

Media release

New report reveals \$4.4 billion annual toll from workplace harm

A new report out today puts the total cost of lost lives, lost earnings and serious injury and health costs from work-related harm in New Zealand at \$4.4 billion.

The *State of a Thriving Nation* report pulls together a range of economic and qualitative data to better understand this country's health, safety and wellbeing performance.

Produced by Sense Partners and Shamubeel Eaqub on behalf of the Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum, the report shines a light on our current performance as well as looking at two issues facing businesses in 2023; an economic slow down and a general election – and how they play into workplace health and safety in this country.

“The report makes confronting reading. While we're making progress as a country, it is too slow,” says Forum CEO Francois Barton.

“If New Zealand could improve its performance to match that of Australia, we would reduce our costs to the country by nearly \$1 billion per year,” he says.

“Fatality rates remain stubbornly high and are similar to those the United Kingdom experienced in the 1980s.”

When pulling together data and literature on how economic cycles affect health and safety outcomes, economist Shamubeel Eaqub says the causes of harm tend to be different at different stages of the economic cycle.

“When the economy is booming, there is too much busyness, which can crowd out good systems and process, and culture. When the economy is weak, there can be tendency towards cutting safety, training, and culture/wellbeing resources,” he says.

“We surveyed Forum members for a pulse check on the economy and business plans over the past year, and the year ahead. While the Forum membership is weighted towards larger firms, the results show that economic growth is expected to be moderate, but continue to grow, defying pessimism in many current surveys of business.”

“The survey also told us that businesses expect to continue making significant investments in capital, technology and training, even more than in the last 12 months,” he says.

When considering the upcoming general election, the report calls for the new government to prioritise the importance of a level playing field through clear regulatory expectations on businesses and effective follow through and accountability.

“New Zealand's health and safety performance is a nationally significant issue, and demands action from across government and business,” says Francois Barton.

“The Health and Safety at Work Strategy 2018-28 has not yet published a workplan – first planned for delivery in 2019, nor established any form of system oversight or governance. This needs to be prioritised,” he says.

“We can, and must do better, as business leaders, government and the regulators to change this economic and social toll to our people and our country.”

ENDS