

PRESS RELEASE

'BODYSTRESSING' CAUSES \$22 BILLION p.a. LOSS TO ECONOMY

- Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Australia, (HFESA)

'Body Stressing' is estimated to be costing the Australian economy over \$22 billion a year and if we are to rebuild our economy, we must tackle this serious drain on our productivity.

'Body Stressing' is targeted as the largest occupational health problem in Australia, according to a recently released position statement by **HFESA**, the peak professional body of ergonomists.

So what is 'Body Stressing'?

It is the term used to describe Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs). These are the highest category of serious workers' compensation claims for Australian workers, representing 36% of all claims in 2017-18.

WMSDs can affect any worker, not just manual labourers. They can happen in any workplace, whether it is an office, a supermarket, a hospital, air traffic control or below the sea in a submarine. These injuries cover a wide range including carpal tunnel syndrome, back pain, tendinitis, repetitive strain injuries, as well as debilitating life-changing impairment.

These are also the injuries that result in the high number of workdays lost. From 2013 to 2017 the median time lost from work due to 'Body Stressing' claims has increased to 6.2 weeks, and the median cost per claim has increased by 32% to \$12,900 per claim.

Remarkably, the HFESA paper pointed out that 'Body Stressing' is closely connected to mental stress. WMSDs are not just the result of physical hazards in the workplace. They are also the result of psychological hazards such as high job demands, low job control, high job strain, low social support, low job satisfaction and low job security. These psychosocial hazards are recognised as critical workplace risk factors.

What is particularly important to recognise is that a significant number of these WMSDs injuries can be prevented. There are readily available solutions for workplaces, and primary prevention is a very effective strategy.

This is where the intervention of ergonomists is vital. Most people think ergonomics is about weirdly shaped office chairs. In fact, the role of professional ergonomists is to design solutions in a workplace that maximise productivity and efficiency, while at the same time optimising the health and safety of employees.

Ergonomists apply a holistic systems approach to see if there is a good 'fit' between the workers, the work job design, the workplace and equipment design, and the way the work is organised.

Then they design a comprehensive risk management strategy.

This type of "participatory ergonomics" connects all the stakeholders and all the elements in a workplace. It is one of the vital keys to making the economy more productive, efficient and sustainable.