported \$100 million a year in Chicago's workers' compensation costs do not include the longer term economic, health, and psychosocial impacts on workers, their families and their communities: notably, loss of income, ongoing disability and family stress are unmeasured. **Worker's Compensation can be harnessed for prevention of workplace injury**, the most effective way to mitigate costs and protect our most precious resource, Chicago workers.

We recommend that Mayor Lightfoot:

1. Introduce an ordinance to move the workers' compensation program to the Executive branch.
2. Create a Workers' Compensation Oversight Committee that includes the City Council, the Office of Inspector General, labor representatives, representatives from business/chambers of commerce, a healthcare provider with experience in workers' compensation, and community stakeholders.
3. Create a unit within the workers' compensation office to manage, analyze, and report workers' compensation claims data. They will:
 - a. share the data on types, places, and causes of injury with City departments to target prevention activities.
 - b. share the data on arbitration decisions with the Oversight Committee to assure fair and impartial outcomes.
 - c. explore the value of connecting workers' compensation data with that of other agencies—Illinois Department of Labor and the Office of Labor Standards—to get a more comprehensive view of issues related to injury prevention, wage/hour and benefits with the overall goal of improving the health and well-being of the workforce.
4. Create or improve the training program for workers' compensation arbitrators. This training should include: workers' compensation law, typical injuries, medical disability and impairment, and long term impacts on the workers' ability to work and maintain financial health.

5. Establish or improve workers' compensation case management to expedite return to work and to limit the impact on City workers and departments.

It is an ethical responsibility to provide a safe workplace and equitable and fair compensation system for injured workers. A safe workplace helps employee morale and satisfaction, which can reduce job turnover. Additionally, an improved workers' compensation program will reduce accusations of unfair processing claims and increase transparency. By applying compensation claims data in order to improve injury prevention efforts, workers' compensation costs will be reduced.

How does the issue connect to the values of equity, diversity, inclusion, transparency, accountability and transformation?

Using the data for prevention will protect the most at risk workers, who are frequently the lowest income residents, often from marginalized communities. An Oversight Board will make the system more transparent, and the City should be committed to releasing an annual report and making the data available to researchers and departments in the City focused on prevention. An open and fair workers' compensation system will endorse the values of equity, diversity, inclusion, transparency, accountability and transformation.

What are the suggestions from the conversation for Chicago's new mayor to consider?

1. Introduce an ordinance to move the workers' compensation program to the executive branch.
2. Create an Oversight Committee (City Council, the Office of Inspector General, business, labor, healthcare provider, community stakeholder).
3. Create an analytic unit within the workers' compensation office to
 - a. manage, analyze, and disseminate workers' compensation claim data to City departments for the purpose of promoting prevention activities.
 - b. analyze and disseminate data on arbitrations to the Oversight Committee data to assure that arbitrators are rigorous in their decision making and that they remain fair and impartial.
4. Create or improve training for workers' compensation arbitrators. This training should include: workers' compensation law, medical disability and impairment, and long term impacts on the workers' ability to work and maintain financial health.
5. Establish or improve workers' compensation case management to focus on use of evidence-based and cost-effective interventions and expedites return to work to limit the impact on city workers and departments.
6. Connect with external agencies to promote prevention and healthy/decent work for City employees
 - a. Illinois Department of Labor in consideration of prevention of workplace illnesses and injuries
 - b. the new Office of Labor Standards to assure that City employees have healthy/decent work

How could the ideas and suggestions presented in this memo help make the Chicago region better for all Chicagoans?

A healthy workforce will provide the best service to the City; money saved can go to other more needed services.