

# Workplace support you didn't know you had

## A look at Ontario's Office of the Employer Adviser and Office of the Worker Adviser.



Office of the  
Worker Adviser



Office of the  
Employer Adviser

Navigating workplace rules and responsibilities can feel overwhelming and confusing for small business owners and workers. From understanding regulations to addressing legal obligations, there's a lot to manage, and it's challenging to tackle these issues alone. That's why the Office of the Employer Adviser (OEA) and the Office of the Worker Adviser (OWA) exist. They provide support, reduce confusion, and ensure fairness across the workers' compensation system.

The OEA and OWA are two resources in Ontario that address workplace safety and insurance concerns. While these offices share the same commitment, they tailor their services to different groups: the OEA supports employers, and the OWA primarily assists non-unionized workers.

### Helping employers with the WSIB system

The OEA provides legal advice and guidance to Ontario employers—particularly small businesses with fewer than 100 employees—as they work through the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) system. The OEA's services are fully prepaid through WSIB premiums that employers already contribute, which means there are no additional costs to access these resources. Employers can access many types of support from the OEA, including:

- Help with understanding premium rates and claim costs
- Support with audits and return-to-work challenges
- Advice and guidance on the next steps when an employer disagrees with a WSIB decision

"Many employers, especially small business owners, face significant resource limitations," says Susan Adams, Director at the OEA. "Our agency, which specializes in the workplace safety and insurance system, is well positioned to provide expert advice and representation. We're consistently working to ensure that employers are treated fairly at all levels."

Accessibility is a defining feature of the OEA. The OEA team meets employers where it's most convenient, such as at their place of business, at in-person events, through video conference, or over the phone. Because most WSIB and appeals tribunal hearings now take place by video conference, the OEA works with employers to ensure they can participate in the most cost-effective way possible for them.

The OEA website also provides additional resources, with separate sections for construction and non-construction employers. This distinction matters because the construction industry has legal obligations that differ from other sectors. For example, construction employers must have a WSIB account and follow different rules for re-employment after a claim. There are also certain WSIB coverage exemptions that apply to sole proprietors, partnerships, and executive officers in construction.

### Understanding employer concerns

The OEA frequently receives questions from employers who want to understand their responsibilities and manage the WSIB system efficiently, including:

- **Claims from previous employers:** Employers ask whether they're responsible for work-related injuries that occurred with a previous employer. The responsibility typically lies with the previous employer, but OEA guidance helps clarify each situation.
- **Return-to-work obligations:** Questions about how long an employer must keep a person employed following an injury are common. Construction employers have a legal obligation to re-employ injured workers, and they must follow all return-to-work requirements.
- **Claim suppression:** Some employers wonder if they can pay a worker directly instead of submitting a WSIB claim. This practice isn't allowed. Employers must submit required forms and follow all legal requirements. Suppressing a claim can lead to penalties.



## Providing workers with accessible support

Just as employers need a voice to help them work through challenges, workers also benefit from having the right support when workplace compensation issues arise. That's where the OWA comes in.

The OWA helps non-unionized workers in Ontario understand their rights, work through WSIB claims, and receive guidance during appeals or meetings with employers and regulators. It offers several benefits, including:

- Expert guidance from lawyers and licensed paralegals experienced in WSIB matters
- Free, accessible services with no income or eligibility restrictions (for non-unionized workers in Ontario)
- Support for denied claims, benefit disputes, and workplace reprisals
- Skilled representation to help workers receive the full benefits they're entitled to

“Our workplace safety and insurance services are free to non-unionized injured workers and their survivors throughout the province,” says Kristen Lindsay, Regional Manager at the OWA. “Our occupational health and safety reprisal services are also free to non-unionized workers who’ve experienced a reprisal.”

The OWA is accessible and flexible in how it provides support. Workers can connect with the OWA through a toll-free number, in-person meetings, or virtual sessions. They can also use secure email for document exchange. This approach ensures that workers get support in a way that works best for their circumstances.

## Protecting worker rights

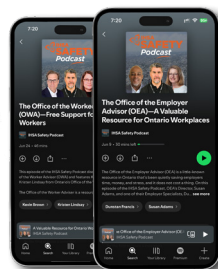
The OWA often helps workers address situations that are unfamiliar or confusing, including:

- **Denied WSIB benefits:** If a worker receives a decision from the WSIB, such as denied benefits, the OWA assists with filing an appeal and may provide representation throughout the process.
- **Return-to-work meetings:** The OWA represents workers in return-to-work meetings with the WSIB or employers, offering counsel to protect the workers' rights.
- **Interactions with other benefits:** Workers often ask how WSIB benefits interact with other benefits, such as the Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, or Ontario Disability Support Program. The OWA provides clear guidance to help workers understand their entitlements.

## Spreading the message of support

The OEA and OWA want to make their services as accessible and effective as possible. Looking ahead, they plan to enhance digital tools, expand online resources, improve social media engagement, and raise awareness about the full range of services they offer.

“We plan to get the message out even more widely, on all social platforms, that the OWA is the best place for workers to come for free representation on their occupational health and safety reprisal issues and insurance matters,” Lindsay says. “We will also use the platforms to continue expanding our educational mandate.” ■



Listen to **Episodes 110 and 111** of the **IHSA Safety Podcast** to hear more about the Office of the Employer Adviser (OEA)—a Valuable Resource for Ontario Workplaces and the Office of the Worker Adviser: [ihsasafetypodcast.ca](http://ihsasafetypodcast.ca).