

# Employer Support for Injured Australian Workers: Overview and Association with Return to Work.

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- These organisations are all represented on the project advisory group, in addition to the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the AiGroup.
- The COMPARE project team, and report authors, include Professor Alex Collie, Dr Tyler Lane, Dr Shannon Gray, Ms Dianne Beck and Mr Luke Sheehan of the Insurance Work and Health Group at Monash University. Please refer to the final page for contact details.
- The views expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the project funders, data providers or members of the project advisory group.

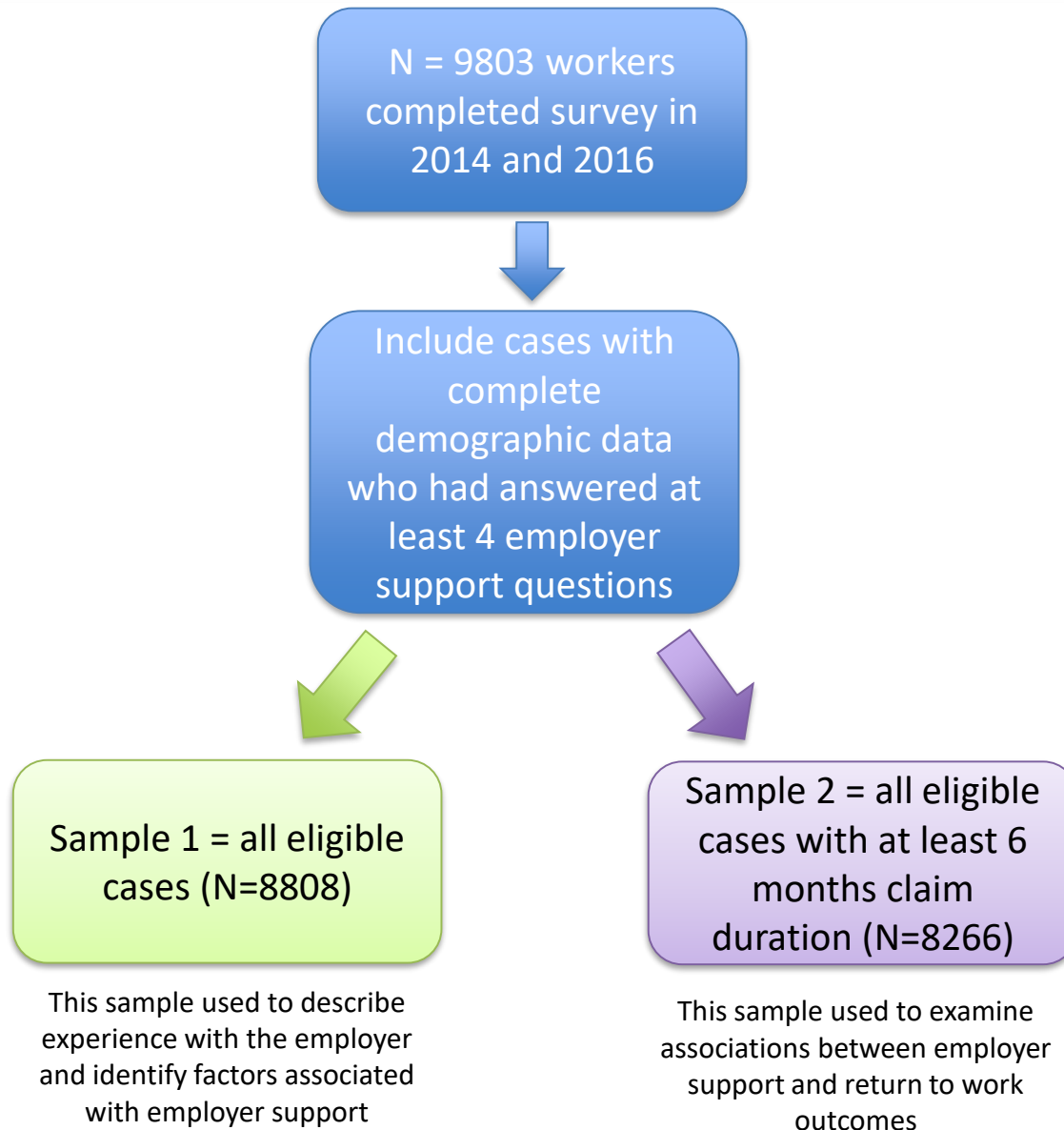
- The employer plays a key role in the management and facilitation of the Return to Work (RTW) of an injured worker.
- Multiple recent studies have demonstrated a link between the level of support offered by the employer and return to work (see next slide for examples).
- Existing Australian studies have relatively small samples, are from a single jurisdiction, have focused on specific conditions, or have employer support as a secondary focus of analysis.
- The National RTW survey provides an opportunity to examine associations between injured workers' post-injury experience with their employer and return to work, using a large sample of Australians from all of the nation's major workers' compensation jurisdictions.

- **Awang et al (2017)** conducted a retrospective study of 9850 Malaysian workers and found 94% of workers with an employer who had a high interest in re-employing the injured worker had a successful return to work compared to 35% for those who did not have an interested employer.
- **Jetha et al (2017)** surveyed 551 Victorian workers about support for RTW from supervisors and co-workers. A positive response from the supervisor was associated with sustained return to work.
- **Lane et al (2017)** used the same Victorian cohort to assess the impact of RTW co-ordinators. Good interactions with a RTW co-ordinator increased the odds of sustained RTW in longer claims.
- **Durand et al (2014)** reviewed 17 studies and recommended an approach for workplace management of RTW grounded in worker support.

This project sought to answer the following questions via analysis of the National Return to Work Survey:

1. How do injured Australian workers perceive their interaction with their employer during the RTW process?
2. What worker, workplace, injury and claim factors are associated with these workplace experiences?
3. Are workplace experiences a significant, independent predictor of return to work, and if so what is the magnitude of the effect?

# Sample Selection for Employer Support Questions



- For each group of questions two samples were used.
  
- Analysis of sample 1 focussed on:
  - Describing workplace experience among respondents (study objective 1). For this analysis we calculated counts and proportions and used chi-square statistics to assess differences across demographics.
  - Determining the association between worker, injury, workplace and claim factors and responses to workplace experience questions (study objective 2). For this analysis we used binary logistic regression and ordinal logistic regression.
  
- Analysis of sample 2 focussed on:
  - Determining associations between workplace experience and return to work outcomes (study objective 3). For this analysis we used binary logistic regression.
  
- Results of analysis have been converted to figures to demonstrate major / statistically significant findings.



The two most recent waves of the National RTW survey included the following questions:

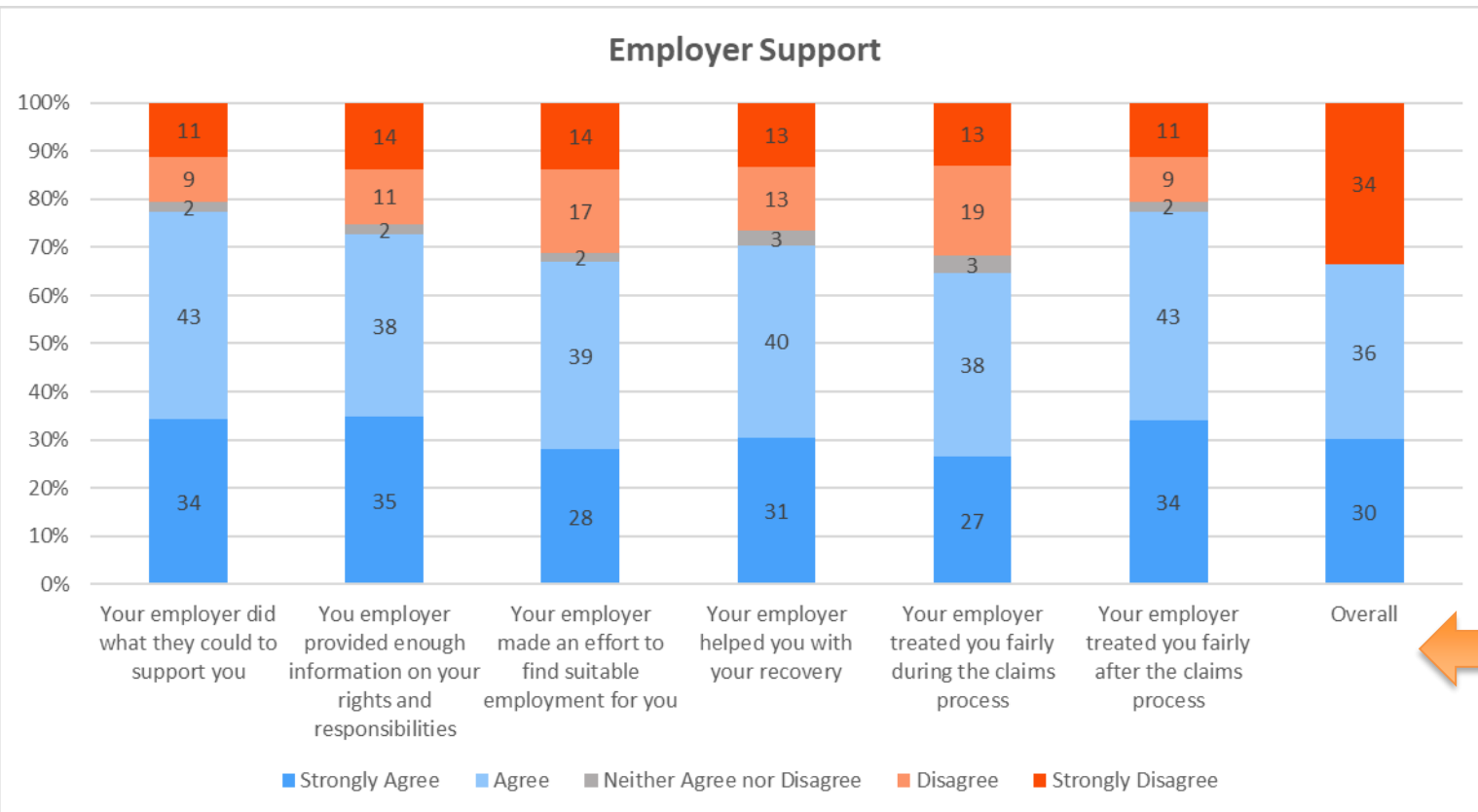
*“Thinking about the role of your employer at the time of your workplace injury or illness, do you agree or disagree with the following statements:*

- 1. Your employer did what they could to support you*
- 2. Your employer provided enough information on both your rights and responsibilities*
- 3. Your employer made an effort to find suitable employment for you*
- 4. Your employer helped you with your recovery*
- 5. Your employer treated you fairly during the claims process*
- 6. Your employer treated you fairly after the claims process”*

Responses were on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale.

The same set of questions were asked in the 2014 and 2016 surveys.

# Injured Workers' Perception of Employer Support



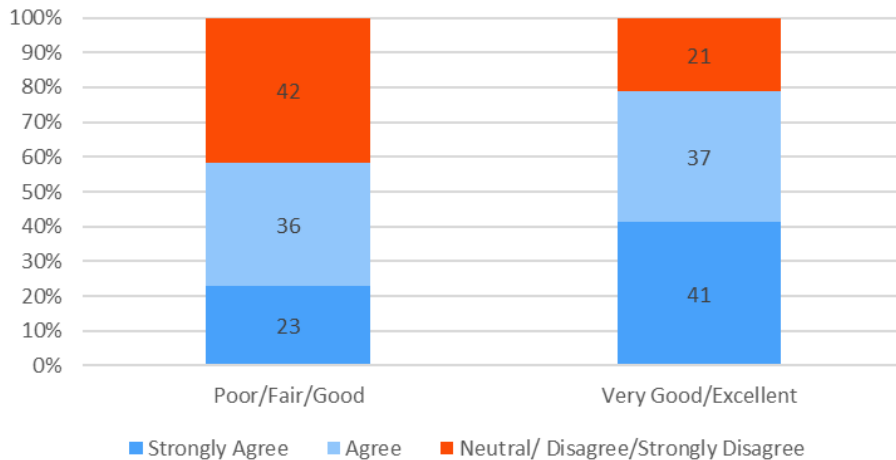
The overall response for each individual across the six questions was used for subsequent analysis.

Between 65% and 77% of workers endorsed positive statements about their treatment by their employer during their workers' compensation experience (blue sections of bar graph).

There was some variation between questions. The question about being treated fairly during the claims process was the least likely to be endorsed, in contrast, being treated fairly after the claims process was the most likely to be endorsed.

# Self-Rated Health and Age were Significantly Associated with Experience with the Employer

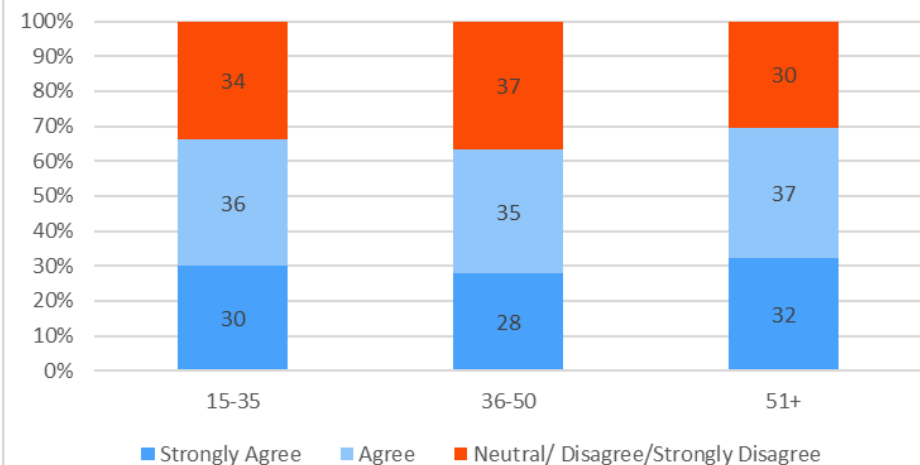
Self-Rated Health



Older workers were the most likely to agree with the statements.

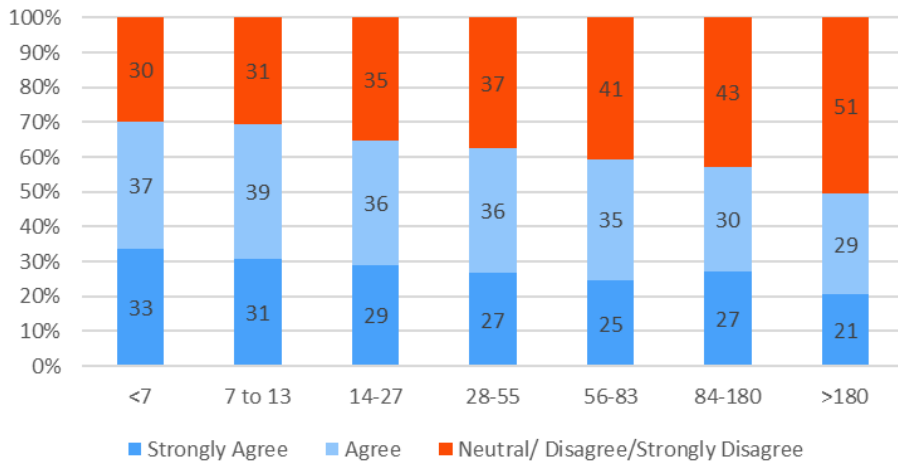
Those who didn't rate their current health highly were twice as likely to disagree with the statements.

Age



# Days from Injury to Claim and Injury Type were Significantly Associated with the Workers' Experience with Employer

**Days from Injury to Claim**

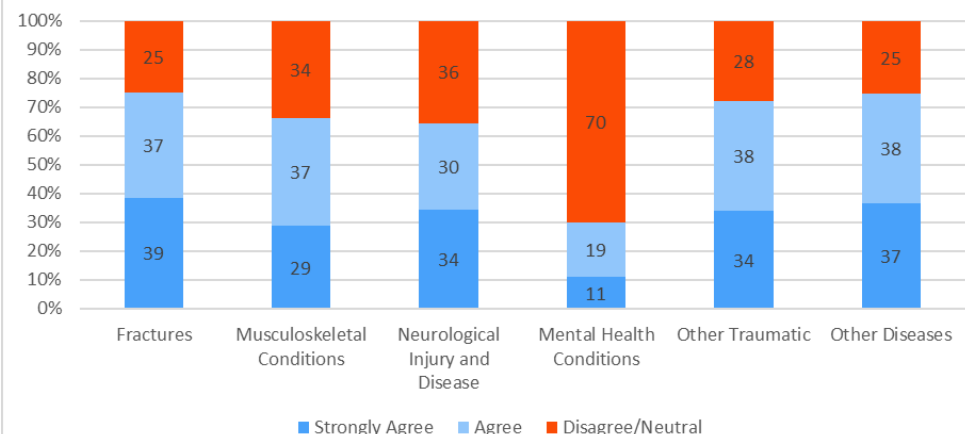


Workers with a longer time between their injury and claim lodgement were significantly less likely to report a positive experience with their employer.

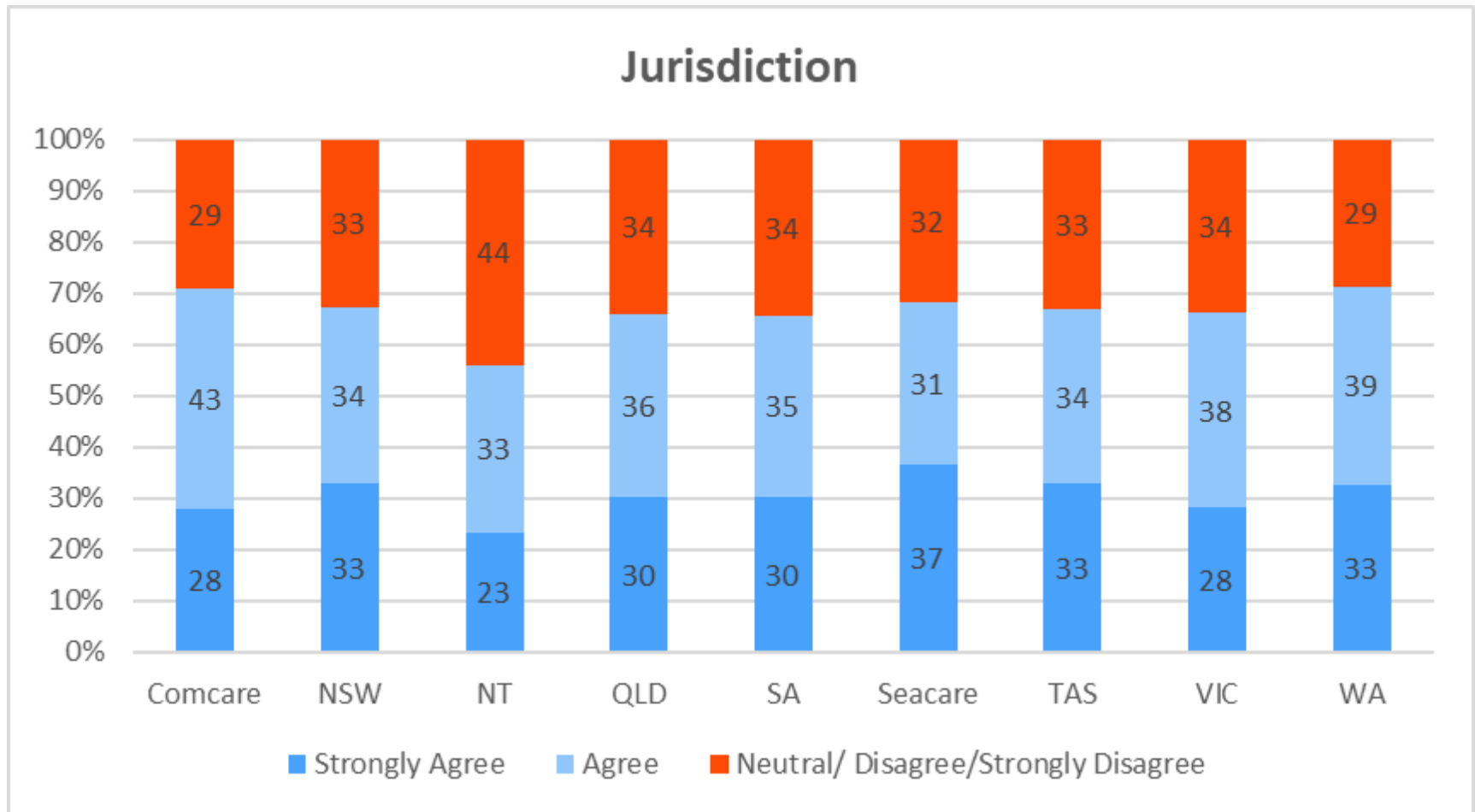
Workers with mental health conditions were twice as likely to report a negative experience with their employer than those with any other injury type.



**Injury Type**

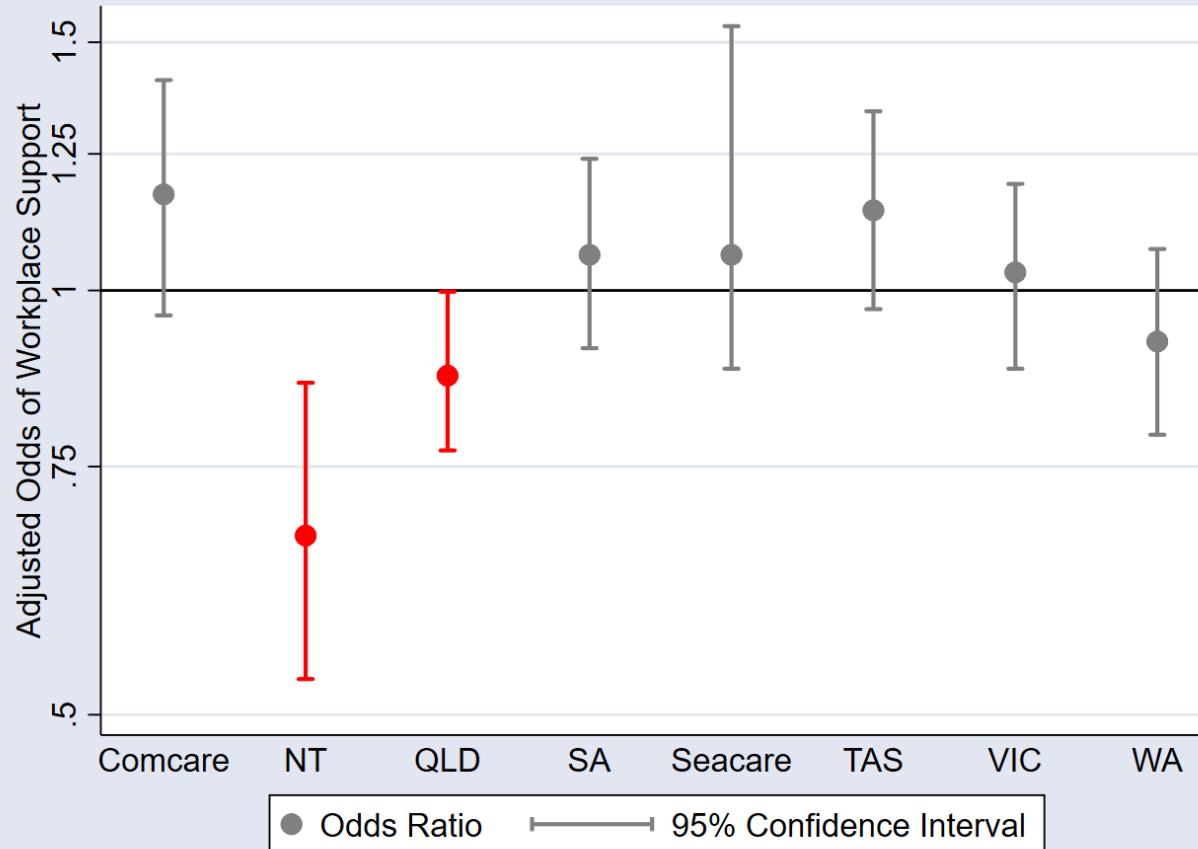


# Jurisdiction was Significantly Associated with Employer Experience



There were similar results in most jurisdictions, however those in the Northern Territory were more likely to disagree with the statements.

# The Odds of a Positive Experience with the Workplace varied by Jurisdiction



Using an ordinal logistic regression model the odds of agreeing with the statements was calculated by jurisdiction.

NSW was the reference jurisdiction that all other jurisdictions were compared to.

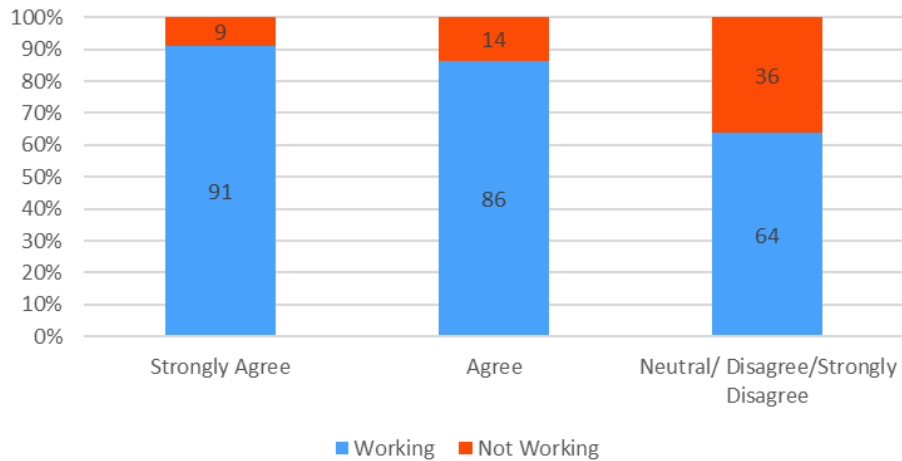
Northern Territory and Queensland workers were significantly less likely to have had a positive experience with their workplace in comparison to NSW workers.

The odds ratio compares the likelihood of a worker in a particular jurisdiction agreeing with the statements to the likelihood of a worker from NSW agreeing. An odds ratio larger than one means a worker in that jurisdiction was more likely than a worker from NSW to agree with the statements.

Odds ratios are statistically adjusted for the influence of other factors including age, gender, injury type, self-rated health, claim duration, year of interview, employer type and time from injury to claim lodgement.

# RTW Outcomes Varied by Employer Experience Ratings

RTW Status



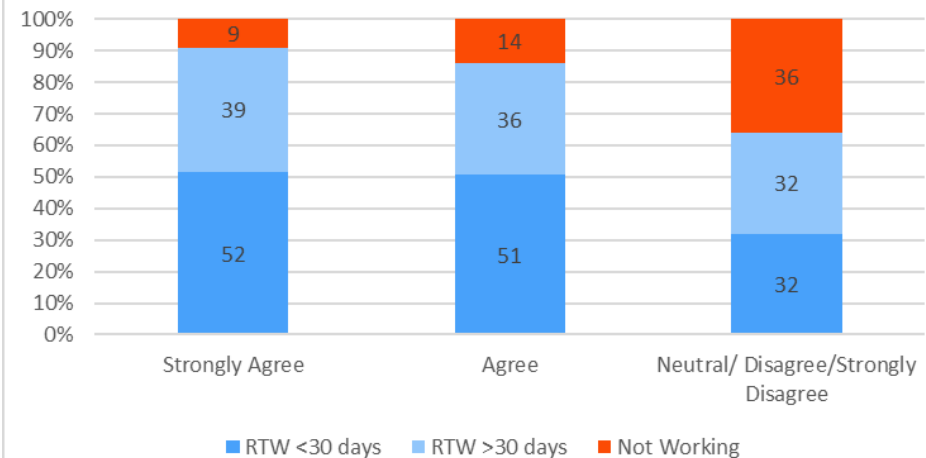
Workers who had a negative experience with their employer were 2.5-4 times as likely to not have returned to work at the time of interview than those with a positive employer experience.

More than half of workers with positive employer experiences had a RTW within 30 days compared to 32% of those with negative employer experience.

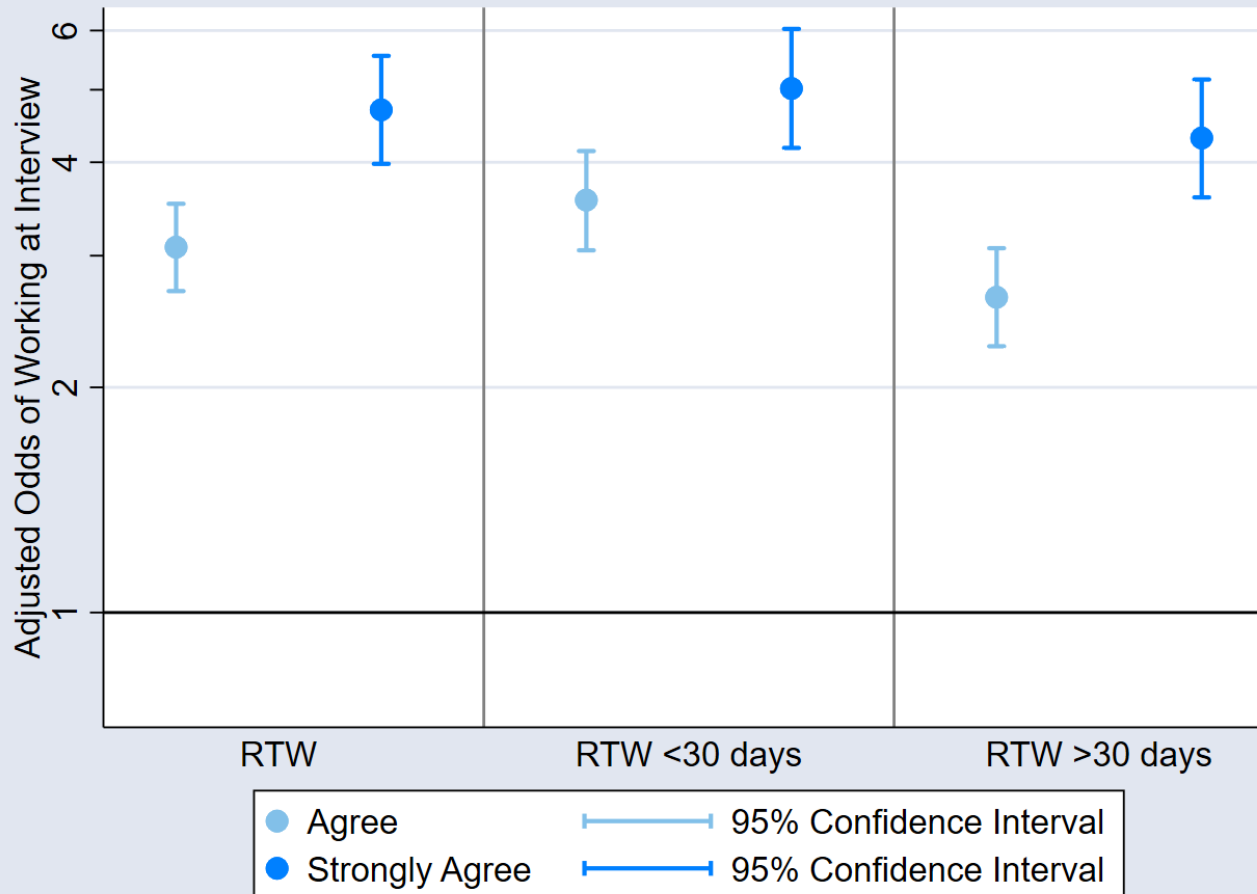
The proportion of workers with RTW after more than 30 days is similar regardless of whether the worker had a positive or negative experience with their employer.



Time Taken to RTW



# The Odds of RTW were Greater in those with Better Employer Support



The odds of RTW were much higher in workers who felt supported by their workplace.

Those who strongly agreed improved their odds of RTW 4.3-5 times.

Those who agreed improved their odds of RTW 2.6-3.6 times.

The odds ratio compares the likelihood of RTW among workers who strongly agreed or agreed with the statements to the likelihood of RTW among those who disagreed with the statements. A larger odds ratio means a worker is more likely to RTW.

Odds ratios are statistically adjusted for the influence of other factors including age, gender, injury type, jurisdiction, self-rated health, claim duration, year of interview, employer type and time from injury to claim lodgement.



## Strengths

- Large national dataset with a consistent data collection method.
- All major workers' compensation jurisdictions represented.
- Sample includes workers with a range of mild to moderate injury and illness typical in a workers' compensation environment.
- Multiple worker, injury, demographic, claim and employer factors recorded.

## Limitations

- Cross sectional data means we can only investigate associations at a point in time.
- Missing data for some variables (e.g., gender, employer size) meant that some cases and some predictor variables were excluded.

- This large study representing workers with a range of injuries from across Australia demonstrates the crucial role that the employer plays in RTW.
- Most workers reported a positive experience with their employer following workplace injury (66%).
- An exception is workers with mental health conditions, where only 30% reported positive experiences.
- Having support from the employer increased the odds of RTW by 2.6 to 5 times compared to those workers reporting a neutral or negative employer experience.
- Workplace processes are modifiable – employers have the capacity to improve RTW outcomes by supporting the worker during their time off from work.

Awang, H., Tan, L. Y., Mansor, N., Tongkumchum, P., & Eso, M. (2017). Factors related to successful return to work following multidisciplinary rehabilitation. *J Rehabil Med*, 49(6), 520. doi: 10.2340/16501977-2233

Link - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28617522>

Durand, M. J., Corbiere, M., Coutu, M. F., Reinhartz, D., & Albert, V. (2014). A review of best work-absence management and return-to-work practices for workers with musculoskeletal or common mental disorders. *Work*, 48(4), 579-589. doi: 10.3233/wor-141914

Link - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24990281>

Jetha, A., LaMontagne, A. D., Lilley, R., Hogg-Johnson, S., Sim, M., & Smith, P. (2017). Workplace Social System and Sustained Return-to-Work: A Study of Supervisor and Co-worker Supportiveness and Injury Reaction. *J Occup Rehabil*. doi: 10.1007/s10926-017-9724-z

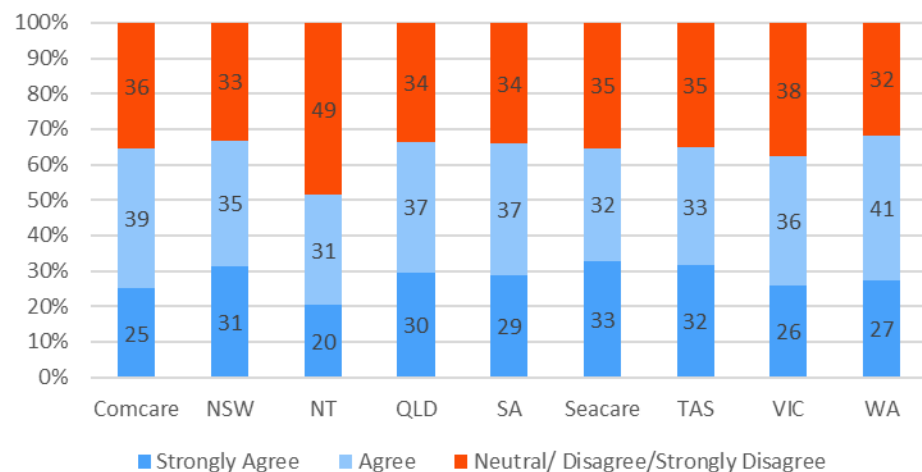
Link - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28861667>

Lane, T. J., Lilley, R., Hogg-Johnson, S., LaMontagne, A. D., Sim, M. R., & Smith, P. M. (2017). A Prospective Cohort Study of the Impact of Return-to-Work Coordinators in Getting Injured Workers Back on the Job. *J Occup Rehabil*. doi: 10.1007/s10926-017-9719-9

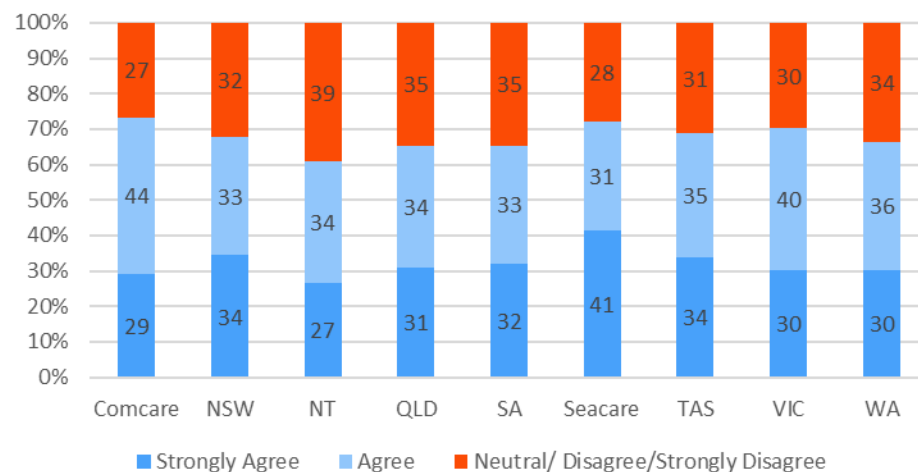
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# Supplementary Figures

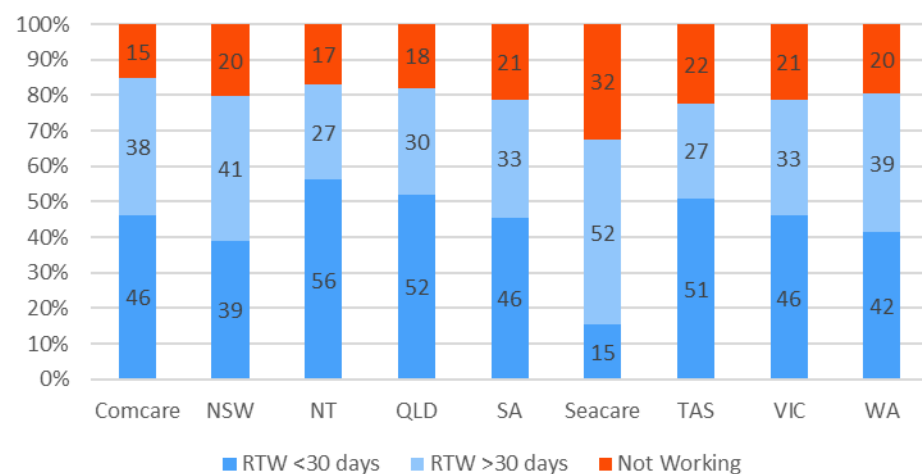
## Overall Response in 2014 Survey



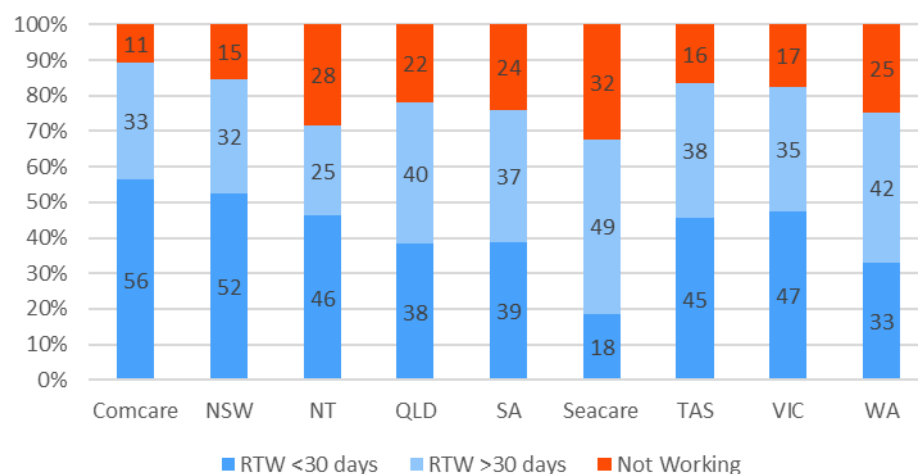
## Overall Response in 2016 Survey



## Time Taken to RTW Work 2014 Survey



## Time Taken to RTW 2016 Survey



- More detailed data tables can be accessed through contacting the first author Luke Sheehan ([luke.sheehan@monash.edu](mailto:luke.sheehan@monash.edu) or 03 9903 0794).

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