

Permanent clinical impairment (PCI)

What is permanent clinical impairment?

If you suffered a work-related injury or illness that has had a permanent impact, you may be eligible for benefits recognizing this impact, known as a PCI.

PCI means:

- losing a body part,
- losing the use of a body part, system or function, or
- a measurable change or disfigurement to any body part, system or function.

The degree of your clinical impairment may be measured through a PCI examination conducted by a physician after you have reached the point of maximum medical recovery.

Determining permanent clinical impairment

To determine the level of your PCI, a physician will either complete a medical examination or review the medical reporting on your file*. The objective clinical information related to your impairment is gathered and converted to a percentage of PCI.

**Some injuries or conditions can be assessed for PCI through a review of the medical reporting on your file. Conditions like the partial removal of a meniscus in the knee or an amputation may not require a medical examination to assess impairment.*

The PCI examination

An examination is scheduled when enough time has passed to allow you to reach your maximum medical recovery. The time frame varies depending on the type of injury/illness, but it can take up to two years or more to arrive at a recovery level that is considered permanent.

The time period is based on guidelines of standardized healing times. For example, it generally takes two years for a nerve to heal so if your nerves are damaged, we will need to wait two years before assessing your injury.

Your adjudicator or case manager will advise you if you need to be assessed for a PCI. However, ask your adjudicator or case manager if you have any questions about an assessment.

What to expect during a PCI examination

A PCI examination is different than a regular physical examination as the examining physician does not need to make a diagnosis or create a treatment plan. The examiner will have reviewed your medical file prior to the examination, so the exam itself may take only a few minutes.

The examiner will measure your physical function, such as range of motion, and ask you questions about your injury to rate the level of impairment for your condition.

How is the PCI exam used to determine the PCI rating?

Once the examination is complete, the results are given to one of our medical consultants specially trained in rating PCI. The medical consultant will review the results along with the approved WCB Alberta rating (Alberta Permanent Clinical Impairment Guidelines) to recommend a percentage for your impairment.

Where the Alberta guidelines do not adequately address your impairment, the medical consultant will then refer to the American Medical Association Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment.

The medical consultant will provide a final percentage number of "whole body impairment." The percentage is then used to calculate the corresponding financial award, called a non-economic loss payment (NELP).

Built into the PCI ratings are the expected effects of your injury or surgery such as pain at the site of surgery, scarring and expected loss of sensation or strength.

So, even though the rating may appear to be based solely on the range of motion measured in the exam, the other injury effects have automatically been included in the rating provided by the guides used.

The medical consultant may also assess PCI to recognize any unexpected injury effects, not already included in the impairment guide.

Examples of PCI ratings:

- Amputation of the entire small (pinky) finger would rate a PCI of two per cent of the whole person.
- A single level lumbar (back) discectomy plus fusion is 20 per cent of the whole person. This rating recognizes pain and scarring at the surgical site, impairment of sensation over a dermatome (area of skin containing sensory fibers from a spinal nerve), and loss of spinal mobility.

Non-economic loss payment (NELP)

The medical consultant's percentage recommendation is sent to your adjudicator or case manager to translate the percentage into a NELP payment.

A NELP is awarded to you if medical evidence tells us you have a permanent clinical impairment relating to an injury/illness that occurred on or after Jan. 1, 1995.

A NELP is a one-time payment. This payment acknowledges that your injury has had an effect on your life outside of work; however, the payment does not compensate for:

- the loss of ability to work or loss of earnings.
- pain and suffering.

The PCI can be reassessed if your condition worsens in the future.

Information about benefits that recognize loss of earnings can be found [here](#).

