



Workers compensation system is designed *not to help workers*

"He wanted to go back to work. He wanted to get better. But this system that we have currently didn't allow that." Mr Rowan Kernebone , Injured Workers Support Network.

Common to all workers compensation systems is the idea that paying compensation to injured workers is a disincentive to return to work. So when the NSW government was able to remove more than 5,000 injured workers from workers compensation within two years of the 2012 changes, this was portrayed as a success. The NSW government announced in April 2014 that the objective of the changes, to return more injured workers to work, had been attained.

But a new report by the Macquarie University on the impact of 2012 changes to the NSW workers compensation scheme shows injured workers have received limited help returning to work.

The report, commissioned by Unions NSW, found that the NSW government has not been interested in whether

- workers had long-term, sustainable employment in work that is meaningful, adequate and appropriate
- workers require ongoing medical treatments or aids in order to remain working productively
- workers are prevented from returning to work, or working in their full pre-injury capacity, because their injury has been exacerbated or a secondary injury has developed as a result of earlier efforts to remain at work, or their interactions with the workers' compensation scheme.

The Injured Workers Support Network gave the example of recently deceased Dieter Sommerberg . Mr Sommerberg had worked as a labourer until a steel bar fell from a height onto his legs and feet. "So much damage that he required special shoes to accommodate his acquired disability," said Rowan Kernebone from the Injured Workers Support Network.

- But shoes that the WorkCover insurer took 18 months to approve.
- Mr Sommerberg was told time and time again by his insurer that he had to look for work, despite knowing he could not do the work without the special orthopedic shoes
- Mr Kernebone said Mr Sommerberg was found dead in his home after he had a heart attack and failed to turn up for a WorkCover case conference.

The report also found that the stigma and discrimination against injured workers is endemic.

Mark Morey, secretary of Unions NSW, said "We know how important it is to get injured workers back to work within the first 8 to 12 weeks to make sure that they are actually going back to productive jobs, not jobs that people can be squeezed into because the insurance companies can't be bothered doing a proper job."