

Absenteeism Report 2019 to 2023

Presented To:	Finance and Administration Committee
Meeting Date:	May 22, 2024
Type:	Managers' Reports
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Recommended by:	General Manager of Corporate Services

Report Summary

This report provides information regarding employee absenteeism for calendar years 2019 to 2023 inclusive to allow the Auditor General's Office to complete the audit of attendance management processes that responds to the interests of members of the Audit Committee.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Climate Action Plans

This report refers to operational matters and has no connection to the Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP).

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Executive Summary

Over the past 5 years, the median level of core absenteeism, which occurs when employees are away due to sick leave or short term disability leaves, has averaged 4.9 available work days per year. That is, half of all employees have absences of greater than 4.9 working days and half have annual absences of below 4.9 working days.

The corporation's five year average core absenteeism rate is 7.8%. Since this is higher than the median, this indicates there are some employees absent for much longer compared to the corporation as a whole.

This report also contains a measure of total absence. Total absence includes core absenteeism plus other leaves such as long term disability leaves, absences for occupational illnesses or injuries (WSIB), or approved leaves of absence, among other examples. The corporation's five-year median level of total absence was 5.7 days per year, on average. The corporation's total absence rate averaged 14% of available work days over the same period.

Generally, absenteeism is higher among 24/7 municipal services like Transit, Long Term Care and

Emergency Services. For CGS, paid short term absences in Fire and Paramedic Services are lower than available municipal comparators, but higher in Long Term Care and Transit Services (see Appendix 1).

Several factors influence this comparison, including:

- Benefits policy and benefit plan design (i.e., municipalities with greater amounts of allowable paid sick hours will report more of their absenteeism than municipalities with less allowable paid sick time);
- Unionization rates influence absenteeism because, in a highly unionized environment, negotiated leave policies provide a “safety net” that tend to be utilized at greater rates than non-union staff;
- Shift work and job demands influence absenteeism especially in services that operate around the clock or for longer hours, like in Transit, Long Term Care, Water and Wastewater and Emergency Services, where the potential is higher that physical and mental fatigue could lead to more frequent absences;
- Organization culture influences absenteeism because employee perceptions of engagement or managers’ attention to the corporation’s attendance policies can increase, or reduce, absenteeism rates.

Attendance management programs, designed to proactively manage attendance and address instances of absenteeism using a structured process that encourages attendance, exist in many of the corporation’s 24/7 service areas. Work is underway to translate these programs into a set of enterprise-wide standards.

Background

Motion AC2023-12, approved at the December 12, 2023 Audit Committee meeting, directed staff to undertake the analysis in this report as follows:

Resolution Number AC2023-12
Title: Audit Plans for 2024 and 2025
Date: Tuesday, December 12, 2023

Moved By Councillor McIntosh
Seconded By Councillor Signoretti

WHEREAS the Auditor General's audit plan for 2024 includes an audit of attendance management processes that responds to the interests of members of the Audit Committee,

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Human Resources and Organizational Development Division prepare a report for Council on absenteeism by Department and Division for calendar years 2020 to 2023 inclusive by the end of Q2 2024 to allow the Auditor General's Office to complete the above audit by the end of 2024.

Attendance management within an organization reflects several elements including the corporation’s policy on managing employee attendance, benefits programs provided by the corporation for employees that typically includes a specified amount of “allowable” time away from work for various reasons, unionization rates of employees, the prevalence of shift work, employee health and wellness, the nature of the services provided, and organization culture.

The value of analyzing trends and comparing absenteeism rates between organizations is the insight that could be obtained about potential policy or benefit plan changes, potential changes in how work is designed and management choices about how to manage employee attendance. The work of changing any of these aspects can be complex and, potentially, may include collective bargaining negotiations.

The corporation has formal policies regarding attendance management. For Fire Services, Pioneer Manor and Transit Services, there are structured processes that have been in place since 2014 designed to

manage employee attendance so that absenteeism is minimized. Work to standardize these processes across the corporation is underway.

Analysis

There are generally two categories of absenteeism – “core absenteeism” and “total absences”. Both are important, as explained below.

1) Core Absenteeism – for use in Attendance Management Programs

Core absenteeism is comprised of incidental and short term absences from work. The corporation measures core absenteeism by tracking those absences paid on a short term sick leave plan, annual incidental sick leave days (called Weekly Indemnity Days) or days covered by a short term disability plan. Most full-time employees receive six weekly indemnity days each calendar year and have access to a short term disability plan at 75% income replacement for absences greater than three days.

This means the corporation anticipates a typical employee will be absent for six days per year due to short term absences. Where absences last longer than three consecutive days (except during the pandemic), a benefit provided by the corporation provides 75% income replacement for up to six months.

The following charts provide core absenteeism data that would typically be used for the purpose of reviewing attendance management processes for active regular and temporary full-time employees. Part-time employees and employees governed by outside boards are excluded.

Consistent with best practices and in line with municipal benchmarking data the types of absences include:

- COVID Leaves
- Pioneer Manor Infectious Disease Outbreak
- Short Term Disability/Sick Leave
- Sick Leave – Weekly Indemnity Days or Paid Sick Leave

Table 1: Enterprise-Wide Core Absenteeism 2019-2023

Core Absenteeism 2019 to 2023 Permanent & Temporary Full-Time					
5-Year Average	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
7.8%	7.7%	7.5%	7.5%	8.6%	7.7%

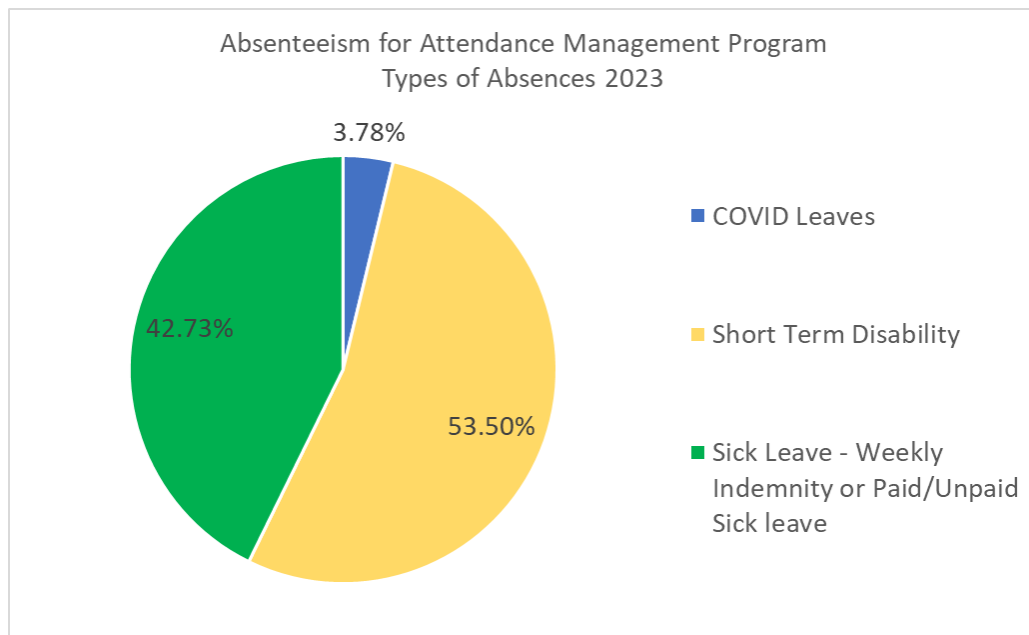
Table 2: Department Core Absenteeism 2019-2023

Core Absenteeism 2019 to 2023 Permanent & Temporary Full-Time						
Department	5-Year Average					Median
	Employee Count	Total Available Working Days	Total Days Absence	Absenteeism Rate	Avg Days per Employee	
Total	1756	389,896	30,356.16	7.8%	17	4.88
Chief Administrative Office	72	15,886	718.43	4.6%	10	3.09
Community Development	639	14,1270	14,322.36	10.1%	22	4.45
Corporate Services	287	63,217	3,840.83	6.1%	13	4.72
Community Safety	295	67,210	4,611.72	6.9%	16	1.96
Growth & Infrastructure	463	102,314	6,862.83	6.7%	15	6.06

Absenteeism is calculated by dividing the number of days absent by the total number of days to be worked in each period.

Of those absences included in core absenteeism the following chart represents a breakdown by type of absence for 2023:

Chart 1: Core Absenteeism 2023 – By Type



For a breakdown of absenteeism by division and over the past five years, please see attached Appendix 1.

During the pandemic, the corporation introduced several policy changes to protect employee health and safety and reflect guidance provided by both Public Health Sudbury and Districts and the Ministries of Health and Long Term Care. These policies produced higher absenteeism rates. For example, in 2022, and in alignment with provincial infectious disease emergency leave provisions, the corporation provided a total of six additional paid sick days (instead of the standard three days) to provide income protection and reduce the

risk that employees attend work while still sick, increasing workplace risks for other employees. While Greater Sudbury’s approach was not unique, there was no standard approach across the municipal sector. Some municipalities provided less paid leave for infectious disease emergency leave or offered only unpaid days, so comparisons with other jurisdictions should be made with that difference in mind.

2) Total Absences

“Total absences” are all absences from work as described in Table 3, below. To obtain an overall absenteeism rate, the total number of absences listed below are divided by the number of hours available to work (less statutory holidays and vacation). Certain absences not related to sick leave are excluded (see below).

Table 3: What is Included/Excluded in “Total Absences”

Type of Absences Included	Type of Absences Excluded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sick Leave – Weekly Indemnity days or paid sick leave • WSIB • Short Term Disability/Sick Leave • Long Term Disability/Sick Leave • Unapproved Absence • Approved Unpaid Absence • Employment Standards Act (ESA) Leaves related to sickness (Unpaid Sick, Emergency Leave, Family Medical/Care Leave, Unpaid Family Responsibility, Infectious Disease Leave • COVID Leaves • Pioneer Manor Infection Disease Outbreak • Declared Emergency Leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banked Overtime Taken • Bereavement Leave • Jury Duty • Pregnancy/Parental Leave • Statutory Holidays • Suspension • Union Leaves • Vacation

Table 4: Total Absences 2019 to 2023 – Five year Average

Total Absences 2019 to 2023 Permanent & Temporary Full-Time					
5-Year Average	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
14.0%	12.4%	14.2%	13.9%	15.2%	14.3%

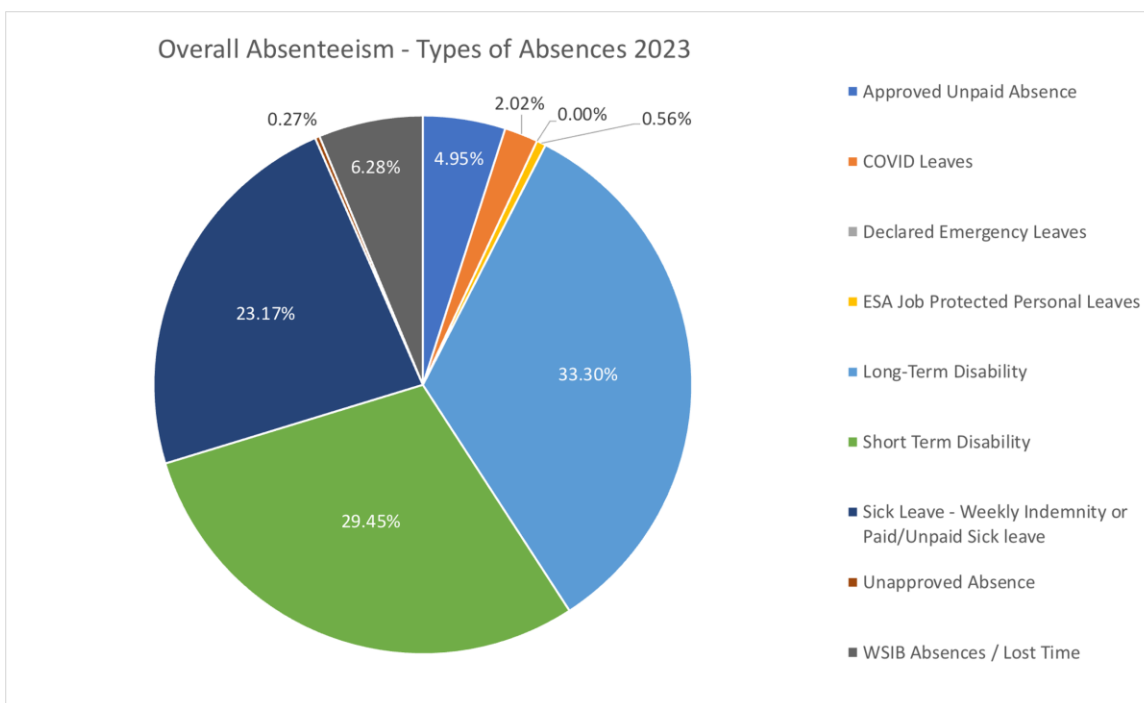
Table 5: Total Absences 2019 to 2023 by Department

Total Absences Five Year Average Permanent & Temporary Full-Time						
Department	5-Year Average					Median
	Employee Count	Total Available Working Days	Total Days Absence	Absenteeism Rate	Avg Days per Employee	
Total	1756	389,896	54,674.27	14.0%	31	5.66
Chief Administrative Office	72	15,886	1,347.78	8.5%	19	3.90
Community Development	648	143,353	26,252.08	18.4%	41	5.86
Corporate Services	287	63,217	6,194.54	9.8%	22	5.35
Community Safety	295	67,210	9,012.40	13.4%	30	3.29
Growth & Infrastructure	463	102,314	11,946.93	11.7%	26	6.66

Summary of the types of overall absences (by percentage)

Absences due to WSIB, short term disability and long term disability make up the majority of the absences (23%, 29% and 33% respectively) and are the key drivers for the average number of days per employee. Employees approved for long term disability have been absent on short term disability for six months before being approved for long term disability. WSIB related absences are subject to early and safe return to work programming and those on long term disability receive specialized rehabilitation and return to work supports.

Chart 2 – Types of Total Absences



Short Term Disability Absences

Chart 3: Short Term Disability Claims

The following chart provides the total number of employees who were absent on short term disability (more days than the 3 day waiting period). When an employee is sick greater than three days or is hospitalized, they can submit a claim for short term disability benefits (along with relevant information from their physician). The benefits carrier (Canada Life) evaluates these claims with information from the rehabilitation and claims section of the Human Resources and Organizational Development (HROD) division. Not all claims are accepted. There is an appeal mechanism should a claim be received and not accepted. For claims that are accepted, the initial information submitted determines next steps for follow up with the absent employee based on prognosis and course of treatment and information supplied by HROD.

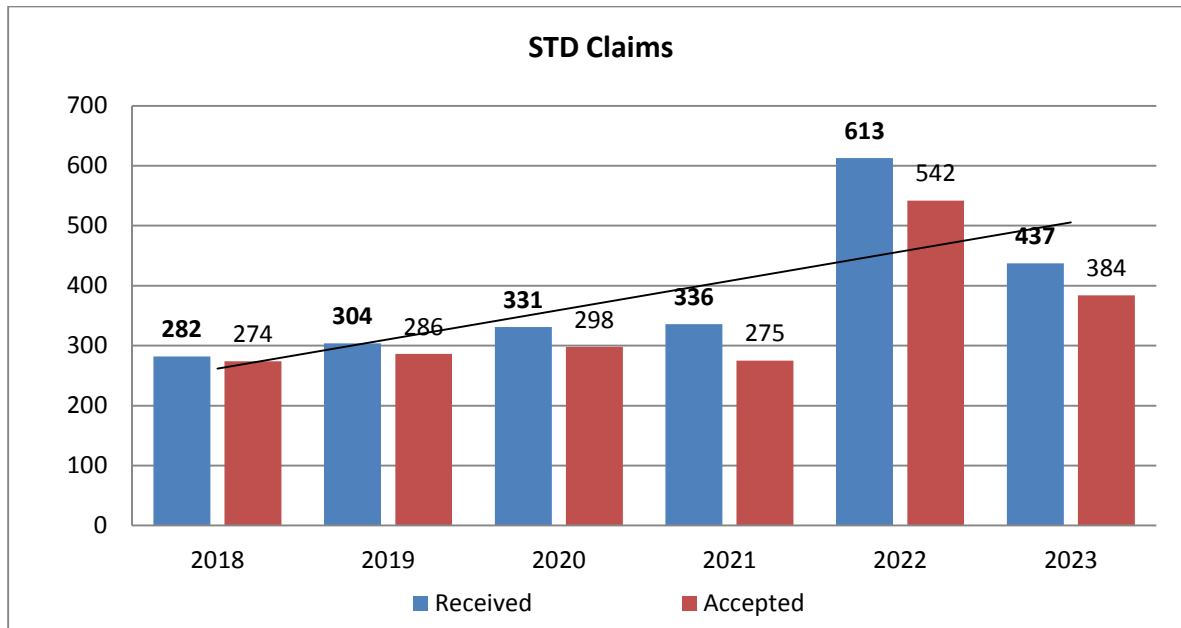


Table 6: Short Term Disability Claims by Type

The following table provides a summary of the reasons employees are absent on short term disability. On average employees on short term disability are absent from work for 64 days (over the four year period). Although respiratory system claims have reduced significantly since 2022, in 2023, there were 77 employees off work an average of 14 days for respiratory issues (67% were for COVID). Mental health continues to be the main cause for absences on short term disability.

Diagnosis	2023			2022		2021		2020	
	Total Closed Claims	Total Days Duration	Average Days Duration	Total Closed Claims	Average Days Duration	Total Closed Claims	Average Days Duration	Total Closed Claims	Average Days Duration
Mental Health Conditions	122	11672	96	118	111	99	99	96	118
Respiratory System	77	1077	14	271	13	12	33	63	17
Musculoskeletal & Connective Tissue	48	4150	86	45	75	47	83	28	89
Accidents & Injury	41	3151	77	36	60	34	58	40	54
Digestive System	23	1161	50	22	69	26	65	17	39
Symptoms & Ill-defined Conditions	29	1554	54	20	50	11	49	12	37
Nervous System & Sensory Organs	14	943	67	15	29	16	37	12	76
Circulatory System	14	1383	99	14	81	12	89	15	70
Genitourinary System	18	618	34	10	47	10	48	12	50
Pregnancy & Childbirth Complications	5	343	69	8	40	4	8	4	41
Cancer & Neoplasms	8	866	108	7	115	3	86	8	95
Skin Conditions	9	316	35	6	60	8	55	5	49
Endocrine & Immunity Disorders	7	624	89	4	142	0	0	2	25
Infectious & Parasitic Diseases	12	316	26	4	8	6	25	3	11
Other*	0	0	0	0	0	2	27	1	4
Total	427	28174	66	580	49	290	74	318	68

Duration and Return to Work

CGS has shorter durations of short term disability absences than other Canada Life customers. The average duration for STD absences is 66 days for 2023 and trending back to pre-pandemic durations. This average duration remains below the Canada Life comparison group for 26 week STD plans which is 90 days.

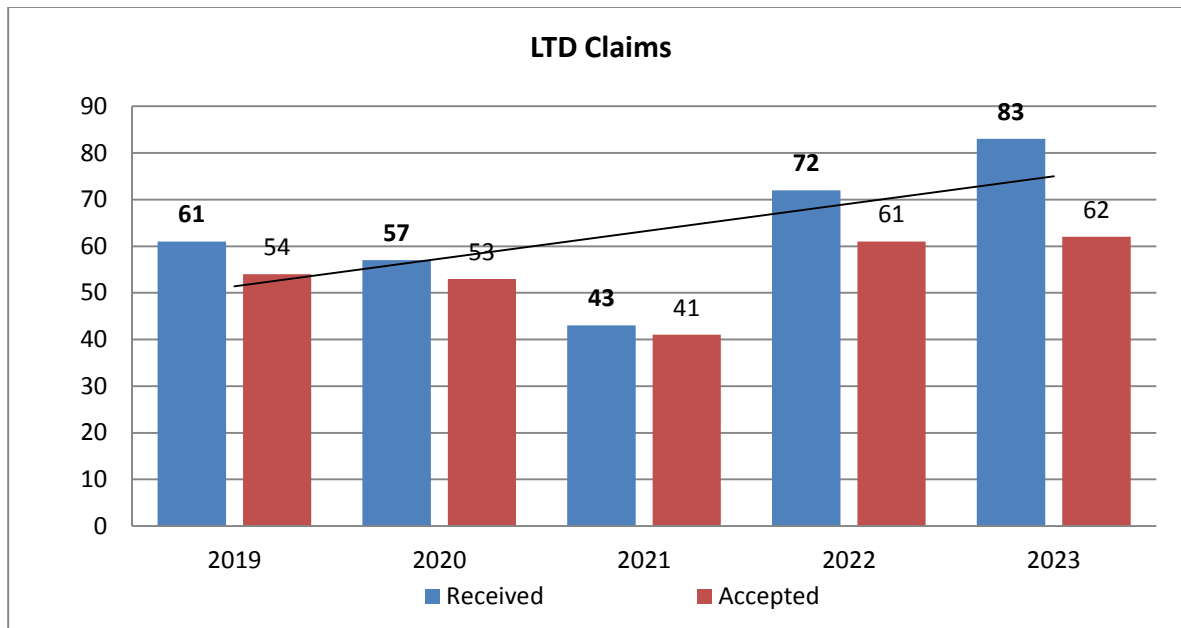
CGS is more successful returning employees back to work from short term disability absences than the Canada Life block of customers. In 2023, 82% of the employees absent on short term disability returned to work whereas only 71% of the employees in the comparison group of Canada Life employers returned to work during the 26 week period.

At CGS, the top age band for short-term disability absences are employees in their 50's (34% of claims). This is slightly higher than the Canada Life block of business and public administration (25% and 29% respectively).

Long Term Disability

Chart 4: Long Term Disability Absences

The following graph provides the total number of employees who were absent on long term disability which is for 6 months or longer:



Duration and Return to Work

The following table provides a summary of the reasons employees were absent on long term disability. On average employees on long term disability are absent from work for 620 days. CGS has a shorter average duration of long term disability absences than comparator cities and municipalities that have an average of 952 duration. CGS has a slightly higher percentage of employees who return from to work from a long term disability than the Canada Life comparator group (73% vs. 71%).

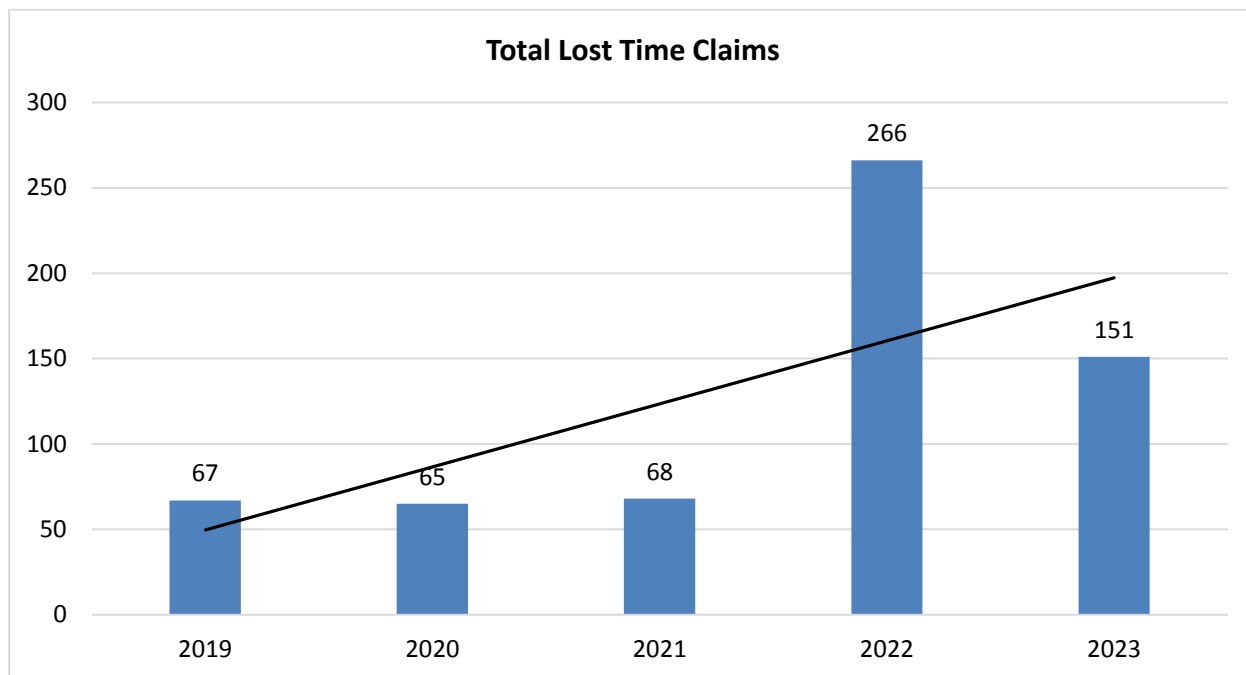
Similar to absences for employees on short term disability, mental health continues to be the main cause for absences on long term disability (45% of claims in 2023).

Table 7: Long Term Disability Absences

NEW Claims by Diagnosis	2023		2022		2021		2020	
	Claims	%	Claims	%	Claims	%	Claims	%
Mental Health Conditions	28	45%	36	59%	22	54%	29	55%
Musculoskeletal & Connective Tissue	9	15%	6	10%	6	15%	7	13%
Cancer & Neoplasms	4	6%	5	8%	0	0%	3	6%
Symptoms & Ill-defined Conditions	2	3%	4	7%	0	0%	2	4%
Accidents & Injury	8	13%	3	5%	3	7%	3	6%
Respiratory System	0	0%	2	3%	0	0%	2	4%
Circulatory System	4	6%	0	0%	4	10%	4	8%
Digestive System	2	3%	0	0%	3	7%	0	0%
Nervous System & Sensory Organs	2	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Other*	3	5%	5	8%	3	7%	3	6%
Total**	62	100%	61	100%	41	100%	53	100%

WSIB Absences – Occupational Lost Time

Chart 5: Total Lost Time Claims




Over the last five years, occupational exposure to COVID had a significant impact on the lost time injury statistics due to ongoing outbreaks being experienced at Pioneer Manor. Further to this, the WSIB has updated their [Communicable Illness Policy](#) which identifies that they will be approving illnesses where there is a declared outbreak within the workplace, without proof of diagnosis from the worker. This differs from their pre-pandemic practices where respiratory illnesses such as colds and flus were most often not approved by the WSIB due to their prevalence within the community. It is therefore expected that exposure incidents at Pioneer Manor will continue to be higher moving forward than pre-pandemic levels resulting in elevated lost time rates.

When exposure claims are removed from the lost time injury data, numbers are within the typical annual norms. The number of psychological claims is also within the typical range, with First Responders accounting for all these approved claims. Work continues to be performed within Fire and Paramedic Services to offer training and support to mitigate these occurrences.

In 2023, of the 151 employees who were absent due to occupational illness/injury, 89 employees were absent because of occupational exposure to COVID. Once COVID claims are removed, the number of employees absent or with lost time due to occupational reasons is 62.

It is important to identify that although the COVID-19 pandemic commenced in March 2020, its impact on occupational transmission of the virus was minimal until 2022. The following chart summarizes the COVID-19 lost time absences throughout the pandemic:

Table 8: COVID related Lost Time Claims

	2020	2021	2022	2023
 COVID-19 related claims	4	16	198	89

3) Attendance Management Processes

Attendance Management Programs

Employee absenteeism is managed in a fair and consistent manner in accordance with the applicable collective agreements as well as the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act*, and the *Employment Standards Act*. When a pattern or number of absences from the workplace becomes unsatisfactory, the aim is to ensure the employee is conscious of his or her attendance and to get the employee to attend work more regularly while remaining sensitive to a person's individual circumstances. Therefore, each case of absenteeism is dealt with on its own merits within a framework that promotes the consistent application of related policies and procedures.

Fire Services, Transit Services and Pioneer Manor have attendance management programs that are specific to their operating areas. Outside of those areas, attendance is monitored and managed a basis that is not specific to a particular operating area.

Attendance Management Programs have the following objectives:

- assist employees in minimizing absences from work by making every reasonable effort to provide accommodation, assistance, and rehabilitation;
- ensure that each employee understands that his/her attendance at work is valued and that his/her presence contributes to the success of his/her team and the consistent achievement of service objectives;
- approach problem attendance in a positive and concerned manner;
- provide for the effective and efficient operation by encouraging employees to regularly attend work;
- encourage the reduction of the excessive use of sick leave benefits;
- enhance the organization's commitment to providing the highest quality of service through the efficient management of its resources;
- provide the employees with attendance guidelines and procedures;
- assist employees and management in the understanding of their roles and responsibilities required to maintain regular attendance;
- promote employee health and wellness; and,
- educate employees about the costs and effects of excessive rates of absenteeism.

Attendance Management Programs (AMPs) are designed to address the measures listed above as core absenteeism. Culpable or blameworthy absenteeism problems will be dealt with under disciplinary procedures, not the AMP, and may be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination from employment.

Absences due to a work-related illness or injury or related to a disability, as defined in the *Human Rights Code*, are not subject to the provisions of the AMP. Also, statutory job protected leaves like family medical leave and emergency leave, as defined in the *Employment Standards Act*, are not subject to the provisions of these programs. For obvious reasons, leaves like bereavement leave, jury duty or union leave are also not addressed directly unless they are part of a pattern of absenteeism.

Other Attendance Management Processes

In addition to attendance management programs longer term non occupational illnesses and injuries and occupational illnesses and injuries are managed outside of attendance management programs and through effective internal claims management, early and safe return to work programs, and by Canada Life, the external benefits provider.

It is the City's responsibility to provide a safe and healthy work environment and promote wellness among all employees. Additional policies and procedures exist at CGS to support employees and relate to this corporate philosophy:

- Reporting for Work and Attending at Work (Employee Handbook)
- Modified Work Program

Work is underway to calibrate dashboards with up to date absenteeism data that would help supervisors better visualize, understand and manage absences in their service area.

4) Comparison Data

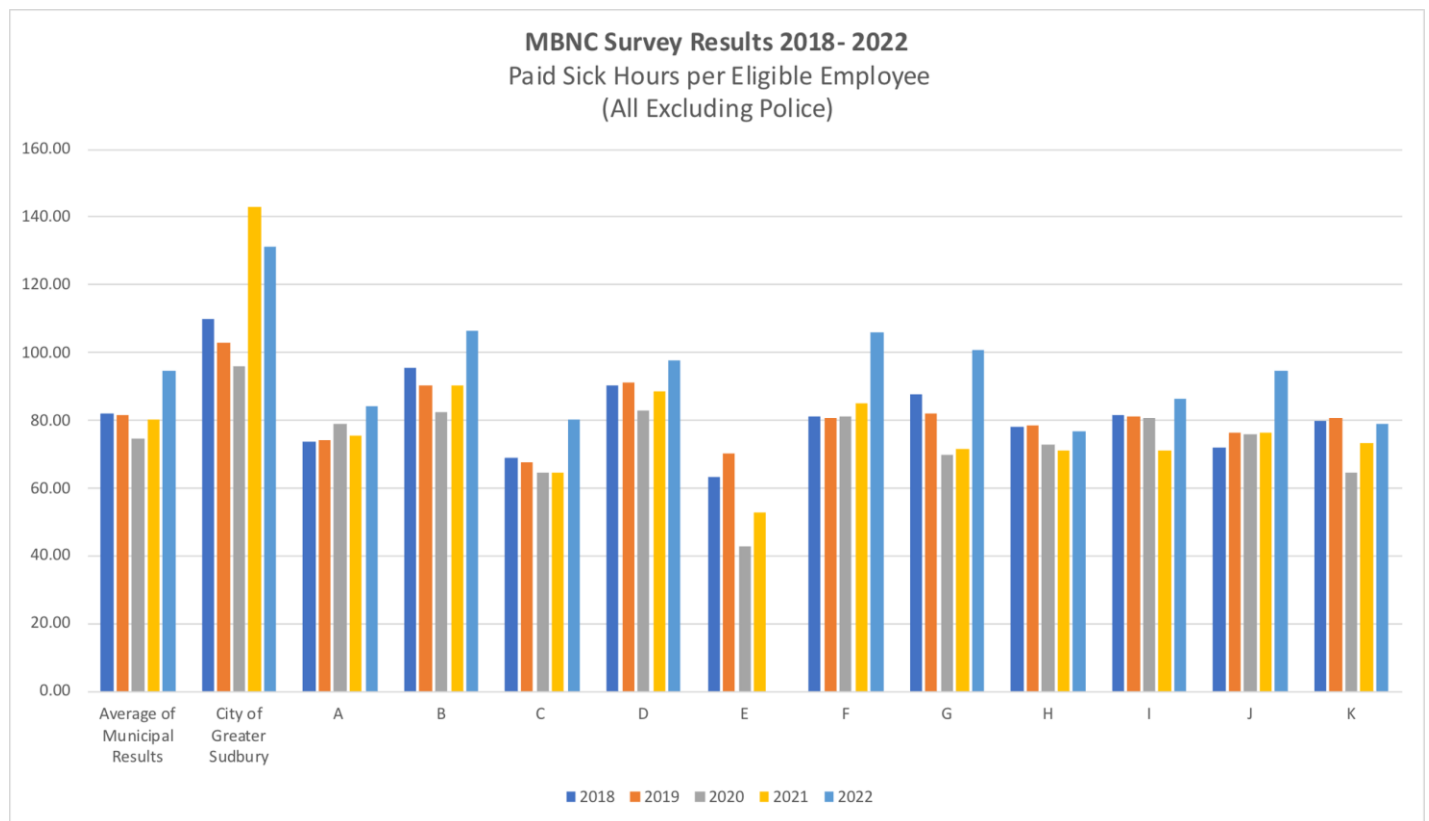
Municipal Benchmarking Network Survey Results: Paid Sick Hours

The Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada (MBNC) survey is a group of Canadian municipalities that share and report municipal performance data. MBNC collects data related to Paid Sick Hours per Employee from municipal service areas. Comparison data relating to 2023 is not yet available.

Overall CGS has higher paid sick hours per eligible employee for the years reviewed. A cautionary note on the overall comparison with other municipalities relates to jurisdictional differences, as municipalities in a two-tier local government system do not provide the same range of services. For example, several comparator municipalities do not provide transit services, fire services or have a long-term care facility. Employees in these 24/7 services typically have higher rates of absenteeism across the municipal sector. For more details, see Appendix 1. Greater Sudbury, as a single-tier municipality, provides all these services. Notwithstanding, two of our 24/7 service areas, Paramedic Services and Fire Services, have lower than average paid sick hours per eligible employee.

Chart 6 – Municipal Benchmarking Canada – Paid Sick Hours Per Eligible Employee

The following chart outlines CGS results compared to the average of overall MBNC survey participants relating to Paid Sick Hours per Employee:



Conclusion

Carefully managing absenteeism, especially in those areas more susceptible to short term illness is important to the continuity and quality of municipal services. Like our comparator municipalities, employees in our 24/7 and Transit services experience higher rates of total absences compared to their peers working day shifts or more regular shift schedules. Attendance management programs are in place in those areas. Also, rehabilitation and return-to-work specialists in Human Resources and Organizational Development, working with our benefits provider, Canada Life, work hard to balance appropriate long term interventions for employee illness and injury with proper urgency for successful return to work. Preventive interventions are in place including wellness programs, mental health supports, and initiatives to reduce workplace illness and injuries.

CGS does not have an enterprise wide attendance management program in place. A review of the current attendance programs and the development of a corporate wide employee health promotion program will be completed in 2024. Work is underway to calibrate dashboards with up-to-date absenteeism data that would help supervisors better visualize, understand and manage absences in their service area.