



STRONGER TOGETHER

INJURED WORKER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
2024 ANNUAL REPORT





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Welcome Message from the Committee



As we reflect on the past year, the Injured Worker Advisory Committee (IWAC) is proud of the progress we have made in advocating for the well-being of injured workers and their families across New Brunswick. **2024 has been a year of significant growth, collaboration, and meaningful impact, driven by our shared commitment to making a difference.**

This year, we embraced exciting changes and new opportunities. We welcomed a new member, **Kirk Westfield**, whose lived experience and passion for service have brought invaluable perspective and energy to the committee. We also had the privilege of forging stronger connections with WorkSafeNB's board of directors, culminating in a successful presentation in December. This pivotal moment not only demonstrated the value of our work but also set the stage for greater collaboration and accountability in the years to come.

Our work in 2024 extended beyond policy and advocacy; it was about **fostering a sense of community**. Through enhanced visibility on WorkSafeNB's website and the launch of new engagement tools like *TalkSafetyNB*, we've opened doors for more injured workers to share their voices and be part of the conversation. We have worked tirelessly to ensure we aren't just a committee, but a trusted resource and ally for injured workers.

As we look to 2025, we are inspired by the possibilities ahead. From advancing benefit improvements to amplifying our presence at key events like the Day of Mourning and Steps for Life, we are dedicated to building on the progress we've made. Our mission remains clear: to advocate for injured workers, ensure their voices are heard, and create a system that values dignity, equity, and fairness.

Thank you to everyone who has supported our efforts this year, from our fellow members to WorkSafeNB staff, stakeholders, and the workers we proudly represent. Together, we will continue to make a meaningful impact in the lives of injured workers and their families.

Sincerely,



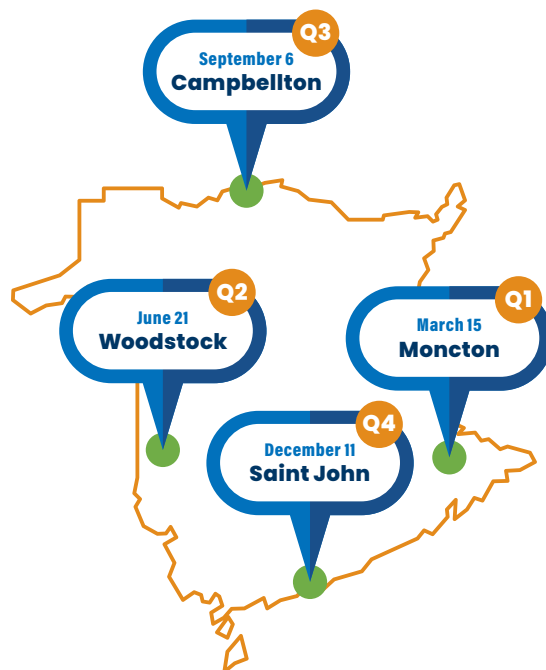
Pam Baker, Paula Garant, Leica Gahan, and Kirk Westfield
IWAC Members

IWAC Across New Brunswick: Listening, Learning, Leading

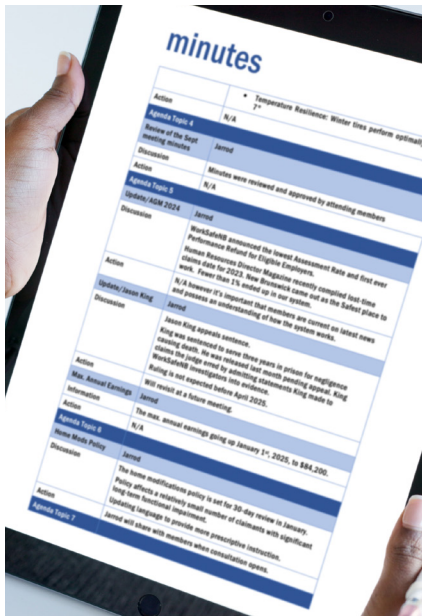
IWAC meets regularly throughout the year in communities across the province, ensuring that injured workers' voices are heard where they live and work. Our members represent various regions of New Brunswick, bringing diverse perspectives to the table. In addition to in-person meetings, we also hold virtual ad hoc meetings when needed to address emerging issues and keep discussions moving forward.



IWAC Website:
worksafenb.ca/IWAC



Commitment to Transparency: Keeping Workers Informed



MEETING MINUTES

In 2024, IWAC took a significant step toward greater transparency by beginning to publish our meeting minutes. By making our discussions accessible to the public and WorkSafeNB's board of directors, we ensure that injured workers and stakeholders stay informed about our work, priorities, and advocacy efforts. These records are available on our website, reinforcing our commitment to openness and accountability.



POSITION PAPERS

We are committed to responding to all legislative reviews and policy consultations. Our position papers, which reflect the perspectives and priorities of injured workers, are made available on the WorkSafeNB website to keep the public and policymakers informed.



TRANSPARENCY

Member bios, photos, and contact information were published, making it easier for injured workers to reach out to us for support and guidance. These efforts reflect our commitment to being an accessible and accountable voice for injured workers across New Brunswick.

Benefit Improvements:

A Historic Milestone for Injured Workers

IWAC was thrilled to see the historic benefit improvements under Bill 45 come into effect on July 1, 2024. These changes mark a significant step forward for New Brunswick’s injured workers, bringing the province’s workers’ compensation benefits back to pre-1993 levels after decades of advocacy and careful stewardship of the Accident Fund.

The increase in **loss-of-earnings benefits from 85% to 90% of net earnings** provides injured workers with much-needed financial security during their recovery. This enhancement reflects WorkSafeNB’s commitment to aligning New Brunswick with other provinces and ensuring injured workers can meet their financial needs during what is often a challenging and uncertain time.

Additionally, changes to the **Maximum Annual Earnings (MAE)** formula have introduced a more inclusive approach to benefit calculations. By increasing the multiplier from 1.5 to 1.6, the MAE will rise from \$76,900 in 2024 to \$84,200 in 2025, allowing more workers to have their full earnings covered.

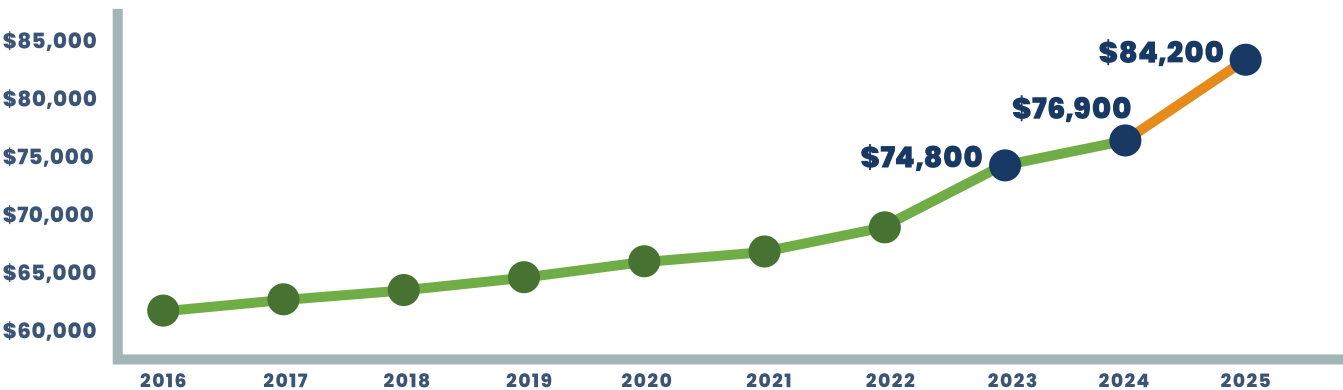
This improvement is particularly meaningful for higher-wage earners, ensuring fairer compensation for those who are injured while supporting their families.

These enhancements follow years of dedicated efforts to stabilize the Accident Fund, which faced significant financial challenges in the early 1990s, leading to benefit reductions in 1993. **The return to pre-1993 levels represent a long-overdue victory for New Brunswick’s injured workers and a testament to the diligent work of WorkSafeNB’s board of directors and leadership team.**

We would like to thank the board for prioritizing these changes and to the workers and employers of New Brunswick for their active engagement during consultations. These improvements provide a solid foundation for future advancements, and we are optimistic about continued progress in 2025 as WorkSafeNB explores the second phase of benefit enhancements.

Maximum Annual Earnings:

A sharp increase from 2024–2025!





Building Stronger Ties with **WorkSafeNB's Board of Directors**

In December 2024, we had the opportunity to present directly to WorkSafeNB's board of directors, reinforcing our role as a trusted voice for injured workers. Our presentation highlighted the lived experiences of injured workers, the ongoing challenges they face, and recommendations to improve support systems. The board's engagement was encouraging, and we look forward to strengthening this relationship in 2025 as we continue to advocate for meaningful change.

Q&A

Kirk Westfield:

A Journey from Injury to Advocacy



In 2024, IWAC welcomed a new member, Kirk Westfield, whose personal journey through workplace injury, recovery, and advocacy brings invaluable perspective to the committee. With a background in emergency response, Kirk has experienced firsthand the physical and mental toll of a workplace injury. His deep understanding of the challenges injured workers face—both on the job and in the recovery process—makes him a strong advocate for change.

Since joining the committee, Kirk has contributed thoughtful insight on psychological health and safety, first responder mental health, and the return-to-work process. His lived experience helps bridge the gap between policy and real-world impact, ensuring that injured workers' needs remain front and centre.

In the following Q&A, Kirk shares more about his journey, what led him to IWAC, and what he hopes to accomplish as part of the committee.



CAN YOU SHARE A BIT ABOUT YOUR CAREER BEFORE YOUR INJURY? WHAT LED YOU TO BECOME A PARAMEDIC?

After high school, I knew I learned best through hands-on experience rather than traditional classroom settings. I was stuck in call center jobs, feeling like I wasn't moving forward. Eventually, I moved back home and joined the Musquash Volunteer Fire Department, following in the footsteps of my father and younger brother.

At the time, New Brunswick's ambulance services were more localized, and paramedics often trained with our fire department. I got to know them, asked a lot of questions, and quickly became fascinated. When a local station needed EMTs, I applied—and from my first shift, I knew I had found my calling.

Becoming a paramedic was challenging, but I put everything into it. The day after I passed my exam, I started working. I became a "go-to" person, mentoring new grads and taking on leadership roles. I loved every minute of it. Even knowing what I know now, if I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't hesitate. It was worth it.





WHAT WAS THE MOST DIFFICULT PART OF YOUR RECOVERY—PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY, OR BOTH?

There were a few. First, accepting that something was wrong and asking for help. I struggled for a long time before reaching out. Looking back, I wish I had done it sooner—maybe I'd still be a paramedic today. That thought still weighs on me.

Second, accepting that I had changed. The “old Kirk” was gone, and I didn't know who I was or where I belonged. My marriage suffered. I withdrew from my friends. I thought handling it alone was the best way—if no one saw me struggle, no one would know I was broken. But isolation only made it worse.



HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED WITH IWAC, AND WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO JOIN?

A member of my peer support group told me WorkSafeNB had a committee for injured workers and that they were looking for new members. I hesitated. I kept weighing the pros and cons, wondering if putting myself out there was worth it.

Then I remembered something my father told me when I was younger:

“If it is going to be, it is up to me.”

That stuck with me. If I wanted change, I had to help make it happen. If I wanted to live, no one was coming to save me—I had to save myself. That's why I joined.



WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH IWAC BEEN LIKE SO FAR? HAS ANYTHING SURPRISED YOU?

The other IWAC members welcomed me with open arms. Walking into that first meeting was terrifying, but I'm so glad I did it. It helps fill the void that was left after I had to stop working.

The biggest surprise? How much I actually enjoy it. I went in thinking, I'll give it a shot, and now I can't imagine not being involved. You miss 100% of the shots you don't take.



Q&A



IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION SYSTEM, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

EQUALITY. That word gets used a lot these days, but it applies here too—especially when it comes to mental health.

PTSD isn't new. Our military and RCMP have been dealing with it for decades, and they've developed policies and programs that work. But first responders like paramedics are treated differently. Why? Why isn't WorkSafeNB working with Veterans Affairs to build a model that actually serves injured workers?

The hardest part is that PTSD affects everyone differently. What works for one person might not work for another. But without access to all the tools that have helped others before us, we'll never get the support we truly need.

This is exactly why I joined IWAC—because if it's going to change, it has to start somewhere. Even if I help just one person, it'll be worth it.





YOU'VE SHARED SOME INCREDIBLE PHOTOS FROM YOUR CAREER—WHAT DO THEY MEAN TO YOU?

There was a time when I wanted to erase that part of my life. One night, after no sleep and a head full of anger, I started deleting every picture I had from my time as a paramedic and firefighter.

I don't know why I stopped, but I'm grateful I did.

Now, those photos remind me that not all my memories are bad. I loved my job. I loved helping people on their worst days and trying to make things even a little bit better for them. Looking at those pictures still brings up a lot of emotions, but I'm finally in a place where I can appreciate them again.



WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO AN INJURED WORKER WHO IS STRUGGLING RIGHT NOW?

FIND YOUR TRIBE. A veteran in my peer group once told me:

"Out with the old if need be. Let some light in, brother. Find people who understand you and lean on them. We were brothers in battle, and we're brothers when the dust settles."

That stuck with me. When you're injured—physically, mentally, or both—it's easy to believe no one understands what you're going through. But there are people who get it. You just have to find them.

Surround yourself with people who have walked the same path. Help them when you can. Let them help you when you need it. You're not alone.





Parting Thoughts

The Injured Worker Advisory Committee remains steadfast in its mission to advocate for injured workers and their families, ensuring their voices are not only heard but drive meaningful change. **2024 has been a transformative year, one that laid the groundwork for even greater impact in the years to come.**

With the momentum gained this past year and the continued support of WorkSafeNB, we are optimistic about what lies ahead. Our successful presentation to the board of directors in December reinforced the importance of IWAC's role as a trusted advisor and partner in shaping policies and initiatives that directly impact the lives of injured workers. This strengthened connection will help ensure that we remain a visible and influential advocate moving forward.

In 2025, we are committed to building on the progress we've made by:

- **FOSTERING TRANSPARENCY:** Publishing regular updates and reports to ensure injured workers and stakeholders stay informed about our work.
- **BUILDING CONNECTIONS:** Deepening relationships with WorkSafeNB, community organizations, and workers across New Brunswick to create a more inclusive and engaged network.

- **AMPLIFYING VOICES:** Expanding outreach efforts through events such as the Day of Mourning, Steps for Life, and WorkSafeNB's Health and Safety Conference, ensuring that the voices of injured workers remain front and centre.

Our vision for the future includes advocating for the next wave of benefit improvements, addressing systemic issues within the compensation system, and continuing to grow IWAC's presence as a resource for injured workers. By embracing these opportunities, we aim to drive forward initiatives that enhance fairness, equity, and dignity for all.

Thank you to everyone who has supported our efforts in 2024. Together, we've demonstrated that when injured workers' voices are amplified, real change is possible. As we embark on 2025, we are energized by the possibilities ahead and remain unwavering in our dedication to improving the lives of those we serve.

Sincerely,

The Injured Worker Advisory Committee

Looking Ahead: 2025 Priorities



Strengthening Policy Impact: Ensuring IWAC provides input on all major WorkSafeNB policy reviews.



Raising Public Awareness: Expanding participation in key events like the *Day of Mourning* and *Steps for Life*.



Enhancing Member Development: Encouraging professional development opportunities for IWAC members.



Improving Worker Support: Exploring initiatives like community partnerships for rehabilitation and mental health support.





RECOGNIZING IWAC **MEMBERS OF THE PAST**

IWAC extends its gratitude to Pauline Diotte and Azarie Ross for their time and contributions to the committee. Their participation helped shape discussions and ensure injured workers' voices were heard. We appreciate their service and wish them the best in their future endeavours.