



Summary of the Proposed Alabama Workers Compensation Loss Cost and Assigned Risk Rate Filing Effective March 1, 2024

The National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI)¹ is pleased to provide this summary of the accompanying proposed workers compensation insurance loss cost² and assigned risk rate³ filing that was filed under separate cover on October 4, 2023, with the Alabama Department of Insurance for its review and approval.

The filing recommends a –11.8% loss cost decrease in the voluntary market and a –4.7% decrease in the assigned risk market, effective March 1, 2024. Due to the catastrophic nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, all reported COVID-19 claims were excluded from ratemaking in this filing.

Alabama Overview

The current proposed filing is based on experience data for Policy Years 2018 through 2021 as of year-end 2022. For this year's filing, a longer-term experience period (four policy years) was selected to increase stability in the policy year loss ratios. More favorable experience has been observed in the latest three years of this period. Alabama's ratio of lost-time claims relative to premium has recently exhibited a declining pattern. The state's average indemnity cost per case figures have been relatively consistent over time, while those for medical have been slightly more unstable from year-to-year.

The voluntary market proposed loss cost level change along with the proposed factor to convert from voluntary loss costs to assigned risk rates results in the overall proposed average assigned risk rate level change. Much of the increase in the factor to convert is driven by an increase to the assigned risk differential.


Countrywide Overview

The performance of the workers compensation system remains healthy. Lost-time claims relative to premium have returned to their 20-year trend trajectory, declining 4% in the past year. Employment and wage growth marked a return to pre-pandemic levels. Recent wage increases are outpacing average claim costs along with continued nationwide declines in total claims. Payroll, as the exposure base, is inflation-sensitive, so as wages rise, premiums automatically increase along with the cost of associated workers compensation benefits. Consequently, wages, premiums, and indemnity benefits typically stay in balance.

¹ NCCI is a licensed rating organization authorized to make recommended loss cost/assigned risk rate filings on behalf of workers compensation insurance companies in Alabama. NCCI's filings are objectively prepared, utilizing widely accepted actuarial ratemaking methodologies.

² "Loss cost" refers to the portion of workers compensation rates that are filed by the rating organization and are allocated to pay losses but not carrier expenses. Some states include certain carrier expenses and assessments in the definition of "advisory loss costs." Carriers can use the approved loss costs as the basis for their rates, typically adjusting them for expenses with a loss cost multiplier.

³ The assigned risk rate is filed for use on policies written through the Assigned Risk Plan, a program established by state insurance regulatory authorities that sets the rules and procedures for providing insurance coverage to parties that are unable to obtain coverage in the voluntary market. For the assigned risk market, NCCI files a full rate that includes the Servicing Carriers' expenses.



On a countrywide basis, there was a notable rise in claim costs for 2022, with medical claim costs increasing about 5% and indemnity claim costs rising about 6% year over year. Over the pandemic period of 2019–2022, the average medical lost-time claim cost increased by about 3% and the average indemnity for lost-time claim costs increased by about 8%, reflecting average annual increases of 1% and just over 2%, respectively.

Medical inflation is predicted to increase at a rate of about 3% per year compared with the long-term average of around 1.5%. Medical inflation continues to remain below the inflation rate of the Consumer Price Index.

COVID-19

Earlier this year, NCCI filed Item E-1410, which proposed changes to the treatment of COVID-19 claims in experience rating. This filing was approved in Alabama. NCCI will be treating the pandemic and its resulting data, between accident dates of December 1, 2019, and June 30, 2023, as a catastrophic event. The claims that occurred during this period are not expected to be a reliable predictor of future years; therefore, all reported COVID-19 claims were excluded from ratemaking in this filing. Beginning July 1, 2023, new COVID-19 claims with accident dates after July 1 will be included in experience rating and will be reflected in ratemaking in subsequent years; however, COVID-19 claims before that date will continue to be excluded from experience rating and ratemaking.

Conclusion

The workers compensation system continues to be healthy. Countrywide lost-time claims, relative to premium, declined 4% in the past year. Private carrier plus state fund net written premium increased about 10% to \$47.5 billion in 2022, just above the 2019 level. Private carriers posted a calendar year combined ratio of 84% (below 100% indicates underwriting profitability). This was the sixth consecutive year that the private workers compensation insurance market posted a combined ratio below 90% and the ninth consecutive year of underwriting profitability. Industry reserves are robust.