

Submission to the Workers Compensation Act Legislative Review Committee

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Executive Summary

This submission is provided by Christine Panas, drawing on eight years of direct experience managing the Safe Hospitality program through the Manitoba Tourism Education Council (MTEC). The purpose of this submission is to provide system-level input to the Legislative Review Committee on the role of sector-specific prevention programming within Manitoba's workers compensation framework.

Safe Hospitality was a prevention-focused initiative that delivered occupational health and safety training to more than 5,000 workers and employers in Manitoba's restaurant and hotel industry. The hospitality sector employs a large number of young, first-time, and otherwise vulnerable workers who face elevated injury risk, making targeted prevention particularly important.

During a period of broader prevention and organizational changes within the workers compensation system, the Safe Hospitality program was discontinued and was not replaced with a comparable, hospitality-specific model. While general safety training and broader industry programs remain available, there is concern that the loss of a dedicated hospitality prevention program has reduced access to industry-relevant safety guidance for employers and workers in this sector.

This submission highlights the value of sustained, sector-specific prevention programming and encourages consideration of how The Workers Compensation Act and associated prevention structures can better support long-term, industry-based safety initiatives. Recognizing established organizations such as MTEC as delivery partners may help strengthen injury prevention, support young and new workers, and improve outcomes for both workers and employers.

Purpose of this Submission

This submission is provided in my individual capacity, based on direct professional experience, and with reference to the role of the Manitoba Tourism Education Council (MTEC) in delivering industry-based safety training. It is intended to contribute system-level input to the Legislative Review Committee regarding workplace injury prevention, sector-specific safety programming, and opportunities to strengthen prevention outcomes within Manitoba's workers compensation system.

Background and Experience

I managed the Safe Hospitality program for eight years while it was administered through the Manitoba Tourism Education Council. During that time, the program delivered occupational health and safety training to more than 5,000 workers and employers across Manitoba's restaurant and hotel industry. Hospitality is a large and diverse sector that employs a high proportion of young, first-time, and otherwise vulnerable workers, many of whom are entering the workforce for the first time and face elevated risk of injury due to inexperience, high turnover, and fast-paced work environments.

Role of Industry-Based Prevention

Through the Safe Hospitality program, strong and collaborative working relationships were developed with restaurant and hotel owners and operators throughout Manitoba. Many of these employers were actively building or improving their workplace safety programs and relied on sector-specific guidance that reflected the operational realities of hospitality workplaces. Industry-based organizations such as MTEC are well positioned to deliver prevention programming of this nature due to their direct connections to employers, understanding of sector-specific hazards, and ability to reach workers efficiently.

Program Changes and Observed Impact

During a period of broader organizational and prevention-program changes within Manitoba's workers compensation system, the Safe Hospitality program was discontinued and was not replaced with a comparable, hospitality-specific prevention and training model. I am not certain whether other sector-based organizations were subject to the same requirement to demonstrate approximately 50 percent support from their respective industry sectors or client employers in order to continue receiving program funding, and this is noted solely to provide context for the Committee's system-level review.

At present, restaurants and hotels seeking safety training or certification are generally directed to broader programs or to general training resources. While these programs provide value across a wide range of workplaces, there is concern that there is no longer a hospitality-specific prevention model comparable to the former Safe Hospitality program. Hospitality workplaces have distinct operational realities, hazards, and workforce characteristics, particularly given the high proportion of young and first-time workers.

From a prevention and system-evaluation perspective, access to sector-specific injury trend data for the hospitality industry would be valuable in assessing the impacts of changes to prevention programming over time. Improved transparency and availability of such data could help inform future prevention investments, program design, and policy decisions within the workers compensation system.

As workplace safety legislation continues to evolve, including recent amendments related to psychological health and safety in the workplace, there is concern that hospitality employers may have

limited access to sector-specific guidance to help them understand and implement new legislative requirements. Without dedicated, industry-based prevention programs, smaller employers in particular may be less aware of emerging obligations and best practices, which could affect both compliance and worker well-being.

Considerations for the Legislative Review

This experience highlights the importance of sustained, sector-specific prevention programming within Manitoba's workers compensation framework. As the Committee considers potential improvements to The Workers Compensation Act and the broader workers compensation system, consideration may be given to how prevention structures and funding mechanisms can better support long-term, industry-based safety programming. Recognizing and supporting established organizations such as MTEC as delivery partners can help ensure prevention initiatives remain relevant, credible, and effective while contributing to improved outcomes for workers, employers, and the workers compensation system overall.