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WCDToday

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Department of Consumer and Business Services
Sean O'Day, Director

Workers' Compensation Division
Matt West, Administrator

<i>WCD Today</i> editor	DCBS editor	Designer
George Arias-Montero	Michael Plett	Angela Van Grunsven

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Matt West

Administrator's notebook

Legislative changes and updates

By Matt West, WCD administrator.

Welcome to another edition of WCD

Today. The Workers' Compensation Division (WCD) has been busy during the first half of 2026, and we expect the rest of the year to be just as active.

The year began with Oregon's short legislative session, which lasted about five weeks. During this session, the Oregon Legislature passed three bills

affecting workers' compensation. They are:

House Bill 4040, which grants physician associates and nurse practitioners the ability to continue treating injured workers beyond 180-days. It also allows physician associates and nurse practitioners to authorize temporary disability benefits, adds them to the definition of attending physician, and permits them to make findings of impairment. In addition, the bill allows a physician associate or nurse practitioner to remain a worker's attending physician after a claim closure. The bill became effective April 7, 2026.

House Bill 4027 established the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) Expenses Fund in the Department of Treasury and directs the director of the Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS) to manage the fund, subject to an agreement between the DCBS director and BOLI commissioner. The bill became effective June 5, 2026.

Senate Bill 1519 modifies the compensation an injured worker receives from workers' compensation insurance during a period of temporary total disability (TTD). Workers will receive

75 percent of the portion of their wage that is equal to or less than 75 percent of the average weekly wage, and 65 percent of the portion of their wage that exceeds 75 percent of the average weekly wage. The bill specifies that this modification to the compensation an injured worker receives during a period of TTD applies to the average weekly wage in effect on the date of injury.

The bill also modifies the compensation an injured worker receives from workers' compensation during a period of permanent total disability. The worker will receive 75 percent of their wage that is up to 75 percent of the average weekly wage, and 65 percent of the portion of their wage that is more than 75 percent of the average weekly wage in effect on the date of the injury.

The bill retains existing minimum and maximum compensation rates during a period of temporary or permanent total disability. It specifies that the statutory definition for "average weekly wage" applicable to temporary total disability only applies to increases in compensation benefits paid when the applicable average weekly wage has increased since the previous fiscal year. The bill applies to claims with a date of injury on or after Jan. 1, 2027.





Modernization update

By Heather Williamson, Modernization Program manager.

Another important change on the horizon is WCD's upcoming move – along with the rest of DCBS – from its current home in the Labor and Industries (L&I) Building in downtown Salem to the Department of Revenue building just across the street. This temporary move is necessary because the L&I Building is scheduled for a seismic retrofit. We now expect the move to take place in early 2027. Our teams are working to ensure the move goes smoothly and that all physical materials, publications, and contact information are updated with the new address. We hope to share additional details about the move in the next edition of WCD Today.

Another change that is important to note is Policy Manager **Daneka Karma's** retirement in early July. Daneka was a key member of the WCD leadership team throughout her nearly 11 years with the division. She played an important role in supporting policy development, strengthening program consistency, and guiding WCD through several major initiatives. We thank Daneka for her many contributions and wish her all the best in her well earned retirement. Her influence will continue to shape our work, and she will be missed.

Thank you for joining us for another edition of WCD Today. We look forward to finishing the year strong and continuing our work toward an equitable workers' compensation system for all. ■



Heather Williamson

The Modernization Program recently shared updates and upcoming milestones for the Workers' Compensation Information System (WCIS) project at the 22nd Workers' Compensation Education Conference.

As a reminder, the WCIS project released a request for proposals (RFP) in fall 2025. Interested vendors had until Jan. 16, 2026, to submit proposals. The selection committee received many submissions and has been reviewing them throughout the multiple round procurement process.

The project is set to select a vendor in August, with contract negotiations to begin soon after the announcement of the decision to award the contract. A vendor kickoff is tentatively planned for the first quarter of 2027.

To support implementation and long term maintenance of the new system, the Modernization Program is growing its team. An external user-support coordinator joined the team in March, followed by a systems/software trainer in June. Recruitment for a product owner is planned to begin this fall. These positions will help support internal and external stakeholders as the project moves forward.

With implementation expected to begin in about 12 to 18 months, we encourage staff members and stakeholders to sign up for our [GovDelivery](#) emails and regularly visit the [Modernization Program](#) webpage to keep up with WCIS project updates. ■



Meet the new Operations manager: Barb Belcher



Barb Belcher

At the beginning of 2026, Barb Belcher stepped into the role of manager of WCD's Operations Section, bringing more than two decades of experience to the position.

Barb began her career at the Department of Consumer and Business Services with Oregon OSHA in 2003, before she joined WCD in 2010. Since 2014, Barb has taken on several leadership roles for the division, including two recent rotations as a section manager. Her work has consistently shown her strong leadership, commitment to WCD's mission, and support for staff members across the division.

Since her permanent appointment to the Operations manager position in March, Barb has applied her thoughtful approach and deep institutional knowledge to strengthen WCD's operations and priorities.

Outside of work, Barb enjoys spending time outdoors, visiting with friends and family, and caring for her cat and dog.

Meet the new Audit manager: Jenn Ferris

Jenn Ferris was selected to lead WCD's Audit Unit in April. Before her appointment, Jenn served as the acting Resource and Technology Services Unit manager beginning in June 2025. She also has held positions in multiple areas of the division, including as the conference and training coordinator and as an appellate reviewer. This variety of experience has given Jenn the leadership skills, workers' compensation expertise, and operational perspective needed to effectively guide the Audit Unit.



Jenn Ferris

Jenn's transition into the unit manager role reflects her long-standing dedication to quality work and collaborative approaches. Under her leadership, the Audit Unit will be focused on consistency, clear communication, and strong partnerships throughout the division.

When she's not at work, Jenn is an avid reader of all things fiction and enjoys traveling. Her most recent trip took her on a road adventure from rural New York through Massachusetts, where she explored every stop she could make along the way.

Meet the new Resource and Technology Services Unit manager: Jim Kumm

Our newest manager, **Jim Kumm**, joined WCD as manager of the Resource and Technology Services Unit in mid-June with a broad and diverse professional background. His previous work experience includes service in the U.S. Navy as a nuclear machinist's mate, followed by work in engineering, operations, and management roles across several industries. Most recently, Jim managed service operations for an equipment company in Oregon.

During the hiring process, Jim was drawn to the collaboration, support, and professionalism he saw throughout the division. He looks forward to working closely with staff members and applying his technical and operational expertise to the unit.

Outside of work, Jim enjoys spending time with his sons, Tavin and Ryker, smoking barbecue, and exploring Oregon with his dog, Otis. ■



Jim Kumm

Preferred Worker Program success story: Koki De La Rosa

On Aug. 22, 2024, Koki De La Rosa suffered a work related injury while moving a bin full of dirty laundry.

The injury left him with a complete tear of his right triceps and permanent restrictions on lifting, pulling, pushing, and performing any overhead work.

These restrictions prevented Koki from returning to his job at Holiday Inn Portland-Colombia Riverfront, where he had been lobby supervisor since 2023. Nevertheless, his employer worked with SAIF Corporation and the Preferred Worker Program (PWP) to get Koki into a modified position that would allow him to work safely within his restrictions.

Reviewing return to work options

On Sept. 22, 2025, **Oscar Garcia Lopez**, worksite

modification consultant with the Oregon Workers' Compensation Division (WCD), met with **Tammy Stark** and **Liz Decker**, Holiday Inn Portland's director of human resources and safety manager, respectively. Together, with Koki, they reviewed PWP benefits and discussed a worksite modification request that could help Koki perform in a modified role.

Oscar started the worksite modification process according to Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) guidelines. He reviewed Koki's permanent restrictions and the modified job offer letter that explained how each duty met the restrictions outlined by the physician. The duties in the letter were designed so they could be supported by appropriate modifications.

During the meeting, Koki said he was, in general, doing well with managing his restrictions. His employer encouraged him to avoid tasks that could worsen his condition and to request help



from co-workers when tasks involved heavy lifting, pulling, or pushing. Even so, Koki said he felt saddened to be labeled as a person with a disability. Before the injury, he had been recognized as an organizer and natural leader, and he hoped to regain some of that confidence

and responsibility with worksite modification.

At the end of the discussion, Oscar recommended several pieces of equipment that could support Koki's work, including a powered tug, wide area vacuum, lighter janitorial floor scrubbers, and a Bluetooth portable radio.

A meaningful effect

Reemployment Specialist **Christy Johnson**, who later helped Koki with employment related purchases, saw how deeply the injury and claims process had affected him. For example, when Koki first called her to discuss his clothing benefit, he told her how PWP had helped him turn his life around. Koki said that, during the workers' compensation claims process, he was depressed and lost interest in hobbies he had enjoyed, such as fishing. He told her he had faced "really dark, dark days," and there were times he wasn't sure "if

he'd see the next day."

Christy said everything changed for Koki when his employer let him know he could return to modified work with help from PWP. She also saw how quickly Koki connected with Oscar during the worksite modification process. According to Koki, Oscar was kind, understanding, and reassuring. Oscar told Koki that he would support him every step of the way. That reassurance allowed Koki to feel he had someone he could depend on as he worked toward rebuilding his life.

Christy said Koki had "nothing but wonderful things to say about Oscar" and that Koki and his employer are grateful for PWP and the support it provided during a challenging time.

A strong finish

Koki's story is just one example of how Oregon

workers can feel overwhelmed or uncertain after a life changing injury. But with the support of PWP and the dedication of WCD's Employment Services team, workers are not left to navigate those challenges alone. Each day, our staff members help people regain confidence, rebuild stability, and return to meaningful work. We are proud of the collaboration, care, and expertise that make outcomes like Koki's possible – and we remain committed to helping more workers find support, opportunity, and hope. ■



Participate in WCD's rulemaking process

By Marie Rogers, policy analyst and rules coordinator.

The Workers' Compensation Division (WCD) encourages participation in its rulemaking process and offers several ways for stakeholders to stay informed and involved.



Marie Rogers

Those interested can sign up for [WCD email updates](#) by visiting the division's [laws and rules webpage](#) or by contacting the rules coordinator.

WCD generally begins rulemaking by emailing stakeholders to request potential issues

related to a specific division of rules in Oregon Administrative Rules chapter 436. Stakeholders can submit issues using the [Possible Rule Issue Form](#). Early submissions allow WCD to research each issue and prepare the agenda for the Rulemaking Advisory Committee.

Rulemaking Advisory Committee meetings provide an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss identified issues, including the advantages and disadvantages of various solutions. WCD uses feedback gathered during these meetings to draft proposed rules. Once proposed rules are published, WCD notifies the public.

Stakeholders can participate in the public hearing

to provide verbal testimony about the proposed rules, or they may submit written testimony by fax, mail, or – preferably – email. WCD considers all testimony when drafting permanent rules. After review, the division publishes a document that responds to every comment submitted. All testimony, and the division's responses, are available on WCD's [proposed rules and testimony webpage](#).

When the permanent rules are published, the rulemaking process is complete.

If you have questions about the rulemaking process, contact me, WCD's policy analyst and rules coordinator, at 971 286 0316 or wcd.policy@dcbs.oregon.gov. ■

Building momentum: 22nd Workers' Compensation Education Conference enjoys stellar turnout

By Chris Sutter, acting conference and training coordinator, and George Arias-Montero, communications coordinator.

The 22nd Workers' Compensation Educational Conference took place May 7-8 in Wilsonville and brought together more than 260 participants from across the Oregon workers' compensation industry.

The event marked another successful collaboration between the Workers' Compensation Division (WCD) and the International Workers' Compensation Foundation (IWCF).

IWCF, a nonprofit established in 1988, partners with eight states to support education and outreach in the workers' compensation field. The



Chris Sutter



George Arias-Montero

foundation helps organize conferences that provide training, networking opportunities, and timely updates for professionals throughout the industry.

This year's event featured more than 23 hours of classes, 20 exhibitor booths, and dedicated networking sessions. Exhibitors showcased new tools, services, and resources, while attendees had the opportunity to earn continuing education credits, including those for insurance agents, vocational providers, attorneys, claims examiners, and claims managers.



From left: WCD's Administrator Matt West, Operations Manager Barb Belcher, and Policy Analyst Aaron Fellman.

WCD Administrator **Matt West** opened the conference with a state of the industry presentation that included things to watch for in the next year. Additional speakers included **Dr. Robert Arias**, a licensed clinical psychologist from Waverly, Nebraska, who specializes in chronic pain and neuropsychological evaluations. His session explored what neuropsychological evaluations involve, the importance of accurate diagnoses in brain injury claims, and how validity testing supports better treatment decisions. He also discussed strategies that promote early intervention, successful return to work, and avoidance of overtreatment.

Breakout sessions throughout the conference covered a variety of topics, including:



Dr. Robert Arias



Clockwise from top left: Jillian Thibodeau of Frasco Inc., one of the conference's 20 exhibitors, speaks with an attendee; conference goers participate in one of many breakout sessions; acting WCD Conference and Training Coordinator Chris Sutter, Executive Director Eric Oxfeld of the International Workers' Compensation Foundation, and WCD Audit Unit Manager Jennifer Ferris; Department of Consumer and Business Services Director Sean O'Day (with green ribbon) and members of the Management-Labor Advisory Committee; Employment Services Team Manager Charity Steffen shares information with an attendee; and attorney Keith Semple of Johnson, Johnson, Lucas, and Middleton, and attorney Kate Suisman of the Northwest Workers' Justice Project, and Ombuds for Oregon Workers Barbra Anderson participate in a breakout session titled "Perspective From the Injured Worker."

- How Oregon OSHA consultations can reduce claims
- Workers' compensation 101
- The perspective of the injured worker
- Appellate updates from the Oregon Workers' Compensation Board
- Worker noncooperation and suspension of benefits

- Mental health and supportive supervision
- Recordables and Reportables (a WCD-Oregon OSHA collaboration)
- Employee or independent contractor classification

Acting WCD Conference and Training Coordinator Chris Sutter said he appreciated everyone who collaborated on this year's conference.

"The success of our conference was a result of our talented WCD staff members who came together to put on such an outstanding event," Sutter said. "Thank you to the speakers and the WCD project team for making this possible!"

The 23rd Workers' Compensation Educational Conference will be held in 2028. ■

WCD in the community



On Jan. 13, Worksite Modification Consultant **Oscar Garcia Lopez** visited the Mexican Consulate for the first of PWP's monthly outreach visits in 2026. He gave brief presentations about PWP benefits

to 52 visitors and answered questions. Consul **Sofía Arreola** thanked PWP for its partnership in supporting eligible injured workers.



On Feb. 7, Oscar Garcia Lopez and Administrative Support Specialist **Kimberly Orea** presented the Preferred Worker Program (PWP) to about 50 construction employers through Prospera NW's education

program.



On Feb. 26-27, the Appellate Review Unit (ARU) attended the Oregon Academy of Ophthalmology Post Graduate Convention, where Appellate Reviewer **Kyle Gwyn** staffed a vendor booth to share information about the Medical Arbitrator

Program. Several providers expressed interest in participating, giving ARU new leads in southern Oregon and along the coast that would help WCD better serve workers in those communities.



On April 2, Field Investigators **Cristal Rodriguez** and **Sarah Jones** took part in the Governor's Marketplace. They made several connections for future outreach, and Cristal

provided Spanish speaking business owners with information about workers' compensation laws. About 200 people attended.



On May 7, Worksite Modification Consultants **Bob Williams** and Oscar Garcia Lopez (not pictured) represented the Preferred Worker Program (PWP) at the 2026 Oregon Association



of Minority Entrepreneurs (OAME) Trade Show. Their booth drew steady interest, including from corporate representatives planning to share PWP information internally. Bob and Oscar strengthened connections with OAME leaders and the Mexican Consulate and networked with more than 1,700 attendees.



On June 10, The Governor's Marketplace event was held in Ontario, Oregon, to provide information on public contracting opportunities

and business resources. Oscar Garcia Lopez participated as a panelist, presenting information on the Employer-at-Injury Program (EAIP) and the Preferred Worker Program (PWP), followed by a Q&A session. Field Investigator **Yasmin Castaneda Benavides** also attended the event to share information on Employer Compliance Unit. The event hosted about 47 participants. ■