

Prevention Works Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety System in Action

5-Year Strategy

Ministry of Labour, Training and
Skills Development

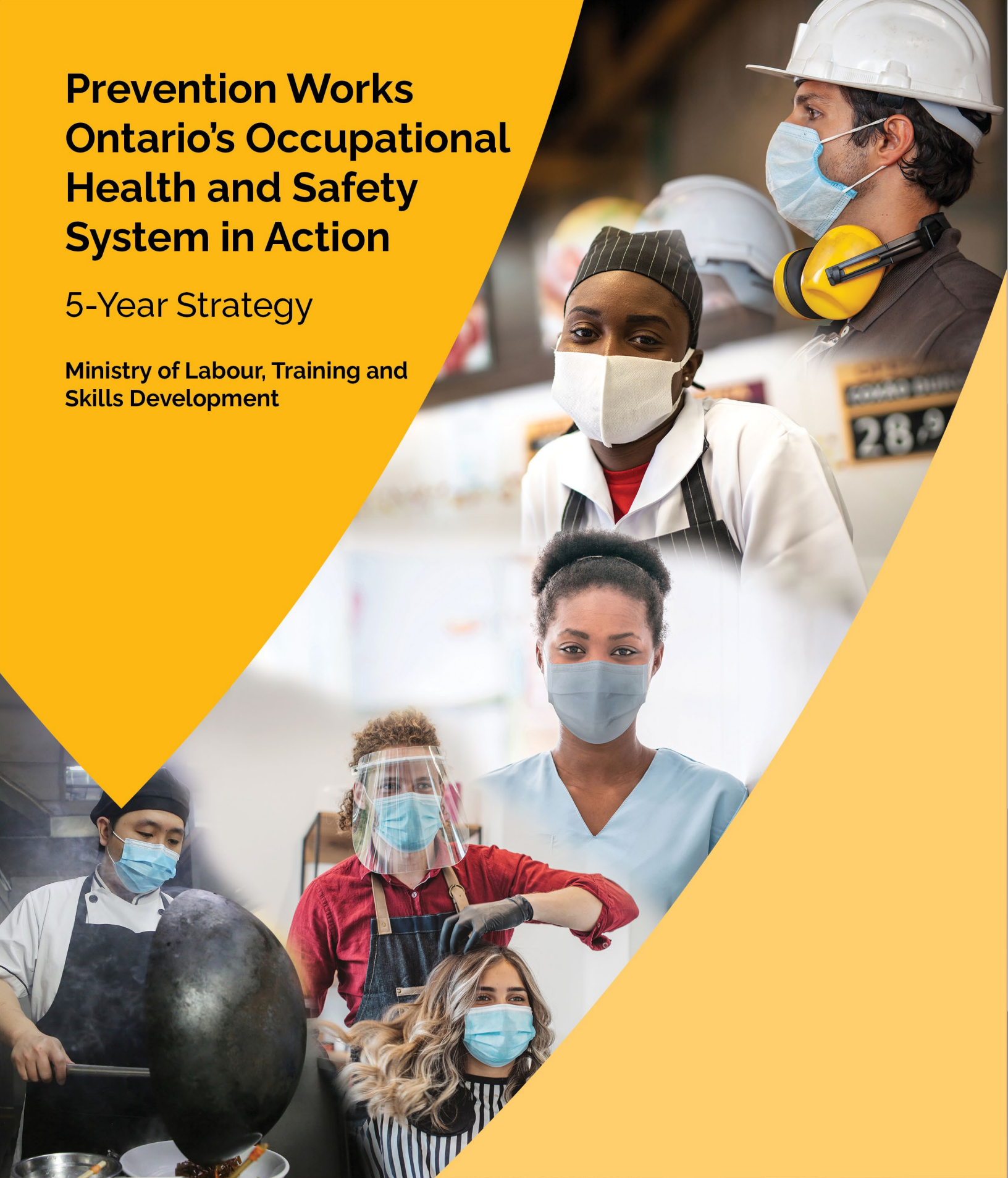


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Message from the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development



I want to congratulate our Chief Prevention Officer, Ron Kelusky, on presenting **Prevention Works**, which outlines his vision for the future occupational health and safety system.

The release of this document coincides with Ron's retirement and is a testament to his amazing leadership, especially during one of the most challenging times in history. His tenure during the COVID pandemic renewed our commitment to preventing workplace hazards, particularly those unseen.

My mission is to ensure that every worker goes home safely to their family at the end of the day.

To move ever closer to that goal, I have three key priorities.

First, we need to **Strengthen System Oversight**, to identify causes of injuries and illnesses, find ways to make the best use of emerging technologies, build capacity to conduct risk assessments, monitor longitudinal data and enhance oversight and standardization of all occupational health and safety training.

Since the Ministry of Labour was expanded to oversee Training and Skills Development, it is critical to work not just with private training providers, but training delivery agents and hospital-affiliated research institutes alike who have established bodies of knowledge.

Second, we need to promote **Secure Workplaces and Labour Mobility**. This means developing a single-window platform to improve access to resources and real-time information, harmonizing regulations with other provinces, and adopting interprovincial training standards or adopting interprovincial certification.

Third, we need to **Support Small Businesses and Customer Service Excellence**. This includes reinforcing the value of improvements to health and safety outcomes, increased knowledge and compliance to drive increased productivity. It is important to help businesses improve their knowledge and practices of health and safety, such as providing affordable training programs or free resources. Likewise, we should also recognize good actors through initiatives like Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers (SOSE) and Health and Safety Excellence (HSEp) programs.

Ensuring all of our workers are safe in their jobs means creating a workplace culture that puts safety and prevention first.

Over the past year, workplaces have faced incredible challenges due to COVID-19. But tens of thousands of workers and businesses rose to those challenges by adopting new health and safety measures to protect workers, including physical distancing, use of personal protective equipment and hand hygiene.

To support workers and employers, under Ron's leadership, we developed guidance on creating a safety plan, provided workplace posters in multiple languages and delivered safety-related webinars.

We also inspected over 58,000 workplaces to keep workers safe on the job.

Together, we worked hard to protect the dedicated individuals who continued to go to their jobs every day to provide essential services.

My priorities are informed by the hard lessons we've learned over the course of this pandemic. By working together to address long-term systemic issues, our province will continue to be one of the safest places to work in the years to come.

I thank our health and safety partners, the Prevention Council, stakeholders and the tens of thousands of essential businesses and workers for their commitment to this mission. I am also thankful for their efforts over the past year to keep our province running and our communities safe.

In closing, I'd like to once more congratulate Ron for his work to improve our health and safety system and ensure Ontario continues to be one of the safest places to work in the world.

Sincerely,

Monte McNaughton

Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development

Message from the Chief Prevention Officer



It has been an honour and a privilege to be Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer for the past three years.

During this time, I met frequently with system partners, and spoke to many workers, employers, and health and safety practitioners. Many of these partners are doing great work to keep our workplaces safe and healthy. I also read many studies and reports on occupational health and safety.

Throughout my work, one theme emerged: Ontario is already one of the safest provinces in Canada. But while we can take some comfort in that, there is room for improvement.

We need a better understanding of the factors that influence workplace health and safety. Finding the means to effectively measure our prevention activities, and better target our initiatives and programs is one of our next steps. This is why my Prevention Works health and safety strategy focuses on tracking and using the best evidence possible to evaluate and improve workplace health and safety.

This new strategy builds on the previous Healthy and Safe Ontario Workplaces Strategy and the work the system has collectively done over the past ten years. Together, we have:

- Implemented the Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers (SOSE) Program, which recognizes employers who implement accredited national and international occupational health and safety management systems.
- Created and implemented new working at heights training standards and built a robust administrative framework to help keep workers who work at heights safe and get the great training they deserve.
- Implemented standards to strengthen the internal responsibility system in Ontario by strengthening Joint Health and Safety Certification training to ensure certified members can help keep their workplaces safe.
- Developed mandatory basic worker and supervisor health and safety awareness training and created eLearning programs, which have been completed by millions of Ontario workers and supervisors.
- Created accessible and affordable Health and Safety Representative (HSR) training to support small business.
- Modernized the ministry's funding relationship with the Health and Safety Associations (HSAs) to increase accountability and ensure better use of evidence and performance measurement and improved return on investment.
- Implemented the majority of deliverables of the Construction Health and Safety Action Plan
- Conducted risk assessments and root cause analysis to lay the foundation to focus our work and built capacity within the Health and Safety Associations (HSAs) for conducting risk assessment and root-cause analysis workshops in the future.

We have made progress towards working together as a system, but there is still more to be done. While our understanding of the system has grown, over the next five years, we need to build new

partnerships and expand our work, especially in the areas of occupational illness, work-related mental health and violence and harassment.

The past 18 months have been challenging, but they have also reconfirmed something I've always known: The system works better when we work together. We saw this during the pandemic, as we worked cohesively to roll out guidance documents, provide additional training, including a free basic infection prevention and control eLearning course and new technology, and gradually reopen the province while keeping workers healthy and safe.

This strategy builds on our recent momentum to help ensure every worker returns home safely each and every day. And, although I will not be here to implement it, I know the strategy will be in good hands.

In closing, I want to commend all our system partners on the work they are doing and the support they have given me and my team over the past three years. I hope this support will continue into the future.

I look forward to watching the implementation of the strategy, in my retirement.

Thank you all

Ron Kelusky



Executive summary

Ontario's occupational health and safety system partners ("the OHS system") – including the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development ("the ministry"), the WSIB, health and safety associations (HSAs), and a broader network of partners including the Ministry of Health and Public Health Ontario – are committed to supporting all workplaces to improve occupational health and safety. As our workplace landscape continues to evolve, the need to adapt and address occupational injuries and illnesses – including infectious diseases like COVID-19 – is more important than ever.

Prevention Works is the OHS system's five-year strategy that builds on the successes of the past while also creating a renewed vision and foundation for the future. Prevention Works will guide the OHS system in assessing the current landscape and provide us with the tools and direction we need to achieve our objectives and intended outcomes.

Prevention Works contains four strategic objectives and two areas of systems focus, which were developed based on extensive research and province-wide consultations. The objectives steer the system towards developing and implementing evidence-informed, risk-based interventions that are customer-focused, and that will strengthen worker mobility and OHS knowledge and practices 'on the ground.'¹ Prevention Works guides the system towards helping workplaces to not only comply with OHS laws and standards but supporting them to achieve OHS excellence through participation in incentive programs. The strategy also makes it easier for small businesses to comply with occupational health and safety requirements; this includes tailoring OHS resources and information to meet the specific needs of small businesses and providing programs and services that are more cost-effective than previously.

The areas of systems focus are occupational illnesses and work-related mental health / workplace violence and harassment, which involve stakeholders from within and outside of the OHS system to achieve the greatest impact and better outcomes.

¹ [Ontario's occupational health and safety system](#)

Highlights of current and emerging OHS system activities

We are working to understand the root of the problem:

In collaboration with sector partners, the ministry has conducted sector-level risk assessments to identify the top risks that could lead to injury, illness or death. To date, the ministry has conducted risk assessments within the mining, hospitals, agriculture, forestry, construction and transportation sectors. The ministry is also building capacity with OHS system partners through a "train the trainer" approach where OHS system partners will be able to conduct the risk assessment process directly with the sectors they serve. The ministry began OHS system capacity building in Summer 2020 and will complete OHS system training on the risk assessment process by Spring 2021.

We are making learning and training easier: To support online learning options, in the Summer of 2020 the ministry provided the option for Part 1 of Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) training to be completed by e-Learning, and is planning for a full review of the JHSC program to begin in the next twelve months. Furthermore, the OHS system published a free e-Learning course in Winter 2021 that helps workers learn how infections spread – including COVID-19 – and what steps can be taken to protect themselves and others from infectious disease risks in the workplace. The ministry is also providing free occupational health and safety training for health and safety representatives in up to 60,000 small businesses with 6-19 workers by investing \$3.5 million annually over a three-year period.

We are improving oversight of OHS training: Currently, there are over 240 training providers in Ontario who are approved by the Chief Prevention Officer to deliver Joint Health and Safety Committee and / or Working at Heights training. This does not include first aid training, which is currently overseen by the WSIB. The ministry recently consulted on a proposal to assume responsibility for workplace first aid, including training. In addition to the approved training providers, the ministry has identified at least 500 training providers who deliver non-CPO approved OHS training. By Fall 2021, the ministry plans to complete a review of OHS training programs to inform options for improved oversight over OHS training in Ontario.



We are eliminating duplication: For workers who have come to Ontario from other provinces and / or territories, the ministry is committed to removing the need to duplicate certain pre-employment requirements. For example, as of January 1, 2021, workers with a valid fall protection training certificate issued by WorkplaceNL are permitted to work at heights in Ontario, making Newfoundland and Labrador's fall protection training an alternative to Ontario's working at heights training.

We are recognizing and promoting excellence: Launched in November 2019, Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers is a voluntary program run by the CPO that promotes health and safety in the workplace and helps reduce injuries and illness through employers' successful implementation of an OHS management system. Employers who are accredited and recognized through the SOSE program may also be eligible for rebates from a related WSIB program. The CPO announced the first SOSE employers in Spring 2021 and will continue to promote the SOSE program and its many benefits into the future.

We are focused on small business: The ministry will conduct a small business survey to better understand the challenges that are facing small business employers and to learn about the type of support that the ministry and OHS system partners can develop that will meet their unique needs. Survey results are expected to be available by Spring 2022. The ministry has also developed an online COVID-19 safety plan builder to make it easier and faster for small businesses to develop custom COVID-19 safety plans to help them comply with public health and occupational health requirements.

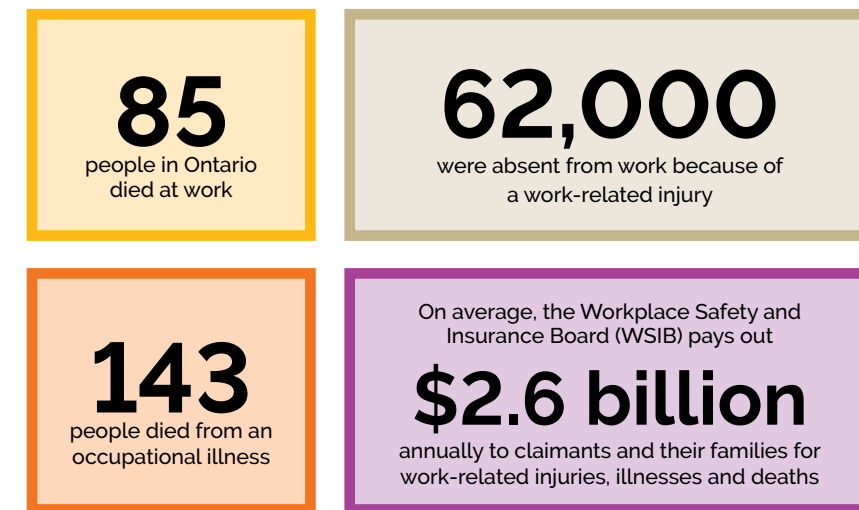
Prevention Works supports the government's Open for Business work in several key ways, including by applying a small business lens to OHS and by strengthening our focus on customer service. Prevention Works also contains a comprehensive plan to develop a performance measurement framework and a strong commitment for OHS system partners to evaluate the strategy's successes. Together we can identify areas for improvement that will inform our work into the future.

Spring 2021

Prevention Works: five-year strategy

Ontario's occupational health and safety (OHS) record is among the best in Canada, with our province achieving the lowest rate of work time lost to injury among any province or territory since 2009.² With over 427,000 business operating in Ontario,³ we are proud of our accomplishments, but we are also aware that injuries, illnesses and deaths continue to be an issue in workplaces of all sizes across the province. This is why we are committed to continuing to improve - we believe that every workplace injury, illness and fatality is preventable.

As the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario noted in their 2019 Annual Report, in 2018:⁴



Under Ontario's [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#), the Chief Prevention Officer (CPO) is responsible for developing a provincial OHS strategy that helps the OHS system ensure Ontario continues to be one of the safest places to work, while also seeking areas for improvement. Ontario's first OHS strategy – Healthy and Safe Ontario Workplaces – was launched in 2013 and paved the way for important advancements in protecting Ontarians while on the job.⁵

This new strategy – called Prevention Works – covers the 5-year period from 2021-2026 and is a call to action for all OHS system partners to continue to work together on improving Ontario's strong occupational health and safety record. This strategy:

- sets a clear direction by affirming the vision for where the OHS system wants to be
- sets objectives, intended outcomes and areas of systems focus that tell us what we need to do to get there
- makes a commitment that the OHS system will develop and implement a performance measurement framework that will measure progress towards achieving our intended outcomes

² Association of Worker's Compensation Boards of Canada, [Detailed key statistical measures report](#)

³ [Key Small Business Statistics - January 2019](#)

⁴ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, [2019 Annual Report](#)

⁵ [Healthy and Safe Ontario Workplaces Strategy](#)



Vision, objectives and measuring success

Ontario's OHS system has a clear vision:

An Ontario where workplaces promote and practice health and safety in their everyday work and are free from occupational injuries, illnesses and fatalities.

The four objectives of Prevention Works will empower the OHS system to achieve our vision. Each of the objectives is based on a priority problem the OHS system has identified and will try to solve. We have used evidence to create a list of activities we will do over the next 5 years to make a change towards improved occupational health and safety practices in workplaces.

In response to Auditor General recommendations, the OHS system is committed to measuring the effectiveness of Prevention Works as we make progress towards achieving our intended outcomes. The OHS system will collect the necessary data and build tools and infrastructure that will properly measure performance. We will work to measure and track across a number of key indicators that will help us understand successes and areas for improvement, with the implementation of our plan happening progressively over the course of this strategy to ensure the proper reporting systems are in place among OHS system partners, and the right information and data is being captured.

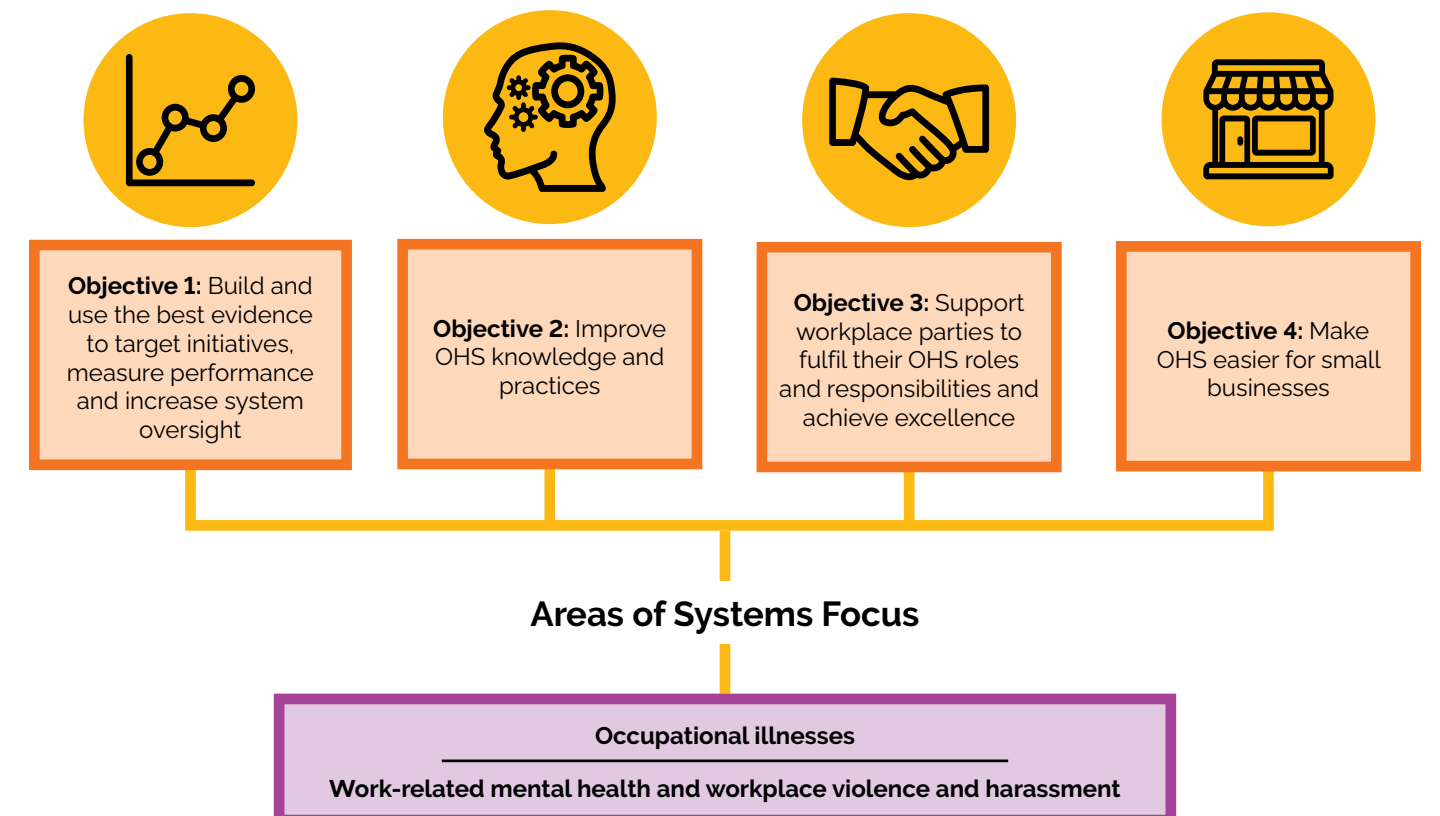
Prevention Works builds on the success of the previous strategy in unifying the OHS system and will serve as the foundation for increased collaboration moving forward. The strategy will guide the planning, implementation and measurement of our activities, programs and services that are designed to achieve our intended outcomes and will advance the importance and use of foundational OHS concepts and tools, including the Internal Responsibility System (IRS)⁶ and the Hierarchy of Controls.^{7,8} In an environment where workplaces are continually changing, this strategy will enable the OHS system to act on evidence, anticipate emerging OHS issues and prioritize occupational health and safety issues in a flexible and adaptable way.

Learning about what matters most

To develop this strategy and learn about the OHS priorities that matter most to Ontarians, the ministry held consultations across the province with representation from the general public and various other stakeholders, including employers, industry associations and labour groups.⁹ Participation was high, with over 1,000 people taking part.

The ministry also conducted extensive OHS research, including jurisdictional and environmental scans, literature reviews, data and statistical analysis from a variety of sources, as well as a benchmark public opinion survey of over 5,300 Ontarians to understand people's attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and behaviours relating to occupational health and safety. As in the case of the previous strategy, collaboration between OHS system partners also played an important role in the development of Prevention Works, particularly through advisory committees and forums through which OHS system partners continue to provide invaluable feedback, guidance and expertise.

Objectives



⁶ [The Internal Responsibility System](#)

⁷ [Workplace exposure and illnesses](#)

⁸ [Develop your COVID-19 workplace safety plan](#)

⁹ [2019 Consultation: Ontario's next occupational health and safety strategy](#)



Objective 1: Build and use the best evidence to target initiatives, measure performance and increase system oversight

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

There are gaps and limitations in the timely, systematic collection and integration of evidence that affect our ability to target, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate our activities meant to prevent injuries, illnesses and fatalities.

While Ontario has been successful in maintaining a solid OHS record, workplaces in the province can be healthier and safer and there is room for improvement. The ministry needs to do a better job of OHS system oversight and ensuring value for money, and the OHS system partners need to do a better job of measuring the effectiveness of prevention initiatives to understand their contributions towards healthy and safe workplaces. To this end, the ministry and the OHS system will obtain, use and share the best available data and evidence – including data and evidence on, for example, gender, race, Indigeneity, disability and income to establish a comprehensive picture when targeting, designing, implementing and measuring its work, with the ministry enhancing system oversight and evaluating partner programs along the way.

The OHS system recognizes that there are numerous hazards across workplaces and sectors, and that some hazards are higher risk than others and can result in more occupational injuries, illnesses and deaths. The OHS system also recognizes that evidence and research are needed to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate interventions that are designed to eliminate and / or limit the onset and progression of disease, injury or infection at work.¹⁰ Using a risk-based approach, the OHS system will build evidence by working with sector partners to identify the hazards that could lead to injury, illness or death in their respective sectors, prioritize those hazards based on the likelihood of an unwanted event occurring and consequences if the event were to occur (i.e. their level of risk), and focus on preventing those highest-risk hazards from causing injury for the sector(s) in question. Following this risk-based process, the OHS system will continue to work with sector partners to identify the root causes associated with the highest-risk hazards, as well as the current successful or potentially successful controls / solutions that could address them.

To achieve Objective 1, the OHS system will engage in the following activities:

Activity	Why we are doing it
Build system capacity to conduct risk assessments and identify root causes of workplace injuries, illnesses and fatalities. Use risk assessment and root cause analysis findings (and other evidence where necessary) to target prevention, compliance and enforcement initiatives and focus the OHS system.	Risk assessments ¹¹ and root cause analyses ¹² are effective ways of identifying, targeting and controlling high-risk workplace hazards. ¹³
Target and evaluate OHS compliance and enforcement using relevant evidence.	To help the OHS system maximize our limited resources. ^{14 15}
Work with system partners to develop new ways of collecting and managing data.	Identify with system partners the performance measurement framework which details the data, data sources, measures and indicators to improve program planning among the partners and to monitor the OHS strategy outcomes. ^{16 17}
Obtain, use and share the best available data on known and suspected markers of workplace vulnerability (for example, gender, race, Indigeneity, disability ¹⁸ and income ¹⁹) – as well as factors that show how a worker is vulnerable (for example, empowerment to participate in injury and illness prevention) ²⁰ – to develop interventions to better support vulnerable workers. ²¹	To help the OHS system better understand who is being impacted by workplace injury and illness, ²² and to better support vulnerable workers in Ontario. ²³

¹⁰ Canadian Public Health Association, [working paper on a conceptual framework for public health](#)

¹¹ Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, [Risk assessment fact sheets](#)

¹² Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, [Incident investigation](#)

¹³ [Technical Paper: Root cause analysis of distracted driving in Ontario logging operations](#)

¹⁴ Institute for Work and Health, [Effectiveness of targeted OHS labour inspections](#)

¹⁵ [International Labour Organization, Labour inspection and sanctions](#)

¹⁶ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, [2019 Annual Report](#)

¹⁷ ACT Government Health, [Leading data reform: The way forward](#)

¹⁸ Law Commission of Ontario, [Interim report August 2021](#)

¹⁹ Law Commission of Ontario, [Final Report December 2012](#)

²⁰ Institute for Work and Health, [OHS Vulnerability Measure](#)

²¹ A vulnerable worker refers to those workers at greater risk of injury. Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, [Precarious employment and vulnerable workers](#)

²² [Toronto Public Health releases new socio-demographic COVID-19 data](#)

²³ Ontario Human Rights Commission, [When collecting data is a good idea](#)

Implement a common system-wide approach to supporting targeted, high-quality research and evaluation, knowledge exchange, and the translation of research into action.	To improve the impact of OHS research ^{24 25} and value for money for Ontarians.
Broaden the evidence base (for example, by developing sector profiles ²⁶) to target sector-specific initiatives.	To enable the OHS system to develop and implement targeted initiatives for the sectors they serve. ²⁷
Using standard evaluation criteria, evaluate funded programs and collect outcome-based performance data that funded partners must be accountable for, track and monitor.	To help the ministry better manage partner funding and ensure the relevance and effectiveness of funded partner initiatives. ²⁸
Continue to use best available evidence to support regulatory changes.	To help ensure regulations achieve the ministry's intended impact. ²⁹

Intended outcome: The OHS system's prevention, compliance and enforcement initiatives are evidence-informed and targeted, with the OHS system able to demonstrate measurable contributions to preventing injuries, illnesses and fatalities.	Measuring success: We will track the extent to which we make use of data and evidence to inform operational, tactical and strategic decisions in the system. As a first step, we will focus on the programs that are reviewed, changed and developed using evidence enabled by the OHS system. We will also build an evidence base to reflect the impact of the prevention and compliance support efforts. Lastly, we will measure the contribution of risk assessment and root cause analysis in identifying, targeting and controlling hazards
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²⁴ [Lost in knowledge translation: time for a map?](#)

²⁵ [Assessing the impact of healthcare research: A systematic review of methodological frameworks](#)

²⁹ Public Health Ontario, [Supporting the policy-making process](#)

²⁶ A sector profile is a descriptive analysis of an economic sectors' OHS performance, mainly focused on sector injury administrative data (claims data), segregated by gender, age group, geographical location, occupation and employer size, among others

²⁷ [Identify worker groups at risk from hazardous substances in the workplace](#)

²⁸ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, [2019 Annual Report](#)



Objective 2: Improve OHS knowledge and practices

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

Workplace parties do not know where to find OHS information or resources, and high-quality OHS training does not reach enough workers in Ontario.

Not knowing where to find OHS information and resources was identified as a top concern during ministry consultations, with participants indicating that the OHS system should provide a single window platform for sharing key occupational health and safety information with the public. The ministry's benchmark public opinion survey of over 5,300 Ontarians also found that four in ten respondents (40%) reported that they are not knowledgeable about OHS, and one quarter (24%) of respondents reported having never received or recall receiving any form of OHS training. In addition, one of the top OHS violations in Ontario in 2018³⁰ across all sectors was non-completion of basic occupational health and safety awareness training (as required under O. Reg. 297/13).³¹

The ministry also found during our province-wide consultation that common themes reported by participants were the need to provide more occupational health and safety training for all workplace parties – especially training that is targeted, and hazard / sector-specific – and that many workplaces face hazards that are more administrative in nature, including understaffing.³²

To achieve Objective 2, Ontario's occupational health and safety system will engage in the following activities:

Activity	Why we are doing it
Develop, implement and promote a single-window, public platform to improve the OHS system's customer services as well as access to OHS resources and information.	To put customer service at the core ³³ of the system's work and improve access to OHS information and resources. ³⁴
Establish new and use existing communications partnerships to increase the reach of OHS information and resources, and compliance with OHS training programs.	To increase the reach of OHS information and resources, and compliance with training programs required under the <i>Occupational Health and Safety Act</i> . ³⁵
Complete a comprehensive review of OHS training (training modernization).	To improve quality and better understand the effectiveness of OHS training in the province, and subsequently better target initiatives. ³⁶

³⁰ [2019 statistics on Ontario's workforce](#)

³¹ [O. Reg. 297/13: Occupational health and safety awareness and training](#)

³² 2019 Consultation: [Ontario's next occupational health and safety strategy](#)

³³ [The public sector gets serious about customer experience](#)

³⁴ 2019 Consultation: [Ontario's next occupational health and safety strategy](#)

³⁵ [World Health Organization strategic communications framework for effective communications](#)

³⁶ [Evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the Ontario working at heights training standard: Final report](#)

Strengthen the CPO's role and oversight of OHS training delivery including standardization of learning objectives across key training programs.	To help the ministry ensure that learners are meeting minimum OHS training requirements. ³⁷
Use evidence (see objective 1) to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate new or improved OHS training programs that are sector-specific, and targeted to specific workplace parties.	To deliver OHS training that addresses key sector-specific OHS issues. ³⁸
Based on evidence, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate online OHS training options.	To deliver OHS training in more cost-effective ways and to broaden reach. ³⁹
Make OHS training more convenient and / or more affordable.	To improve uptake of OHS training (especially among small businesses). ⁴⁰
Make it easier, where appropriate, for workers from other provinces and / or territories to work in Ontario by recognizing out-of-province OHS training.	To remove the need for workers to unnecessarily duplicate OHS training. ⁴¹

Intended outcome: Workplace parties can easily access OHS resources, information and training to enhance their OHS knowledge, improve their workplace health and safety practices and be prepared for work in Ontario.	Measuring success: We will measure the reach and uptake of resources, information and training as well as improved OHS knowledge as a result. Similarly, we will measure the customer experience and the extent to which training targets and contributes to sector-specific issues and outcomes.
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Objective 3: Support workplace parties to fulfil their OHS roles and responsibilities and achieve excellence

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

There are still too many people in the workplace who do not know or understand what their health and safety roles and responsibilities are under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, or how to achieve OHS excellence

The ministry's benchmark public opinion survey indicated that one in five respondents had been asked to perform a task that they considered unsafe at their workplace, and among these respondents, only one quarter raised their concern to their manager / supervisor and refused the task. In addition, improving support for all workplace parties to comply with the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) was frequently raised by participants during our province-wide consultations. Workplace visits by ministry inspectors were suggested as an opportunity to provide compliance information and coaching to all workplace parties, specifically in the areas of education for employers, supervisors and workers on their rights and responsibilities under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, and how to identify and speak out against unsafe workplace practices.

While fulfilling OHS roles and responsibilities is critical to healthy and safe workplaces, the OHS system will also support workplaces to achieve OHS excellence. Other jurisdictions⁴² that offer incentives for occupational health and safety excellence (similar to WSIB's Health and Safety Excellence Program⁴³ and the ministry's Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers (SOSE) Program⁴⁴) have seen participating workplaces experience positive outcomes such as lower rates of lost-time injuries.⁴⁵

To achieve Objective 3, Ontario's occupational health and safety system will engage in the following activities:

Activity	Why we are doing it
Based on evidence, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate new or improved OHS programs and resources to assist ⁴⁶ Ontarians in understanding and practicing their OHS roles and responsibilities under the <i>Occupational Health and Safety Act</i> , and set them on a path to achieve excellence.	To increase compliance with the <i>Occupational Health and Safety Act</i> , and set Ontarians on a path to achieving OHS excellence. ^{47 48}

³⁷ CSA group, Why do we need standards? [frequently asked questions](#)

³⁸ [The Skills Factor in Productivity and Competitiveness: How Canada's Sector Councils are Helping Address the Skills and Labour Needs of Employers](#)

³⁹ [The potential of online learning for adults: Early lessons from the COVID-19 crisis](#)

⁴⁰ [Improving health and safety in small businesses](#)

⁴¹ [Ontario now recognizes fall protection training certificates from Newfoundland and Labrador workers](#)

⁴² [Employers certified by COR programs have greater reduction in injury rates: studies](#)

⁴³ [WSIB Health and Safety Excellence program](#)

⁴⁴ [Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers Program](#)

⁴⁵ [Employers certified by COR programs have greater reduction in injury rates: studies](#)

⁴⁶ Compliance assistance is when a ministry inspector or another OHS system partner provides information, guidance or other tools to help businesses and individuals comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and its Regulations.

⁴⁷ [Basic OH&S Program Elements](#)

⁴⁸ Occupational Safety and Health Administration, [Recommended practices for safety and health programs](#)



Objective 4: Make OHS easier for small businesses

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

There are still too many barriers for small businesses to be set up as healthy and safe workplaces

The ministry considers small businesses to be those with fewer than 50 workers. In Ontario, small businesses represent 95% of all employers and they employ 28% of Ontario's workers.⁵⁵ In comparison to larger businesses, small businesses often experience greater difficulty in controlling exposure to hazards in their workplaces because of the limited resources they can invest in OHS. Participants of the ministry's province-wide consultations described several barriers faced by small businesses in improving occupational health and safety, including cost-prohibitive training programs, consultation services and educational resources, as well as a lack of occupational health and safety resources that are tailored to the specific needs of small businesses. The ministry heard that small businesses need help to understand the business case for OHS as a factor in improving productivity and profitability. Participants also noted the need to create engagement forums and improve flow of information, which could include increased small business representation and participation on the OHS system's various advisory committees and bodies.⁵⁶

To achieve Objective 4, Ontario's occupational health and safety system will engage in the following activities:

Activity	Why we are doing it
Evidence – Create new ways of consulting with small businesses and collecting data to better understand issues unique to small businesses. ⁵⁷	To increase the impact and value for money of small business initiatives. ^{58 59}
Relevance – develop, implement, monitor and evaluate resources that are tailored to meet the specific needs of small businesses.	To improve small business OHS knowledge and practices. ^{60 61}
Cost – provide convenient and / or more affordable OHS resources or programs to small businesses.	To reduce costs to small businesses and improve small business OHS knowledge and practices. ^{62 63}

Help workplace parties comply with OHS laws through compliance commitments⁴⁹ and enforcement.

To increase compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.⁵⁰

Through the Health and Safety Excellence Program (HSEp), provide workplaces with a clear roadmap to improve their health and safety.⁵¹

Workplaces that complete the HSEp program and / or are accredited and recognized through SOSE are likely to experience reductions in lost-time injury rates⁵² and fewer workers will be injured.⁵³

Through the Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers program, accredit applicable OHS management systems used by Ontario businesses and recognize employers that have implemented an accredited system.⁵⁴

Intended outcome: Workplace parties understand and adhere to their health and safety roles and responsibilities and take a systematic approach to identify and solve OHS issues at their workplaces to achieve excellence.

Measuring success: We will measure the extent to which OHS programs and resources, as well as compliance and enforcement activities, contribute to changing workplace party practices and how participation in HSEp and SOSE lead to improved OHS performance.

⁴⁹ Employers certified by COR programs have greater reduction in injury rates: studies

⁵⁰ [WSIB Health and Safety Excellence program](#)

⁵¹ [Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers Program](#)

⁵² [Employers certified by COR programs have greater reduction in injury rates: studies](#)

⁵³ Compliance assistance is when a ministry inspector or another OHS system partner provides information, guidance or other tools to help businesses and individuals comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and its Regulations.

⁵⁴ [Basic OH&S Program Elements](#)

⁵⁵ [Inspection initiative results: New small business registrations and internal responsibility system](#)

⁵⁶ [Ontario's occupational health and safety system](#)

⁵⁷ [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Small Business Assistance Program](#)

⁵⁸ [Institute for Work and Health, Improving health and safety in small businesses](#)

⁵⁹ [Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Small Business Handbook](#)

⁶⁰ Institute for Work and Health, [Improving health and safety in small businesses](#)

⁶¹ Workplace Safety North, [Health and safety checklist for small business owners](#)

⁶² Institute for Work and Health, [Improving health and safety in small businesses](#)

⁶³ National research center for OHS regulation, [OHS in Small Organizations: Some Challenges and Ways Forward](#)



Areas of systems focus – building relationships to have a bigger impact

The objectives and intended outcomes of Prevention Works represent foundational OHS issues that need to be addressed broadly. Based on our consultations, research findings, and our experiences with COVID-19, Prevention Works also includes two areas of systems focus, which will involve stakeholders from within and outside of the OHS system (for example, other provincial ministries). We expect that through these areas of systems focus – occupational illnesses, work-related mental health and workplace violence and harassment – the OHS system will achieve the biggest impact in reducing or eliminating exposure to the hazards that pose the greatest risk.

Occupational illnesses

The OHS system will focus on preventing occupational illnesses,⁶⁹ which are health problems caused by exposure to physical, chemical or biological agents in the workplace. WSIB statistics show that long latency occupational diseases – such as cancers that do not develop until a long time after the hazardous exposure took place at work – are among the most serious and make up the largest amount of allowed benefit costs in Ontario.⁷⁰ However, researchers with the Occupational Cancer Research Centre assert that workers compensation statistics largely underestimate the true impact of occupational illness.⁷¹ Moreover, research from the Occupational Cancer Research Centre of Ontario Health (OCRC) shows that about 3,000 new cases of cancer each year in Ontario are caused by exposure at work to one or more of 16 hazardous substances, commonly found in workplaces.⁷²

Occupational illnesses may also occur more acutely and suddenly, including those caused by exposure to infectious diseases (for example, COVID-19). The OHS system will support workplaces to be healthy and safe during and after COVID-19 and will help workplaces prepare for other types of outbreaks. In addition, the OHS system will review how such events can disproportionately impact particular workers (for example, temporary foreign agricultural workers) and workplaces to inform targeted occupational illness prevention activities now and in the future.

Research shows that a multi-faceted, system-level approach is needed to reduce burden of occupational illness.^{73 74} As a system, we will build on the latest evidence available as well as the work that the system has done to date. Since 2017, we have been working with OHS system partners as well as other partners from the broader health sector to implement an Occupational Disease Action Plan (ODAP). The ODAP includes a range of actions to support recommended approaches to prevent occupational illnesses, including updated legislation and regulations; enforcement and compliance; improved access to exposure data and illness surveillance to monitor trends and patterns; improved linkages with physicians; and, targeted communications, training, tools and resources to raise awareness.

Consider the impact of regulatory changes for small business compliance.⁶⁴

To consider how to support small business compliance with regulations.⁶⁵

Value of OHS – help small businesses understand and embrace OHS roles and responsibilities and the value of OHS as a way to improve productivity and their bottom line.⁶⁶

To help improve small business productivity and their bottom line.^{67 68}

Intended outcome: Small business workplaces are set up and operated to be healthy and safe because the OHS barriers that small businesses face are alleviated and / or removed.

Measuring success: We will measure small business access and use of OHS resources, services and supports and extent to which they contributed to improved OHS knowledge and practices.

⁶⁴ Government of Canada, [Policy on Limiting Regulatory Burden on Business](#)

⁶⁸ [Reducing Regulatory Costs for Business Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 20, Sched. 4](#)

⁶⁶ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9d6104db-e2a1-4b60-b672-ea0d4b5fadcb/resource/a1c18b1c-e3b1-4da7-abbc-837e4f3e1b00/download/zz-2011-occupational-health-and-safety-tool-kit-for-small-business-may-2011.pdf> Government of Alberta, Occupational Health and Safety Tool Kit for Small Business

⁶⁷ [The business case for safety and health at work: Cost-benefit analyses of interventions in small and medium-sized enterprises](#)

⁶⁸ Public Services Health and Safety Association, [Small-Business](#)

⁶⁹ As defined in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, "occupational illness" includes an occupational disease for which a worker is entitled to benefits under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

⁷⁰ [By the Numbers 2019 WSIB statistical report](#)

⁷¹ Demers, et.al Options for Tracking Occupational Disease and Exposure in Ontario. Occupational Cancer Research Centre, Ontario, 2019.

⁷² [Burden of Occupational Cancer in Ontario](#)

⁷³ Keefe, et.al. Preventing Occupational Disease: Designing a System that Works, March 2017

⁷⁴ Dr. Paul Demers, [Using scientific evidence and principles to help determine the work-relatedness of cancer | Ontario.ca](#).



To enhance our approach on the prevention of occupational illnesses, over the next five years we will continue to build on the successful approaches in the ODAP to move from evidence to action, strengthen our existing partnerships and expand our partnerships with public health and the health care system partners to support collaborative, multi-disciplinary, evidence-informed approaches and activities across the OHS system and broader health systems.

Work-related mental health and workplace violence and harassment

System partners such as the WSIB and the HSAs are doing important work in these areas. For example, the WSIB provides compensation and a range of services (including re-employment, health care, and return to work) for work-related mental injuries, such as chronic stress and traumatic mental stress. The HSAs provide important training and resources on work-related mental health and on the development of workplace violence and harassment policies and programs.

Over the next five years, the OHS system will continue to focus on providing work-related mental health information and resources through the HSAs and preventing workplace violence and harassment (especially in education and healthcare sectors). During our province-wide consultations the ministry heard that work-related mental health is a serious issue in Ontario's workplaces. Participants identified issues such as lack of clarity around work-related mental health, violence and burnout for nurses and health care professionals, employer obligations under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* regarding workplace violence and harassment, and increased support for addressing impairment (which may pose a physical hazard) in the workplace.

The ministry's benchmark public opinion survey also found that among those who sought information about workplace health and safety, the most sought-after type of information was about harassment (33%), particularly among women. Information on dangerous substances (32%) and mental health (29%) was also highly sought-after. Aligned with the recommendations of the researchers who led the survey,

the OHS system will work to ensure that information and resources about workplace harassment, violence and work-related mental health are effectively communicated and made available to workers.

Information sought about workplace health and safety



In addition, one of the top OHS issues observed in Ontario's workplaces in 2018 was workplace violence and harassment across all sectors.⁷⁵ Research conducted by the Institute for Work and Health has demonstrated sector and gender differences in Ontario, with higher incident rates of workplace violence reported in the education sector, and higher among women.⁷⁶ Workplace violence and workplace harassment may result in psychological injury. Compliance with the rights and duties in the OHS Act that deal with workplace violence and harassment will remain a key focus of the ministry's initiatives.

COVID-19 brought a heightened focus to the importance of work-related mental health, and OHS system partners (such as the HSAs and the WSIB) will work to address the unique challenges to workplaces resulting from COVID-19 within the parameters of their respective mandates.

⁷⁵ [Occupational Health and Safety in Ontario \(April 2018 - March 2019\)](#)

⁷⁶ [Gender differences in injuries attributed to workplace violence in Ontario 2002-2015](#)



Supporting Open for Business

In collaboration with public health partners, the ministry played a key role in developing workplace health and safety / infection prevention and control guidance to support the reopening of Ontario's businesses through COVID-19. In addition, through the Open for Business initiative, the ministry is committed to supporting the growth of Ontario's economy and creating workplaces that are healthy and safe.⁷⁷ Prevention Works supports the government's Open for Business efforts in several key ways, including by providing the option for businesses to use industry standards when seeking accreditation and recognition through the ministry's Supporting our Safe Employers program (SOSE⁷⁸), applying a small business lens to OHS through Objective 4 activities, and going digital (for example, through providing e-learning options) where appropriate. The OHS system will also continue to support Ontario's businesses by making it easier to access OHS services and resources, strengthening our focus on customer service and providing compliance assistance so businesses can better adhere to requirements under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#).

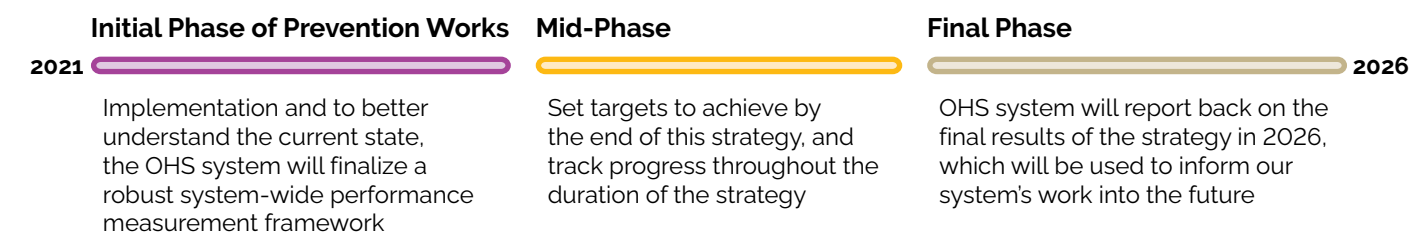
⁷⁷ [Open for Business](#)

⁷⁸ [Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers Program](#)

Turning the strategy into action and anticipated timeline

Prevention Works provides a framework for OHS system partners to ensure that Ontario remains one of the healthiest and safest jurisdictions in Canada to work. Following the release of Prevention Works and over the period 2021-2026, Ontario's OHS system partners will work together to operationalize the strategy by planning, coordinating and implementing mutually reinforcing activities under each of the strategy's objectives, which will include engagement with various advisory bodies like the Prevention Council⁷⁹ or "Section 21 committees"⁸⁰ (appointed by the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development,). The ministry will oversee and track the activities as part of a modernized funding model and OHS system governance structure to ensure accountability and integration across the OHS system. The effectiveness of the system's work in support of this strategy will be captured and reported regularly through the ministry's Annual Report on Occupational Health and Safety in Ontario, and as part of ongoing performance measurement and continuous improvement.⁸¹

During the first initial phases of Prevention Works' implementation, the OHS system will engage in enterprise operational planning and target-setting in support of a common, system-wide strategy for data sharing and to track and publicly report performance measures that demonstrate the impact of efforts and strategies. We will continue building data collection tools for system partners to measure outcomes under each objective. In the mid-phases of Prevention Works, we will set targets to achieve by the end of this strategy, and track progress throughout the duration of the strategy. We will evaluate the strategy's mid-term successes and identify areas for improvement. The OHS system will report back on the final results of the strategy in 2026, which will be used to inform our system's work into the future.



⁷⁹ [The Prevention Council for workplace health and safety](#)

⁸⁰ [Ontario's occupational health and safety system](#)

⁸¹ [Occupational Health and Safety in Ontario \(April 2018 - March 2019\)](#)

