

Oregon Ombudsman for Injured Workers Annual Report, CY 2011

Information Management Division

Department of Consumer & Business Services

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Introduction

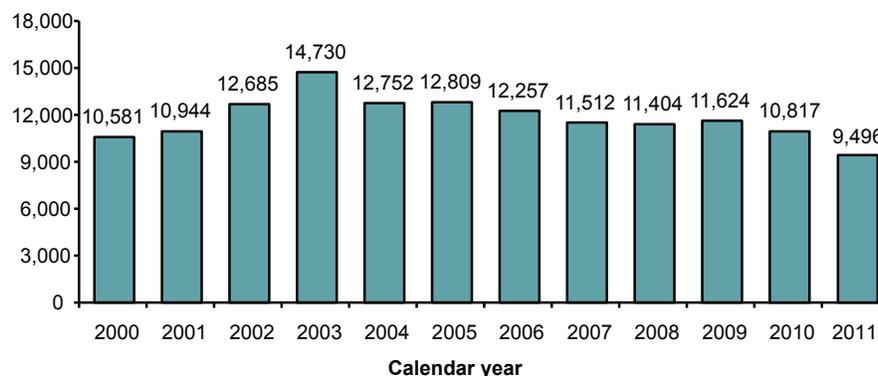
The Office of the Ombudsman for Injured Workers (OIW) is an independent advocate for Oregon injured workers. The OIW helps injured workers understand their rights and responsibilities, investigates complaints, and works to resolve those complaints. The OIW also provides training and outreach to injured 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 six.

Inquiries and contacts

The OIW closed 9,496 inquiries (requests for information, advice, or assistance) in 2011 (see graph below), 12.2 percent fewer than in 2010. About 87.9 percent of the inquiries were initiated by the worker, a percentage that's typical of recent years. Approximately 91.0 percent of inquiries were made by telephone. Non-English speakers made 26.4 percent of inquiries, slightly above 2009-2010 values. Some 73.7 percent of inquiries required no additional contacts to be resolved; the remaining 26.3 percent of inquiries required an average of 2.7 subsequent contacts for resolution. The total number of contacts, including those that originated the inquiries, was 16,251 (14.2 percent fewer than in 2010).

OIW inquiries, 2000-2011



Issues

There were 13,305 issues addressed in the 9,496 inquiries (Table 1), an average of about 1.4 issues per inquiry. The most frequent issues have been much the same from year to year, especially in recent years. For 2011, the most frequent issues (in order of decreasing count) were (1) general claim process, (2) medical services or bills, (3) accurate and timely benefits, (4) acceptance-denial, and (5) employer problems or issues. In 2008, 2009, and 2010, the top four issues were the same ones, and in the same order; however, for 2011, employer issues replaced litigation issues as the fifth most frequent issue. The top five issues (almost 28 percent of 18 possible issues) constituted 61 percent of the issues in inquiries closed in 2011.

Table 1. Issues by decreasing count, 2011

Issue	Count
General claim process	2,699
Medical services, bills	2,138
Accurate, timely benefits	1,471
Accept, deny	977
Employer issues, problems	863
Litigation, settlements	834
Filing Workers' comp claims	798
Closure & reconsideration	649
CDA OIW required*	468
Return to work	467
CDA general inquiry	460
Attorney problems	364
Aggravation	256
Insurer issue, problem	255
Independent medical exam	249
Vocational assistance	131
Other issue	119
PTD or fatality	62
Unknown issue	45
Total issues:	13,305

* WCB refers worker to OIW.
CDA is claim disposition agreement.
PTD is permanent total disability.

Timeliness, assistance, and referrals

The OIW responded to 99.7 percent of inquiries within two days. It completed about 82.0 percent of inquiries the same day, and 91.6 percent within two days. The OIW provided assistance beyond basic information in 23.3 percent of inquiries (Table 2), down from 2010's 25.7 percent, but above the 2001-2009 average of 20.9 percent. In approximately 3.1 percent of inquiries, the OIW referred the inquirer to another agency. About 71.8 percent of these referrals were to the Bureau of Labor and Industries.

Table 2. Type of service provided, 2005-2011

Type	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Provide information	75.2%	76.9%	79.2%	79.1%	77.0%	74.3%	76.7%
Provide assistance*	24.8%	23.1%	20.8%	20.9%	23.0%	25.7%	23.3%

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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