

Oregon Ombudsman for Injured Workers Annual Report, CY 2006

Information Management Division

Department of Consumer & Business Services

September 2007

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Introduction

The Office of the Ombudsman for Injured Workers (OIW) is an independent advocate for Oregon injured workers. The OIW helps injured workers understand their rights and responsibilities, investigates complaints, and works to resolve those complaints. OIW also provides training and outreach to injured workers and stakeholders to improve awareness of OIW services and to ensure that workers needing help have access to those services regardless of language, disability, or other barriers.

The legislature established the OIW in 1987. The director of the Department of Consumer and Business Services, with the governor's concurrence, appoints the ombudsman. The ombudsman supervises a staff of seven.

Table 1. Inquiries by inquirer, 2002-2006

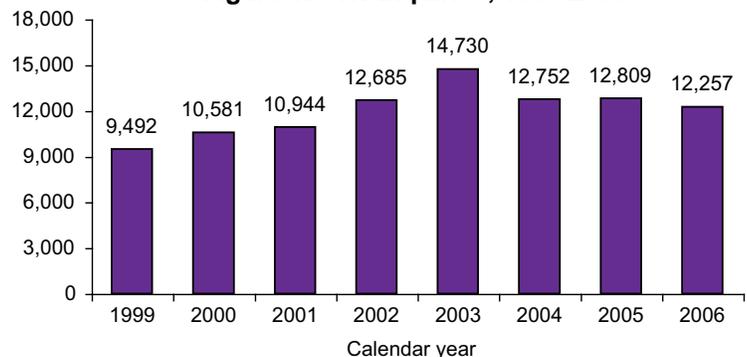
Inquirer	2002		2003		2004		2005		2006	
	Count	Share								
Attorney	93	0.7%	69	0.5%	61	0.5%	66	0.5%	74	0.6%
Workers' Comp. Board	278	2.2%	353	2.4%	407	3.2%	431	3.4%	457	3.7%
Employer	133	1.0%	93	0.6%	89	0.7%	85	0.7%	72	0.6%
Governor/Legislature	86	0.7%	59	0.4%	79	0.6%	55	0.4%	41	0.3%
Worker	11,468	90.4%	13,463	91.4%	11,531	90.4%	11,528	90.0%	10,847	88.5%
Insurer	82	0.6%	101	0.7%	80	0.6%	91	0.7%	88	0.7%
Insurance Division	23	0.2%	22	0.1%	33	0.3%	36	0.3%	14	0.1%
Medical provider	208	1.6%	258	1.8%	184	1.4%	189	1.5%	141	1.2%
Other	233	1.8%	224	1.5%	178	1.4%	250	2.0%	387	3.2%
Union representative	28	0.2%	27	0.2%	15	0.1%	20	0.2%	26	0.2%
Workers' Comp. Div.	53	0.4%	61	0.4%	95	0.7%	58	0.5%	110	0.9%
Total	12,685	100%	14,730	100%	12,752	100%	12,809	100%	12,257	100.0%

Note: "Other" includes a small number with unknown inquirers.

Inquiries

The OIW closed 12,257 inquiries (requests for information, advice, or assistance) in 2006 (see Figure 1), about 4.3 percent fewer than in 2005. About 88.5 percent of the inquiries were initiated by the worker, slightly lower than in recent years (Table 1). For about 91.9 percent of inquiries, the method was telephone. Non-English speakers made about 24.3 percent of inquiries. About 75.9 percent of inquiries required no additional contacts to be resolved; the remaining 24.1 percent of inquiries required an average of 2.6 subsequent contacts for resolution. Total contacts, including those that originated the inquiries, was 19,986.

Figure 1. OIW Inquiries, 1999-2006



Issues

There were 19,032 issues addressed in the 12,257 inquiries (Table 2), about 1.55 issues per inquiry. The most frequent issues tend to be much the same from year to year, and “medical services” remained the most frequent issue in 2006. However, “general claim process” jumped from fifth to second most frequent. The top four issues constituted 49.0 percent of all issues, and the top nine issues were 80.3 percent of all issues.

Results

The OIW responded to 99.8 percent of inquiries within two days. The office completed about 82.4 percent of inquiries the same day, and 92.1 percent within two days. The OIW provided assistance beyond basic information in about 23.1 percent of the cases (Table 3). In about 4.7 percent of inquiries, the OIW referred the worker to another agency. About 84.9 percent of these referrals were to the Bureau of Labor and Industries.

Table 2. Issues by decreasing count, 2006

Issue	Count
Medical services, bills, problems	3,066
General claim process	2,380
Accurate/timely benefits	2,145
Accept/deny	1,743
Litigation, including settlements	1,663
Closure and reconsideration	1,291
Filing workers' compensation claims	1,125
Employer issues, problems	1,124
Return to work	754
Other issues	622
Aggravation	575
Attorney problems	493
CDA general inquiry*	477
CDA OIW required**	444
Insurer issue or problem	361
Vocational assistance	318
Independent medical exam	291
Unknown issue	149
<u>Permanent total disability/fatal</u>	<u>11</u>
Total issues:	19,032

*Issue first recorded in October 2005.

**Insurer or WCB refers worker to OIW.
CDA is claim disposition agreement.

Table 3. Type of service provided, 2002-2006

Type	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Provide information	81.1%	83.1%	82.4%	75.2%	76.9%
Provide assistance*	18.9%	16.9%	17.6%	24.8%	23.1%

Percentages exclude inquiries where the worker could not be reached (usually about 0.5 percent of inquiries).

*The OIW advocates on behalf of the worker to reach a resolution, or additional contacts are required to provide specific information.

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