

Safe Work Australia

Older workers' safety in the workplace

Isabella Caddy

Senior Analyst | Evidence and Strategic Policy

2nd CEPAR international conference





Safe Work Australia's role and functions

- SWA leads the development of national policy and strategies to improve work health and safety (WHS) and workers' compensation across Australia.
- Safe Work Australia is a tripartite body representing the interests of the Commonwealth, states and territories, as well as those of workers and employers.
- SWA's functions include developing and evaluating national policy, strategies and the model WHS legislative framework, undertaking research, and collecting and analysing data.

Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023-2033

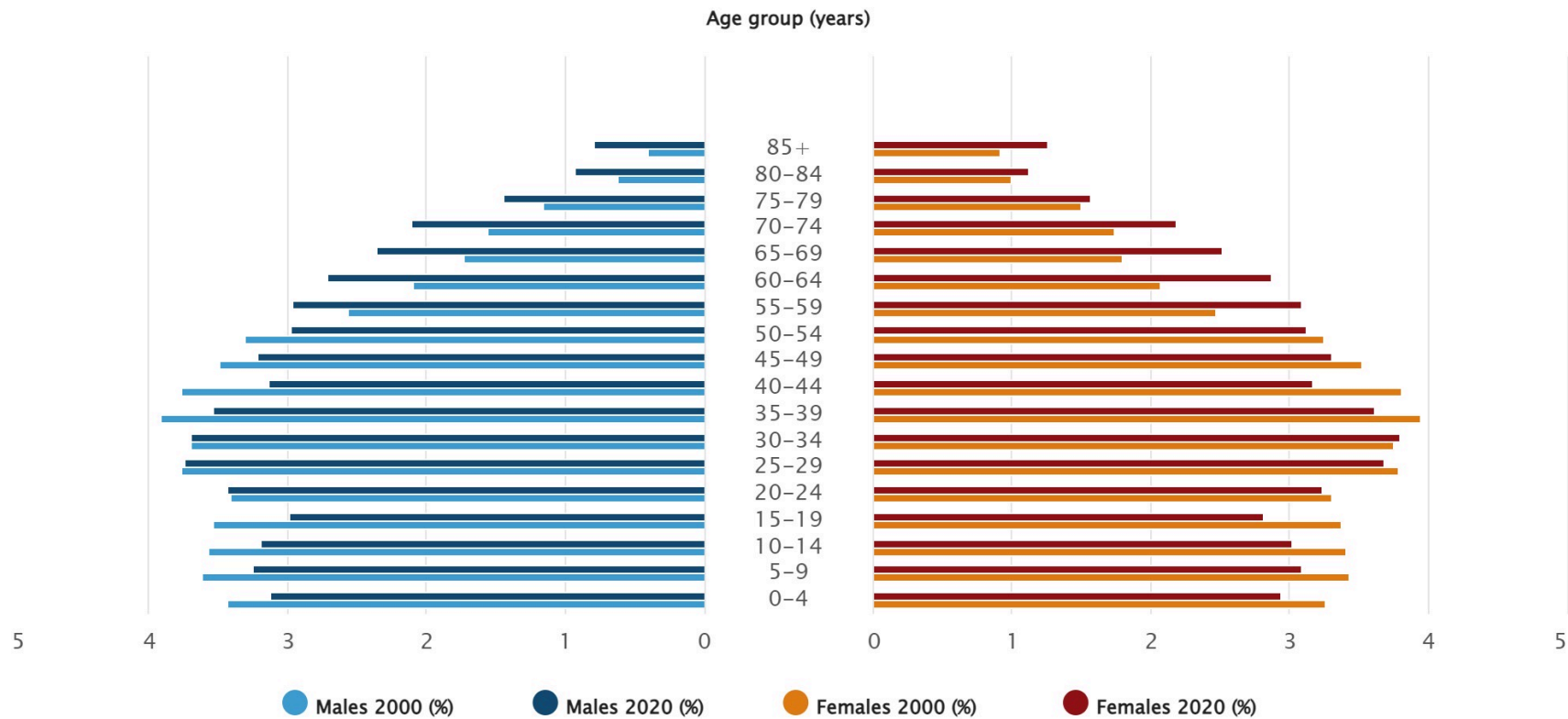


- Vision: Safe and healthy work for all
- Goal: reduced worker fatalities, injuries and illnesses



Introduction

Population distribution, by sex and age groups – 2000 and 2020



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Twenty years of population change 17/12/2020

Introduction

Workers > 55 are more likely to work in...

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Health care and social assistance
- Transport, postal and warehousing

Than their younger counterparts.

Workers < 55 are more likely to work in...

- Accommodation and food services
- Retail trade
- Construction

Than their older counterparts.

Methodology

Four datasets were used to develop and analyse a set of descriptive statistics

Methodology

Four datasets were used to develop and analyse a set of descriptive statistics

National dataset for compensation-based statistics (NDS)	Traumatic injury fatalities (TIF)	National Return to Work Survey (NRTW)	Work-related injuries Survey (WRIS)
Workers' compensation claims from each state, territory and the commonwealth.	All work-related traumatic injury fatalities in Australia.	Survey of workers who have been compensated for one or more days off work in the previous 2 years.	Australian Bureau of Statistics survey that collects data about anyone who has experienced a work-related injury or disease in the past 12 months.



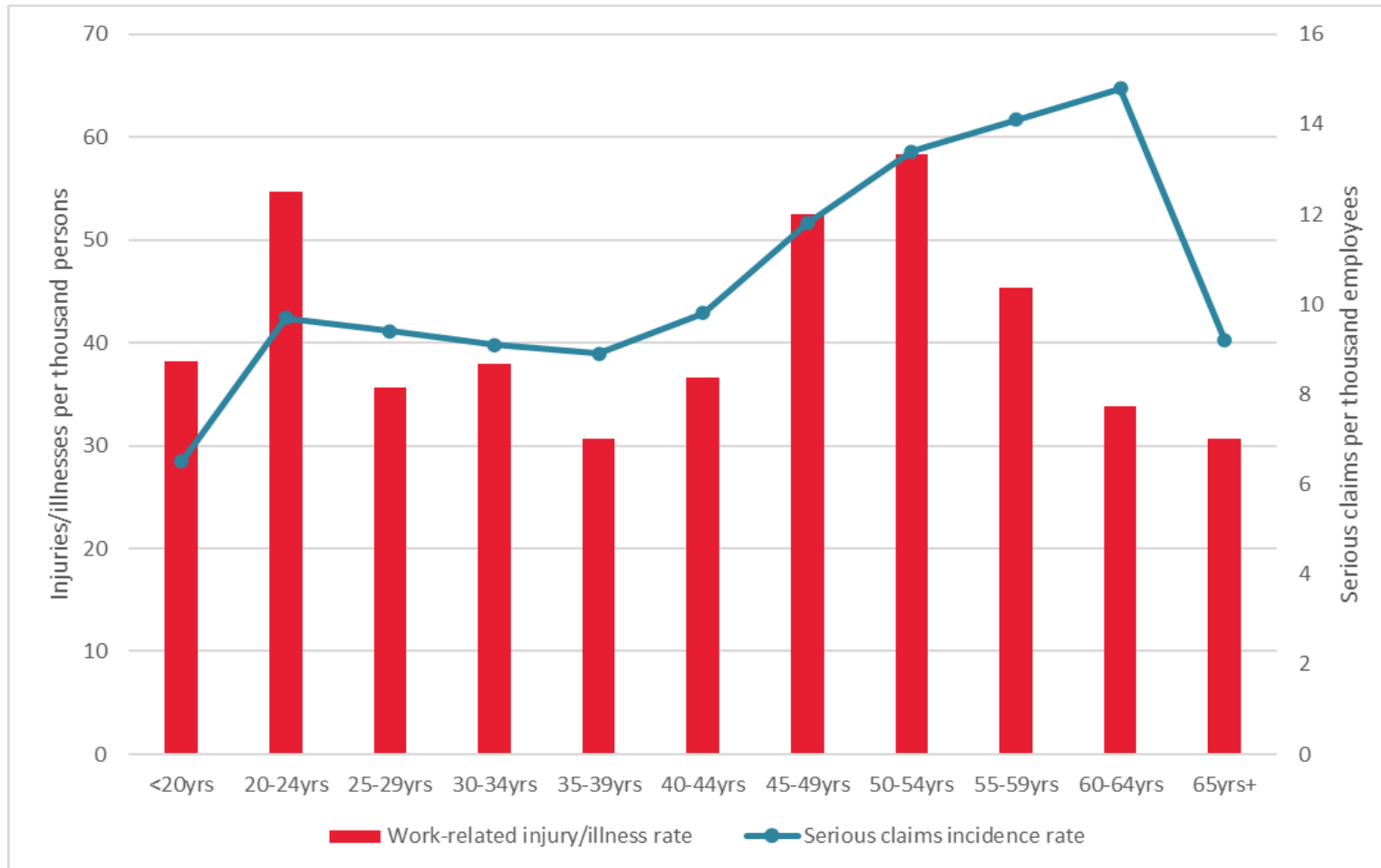
Methodology

Rates were used to compare the experience of work-related injury and disease across age groups:

- Frequency rate: serious claims per million hours worked
- Incidence rate: serious claims per thousand employees
- Work-related injury/illness rate: injuries/illnesses per thousand persons who worked in the last 12 months
- Fatality rate: fatalities per hundred thousand workers

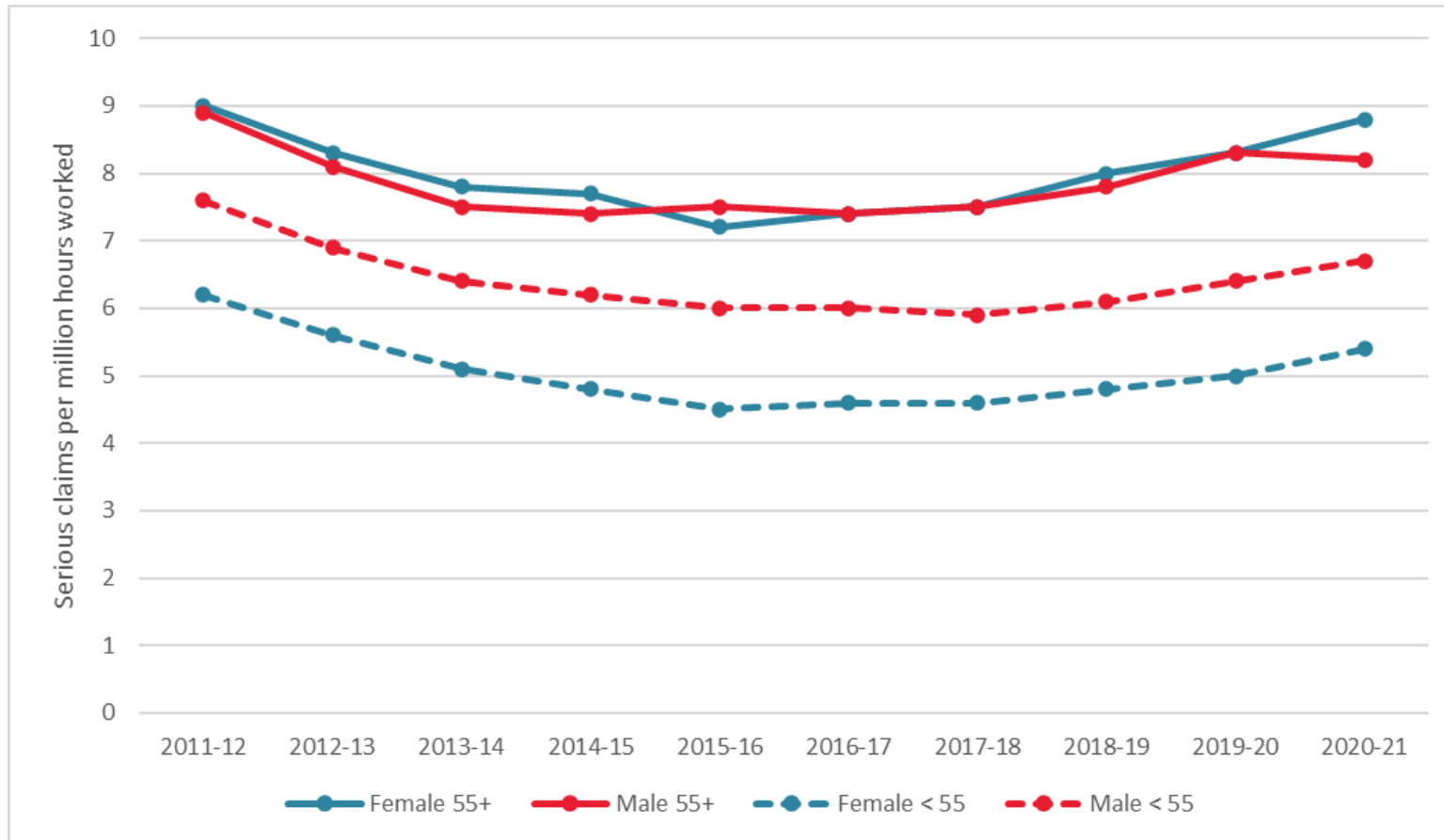
Work-related injuries and illnesses by age

Figure 1: Comparison of work-related injury and illness rate and serious claims incidence rate by age group, 2020-21p



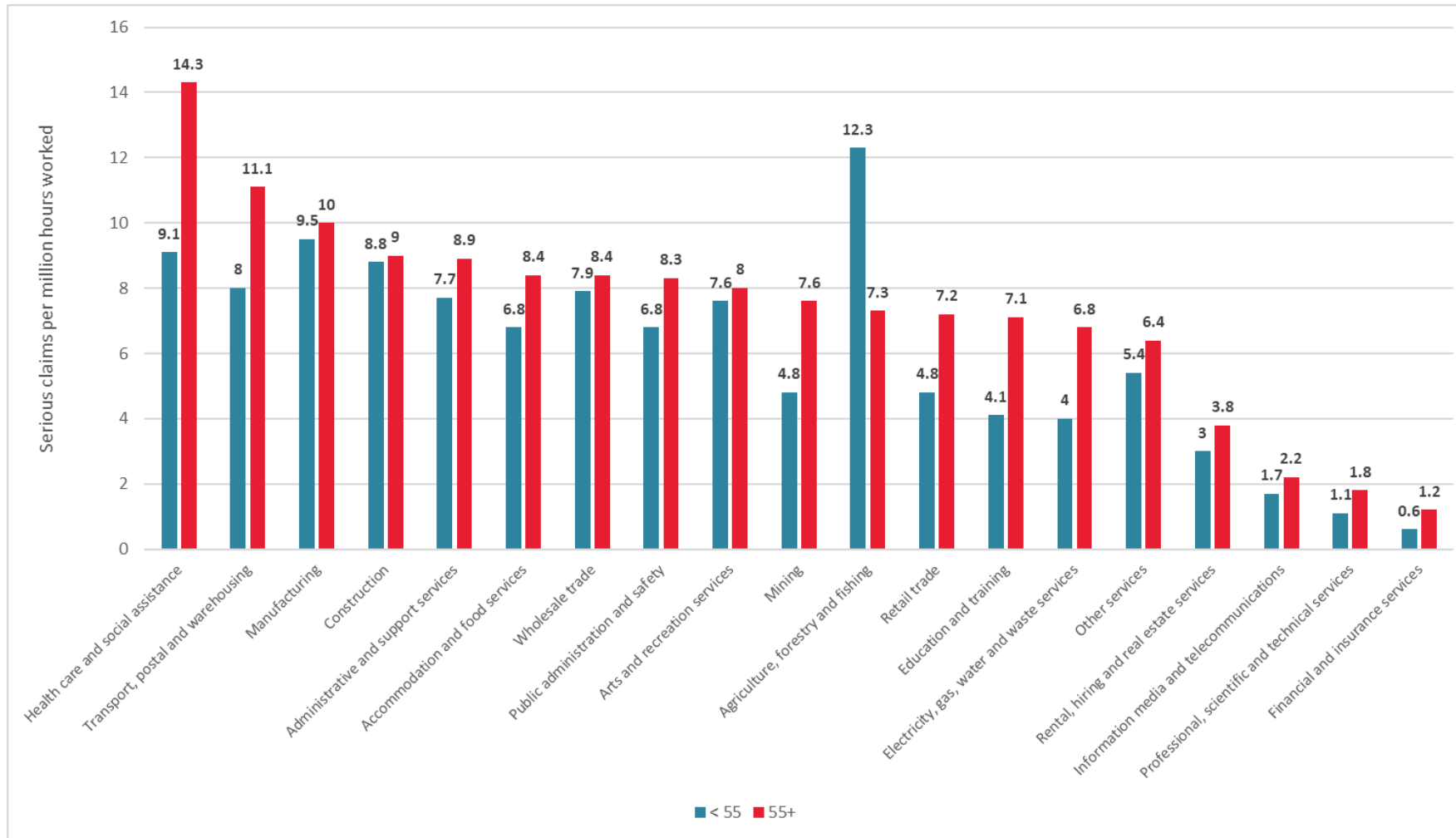
Work-related injuries and illnesses by age and sex

Figure 2: Work-related by sex and age group, 2020-21p



In which industries and occupations are older workers more likely to be injured?

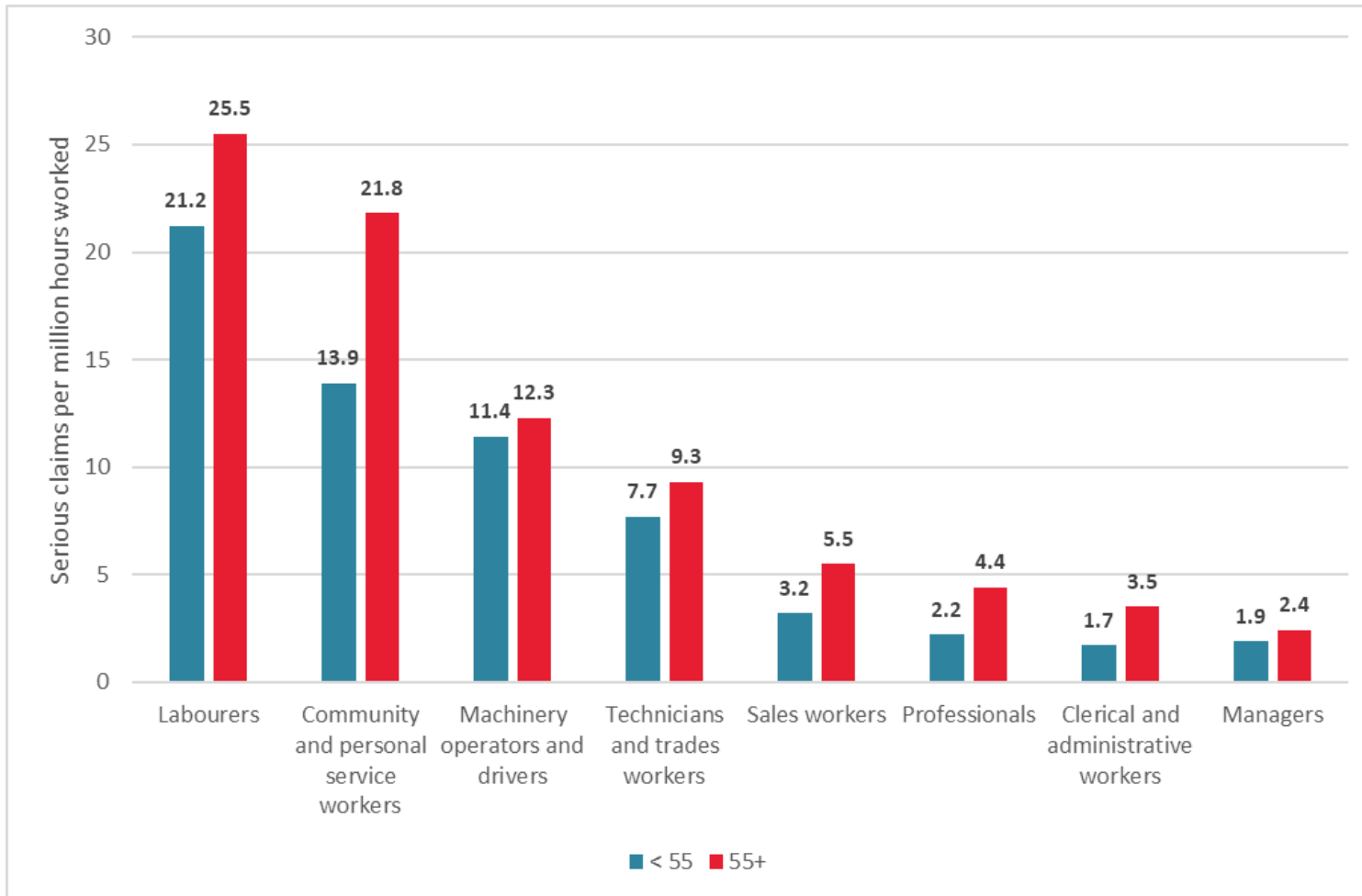
Figure 3: Frequency rate of serious workers' compensation claims by industry of employer, 2020-21p.



re and social
e
t, postal and
sing
uring

In which industries and occupations are older workers more likely to be injured?

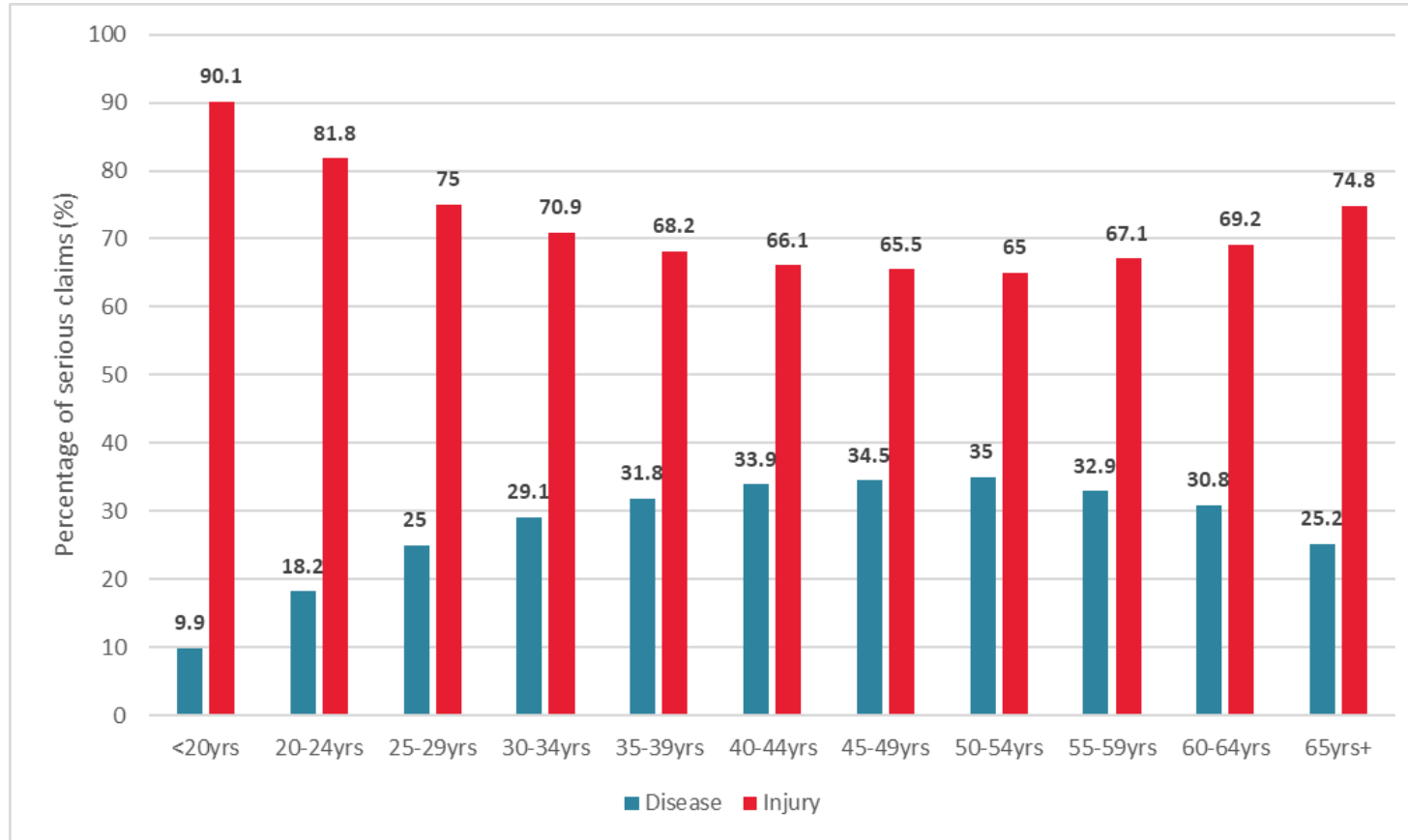
Figure 4: Frequency rate of serious workers' compensation claims by occupation, 2020-21p.



Labourers
 Community and personal service workers
 Machinery operators and drivers

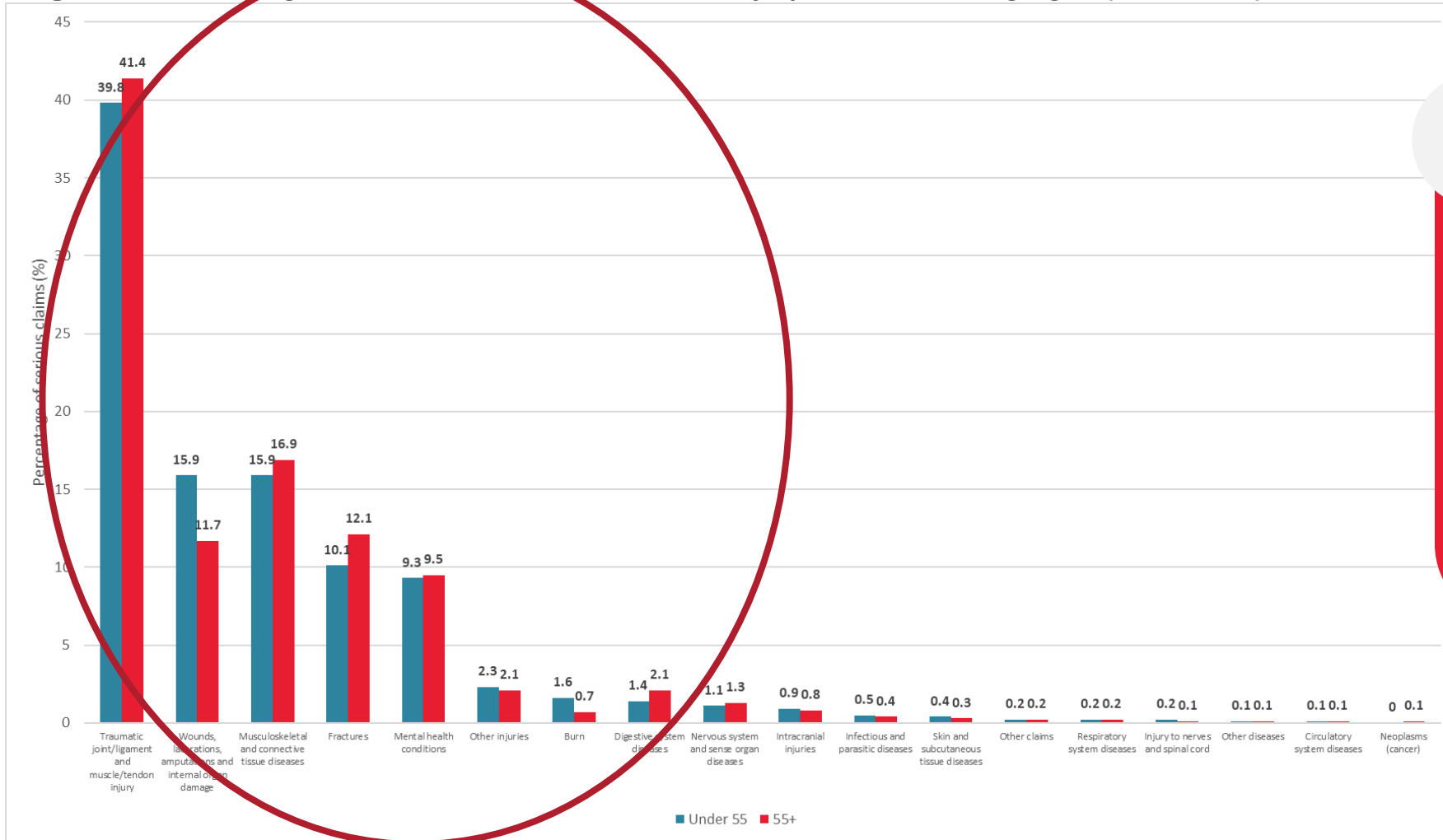
What injuries or diseases do older workers experience?

Figure 5: Percentage of serious workers' compensation claims by injury or disease, 2020-21p.



What injuries or diseases do older workers experience?

Figure 6: Percentage of serious claims by nature of injury/disease and age group, 2020-21p.

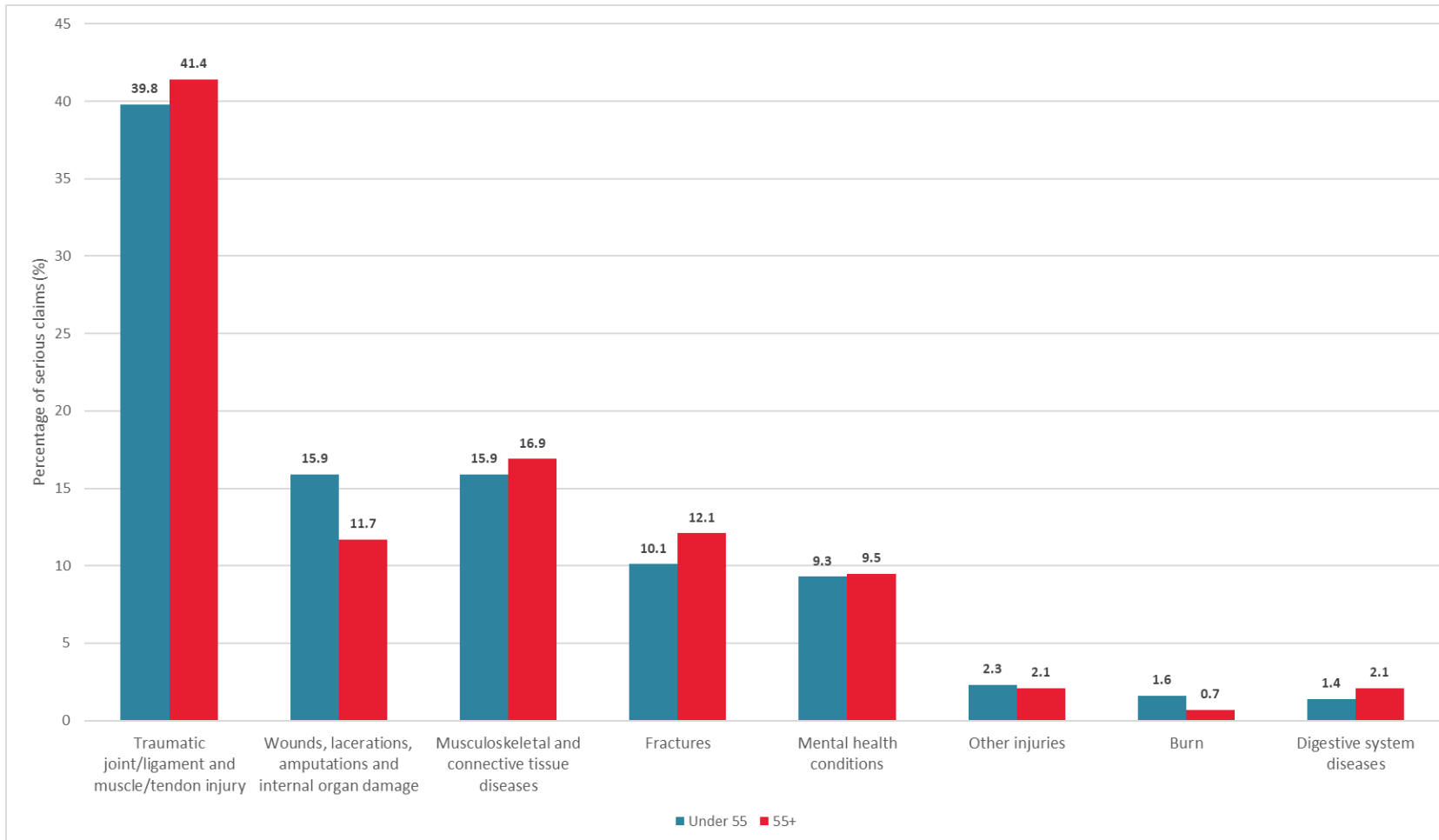


?

Nature of injury/disease is intended to identify the type of hurt or harm that occurred to the worker.

What injuries or diseases do older workers experience?

Figure 6: Percentage of serious claims by nature of injury/disease and age group, 2020-21p.

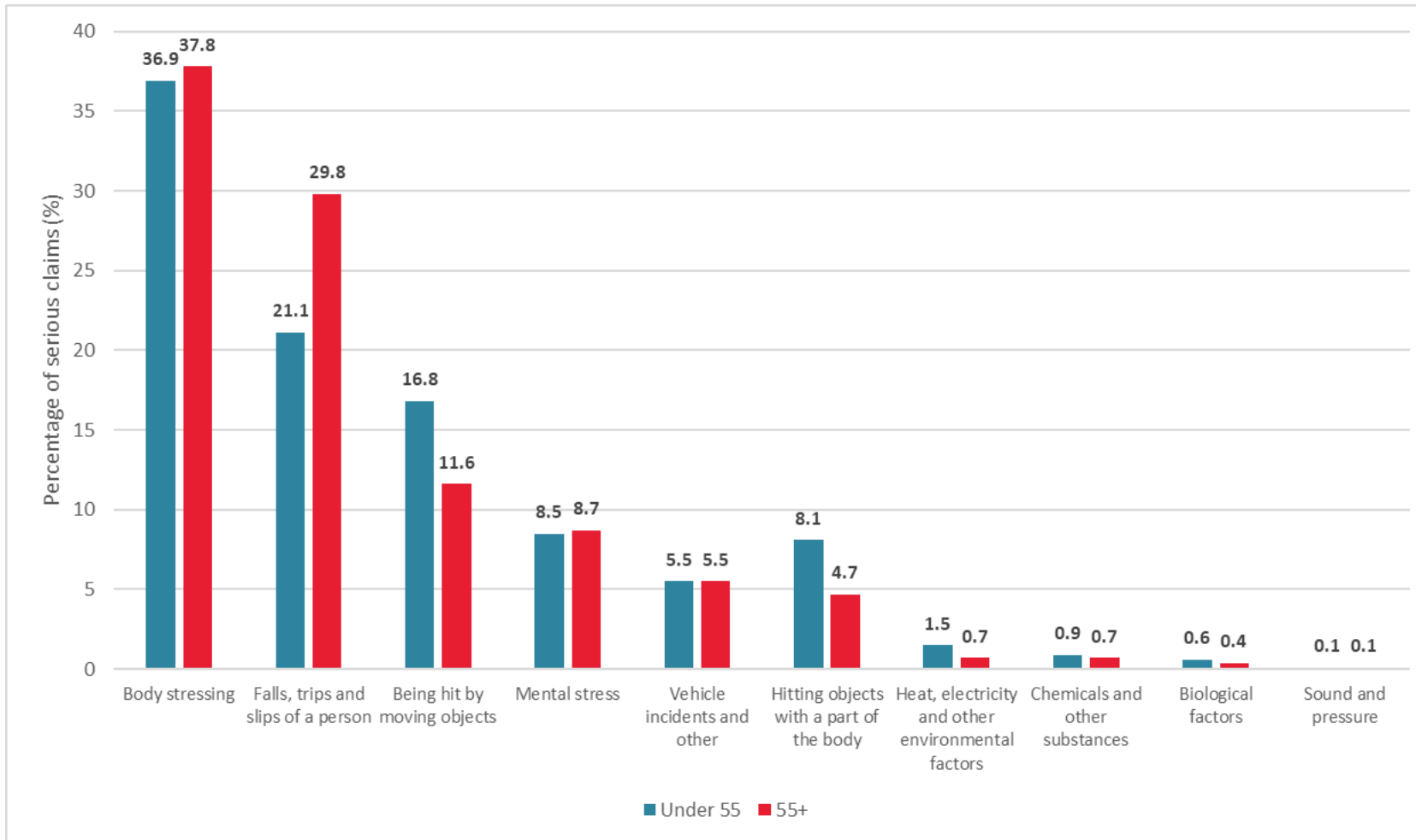


?

Nature of injury/disease is intended to identify the type of hurt or harm that occurred to the worker.

How are older workers getting injured?

Figure 7: Percentage of serious claims by mechanism of incident and age group, 2020-21p.

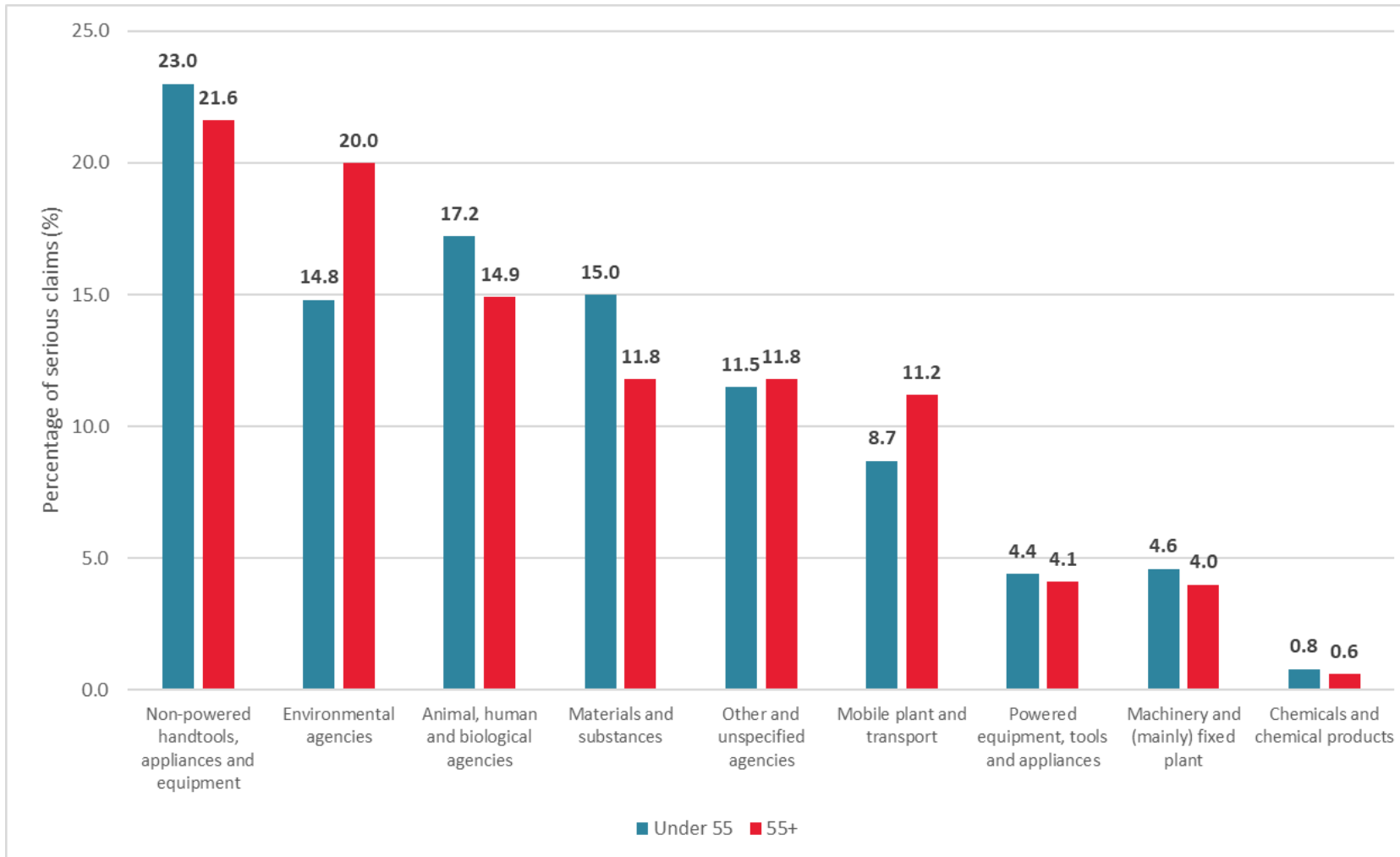





Mechanism of incident classification is intended to identify the overall action, exposure or event that best describes the circumstances that resulted in the most serious injury or disease.

How are older workers getting injured?

Figure 8: Percentage of serious claims by breakdown agency and age group, 2020-21p.

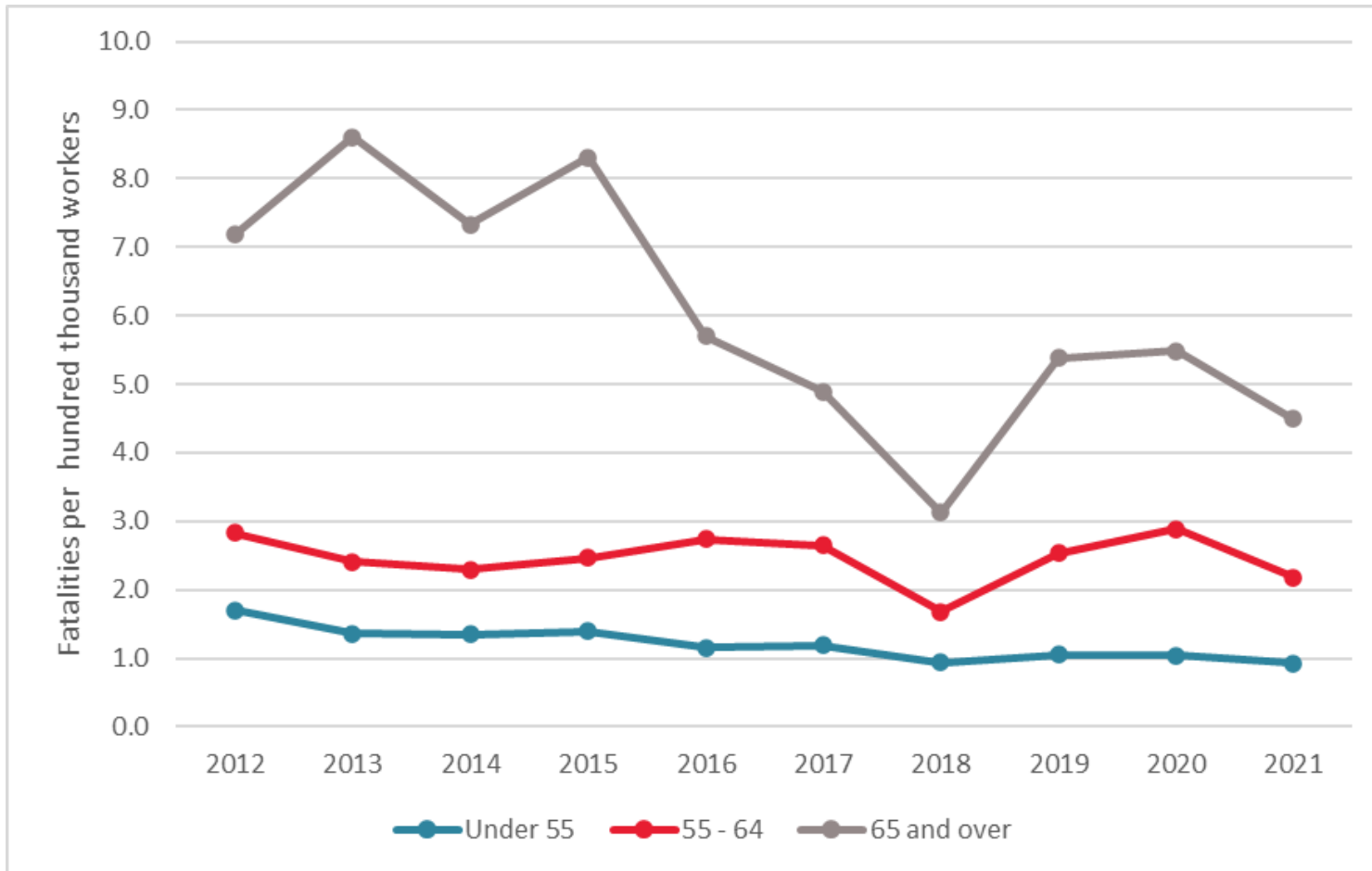




Breakdown agency identifies the object, substance or circumstance that was principally involved in, or most closely associated with, the point at which things started to go wrong.

How serious are these injuries?

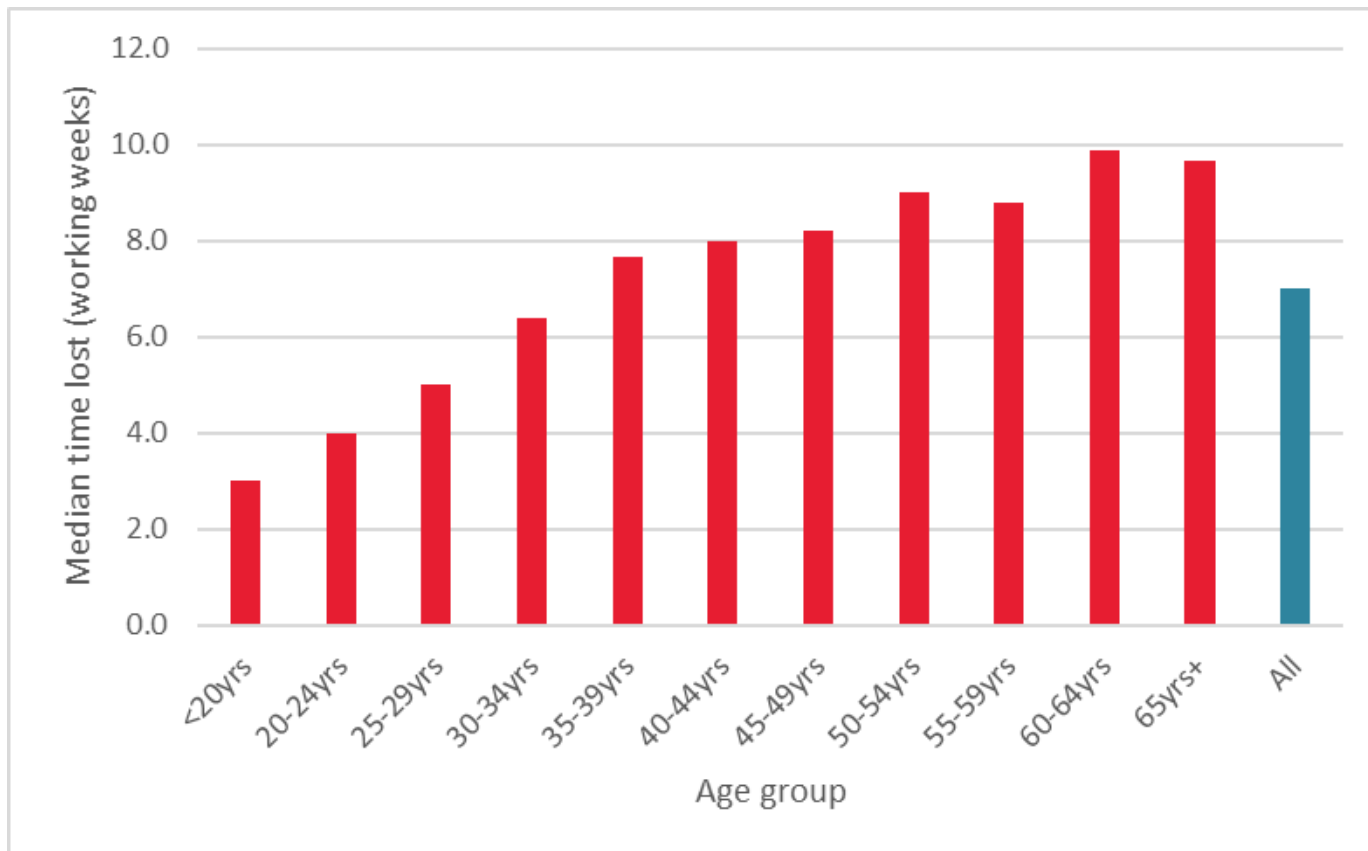
Figure 9: Fatality rate by calendar year, 2012-2021.





How serious are these injuries?

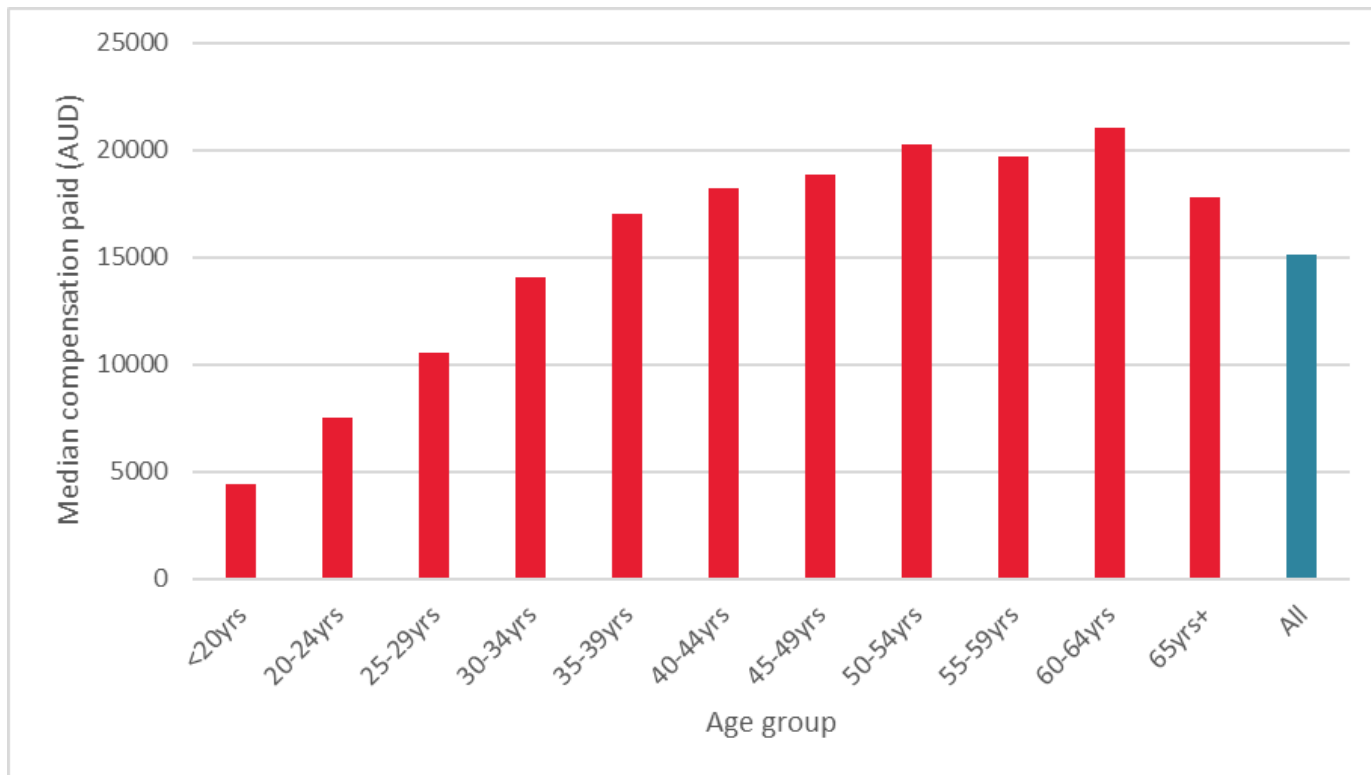
Figure 10: Median time lost by age group, 2019-20.





How serious are these injuries?

Figure 11: Median compensation paid by age group, 2019-20.



Return to work outcomes

- **91.6%** of all workers return to work after at some point after a work-related injury.
 - This drops to **87.3%** for workers aged 55-64
 - and **85.1%** for workers aged over 65.

Injury Type	Under 55	55+
Fractures	93.09%	84.4%
Musculoskeletal disorders	93.01%	87.2%
Other trauma	97.30%	91.7%
Mental illness	77.76%	83.2%
Other diseases	89.10%	79.1%

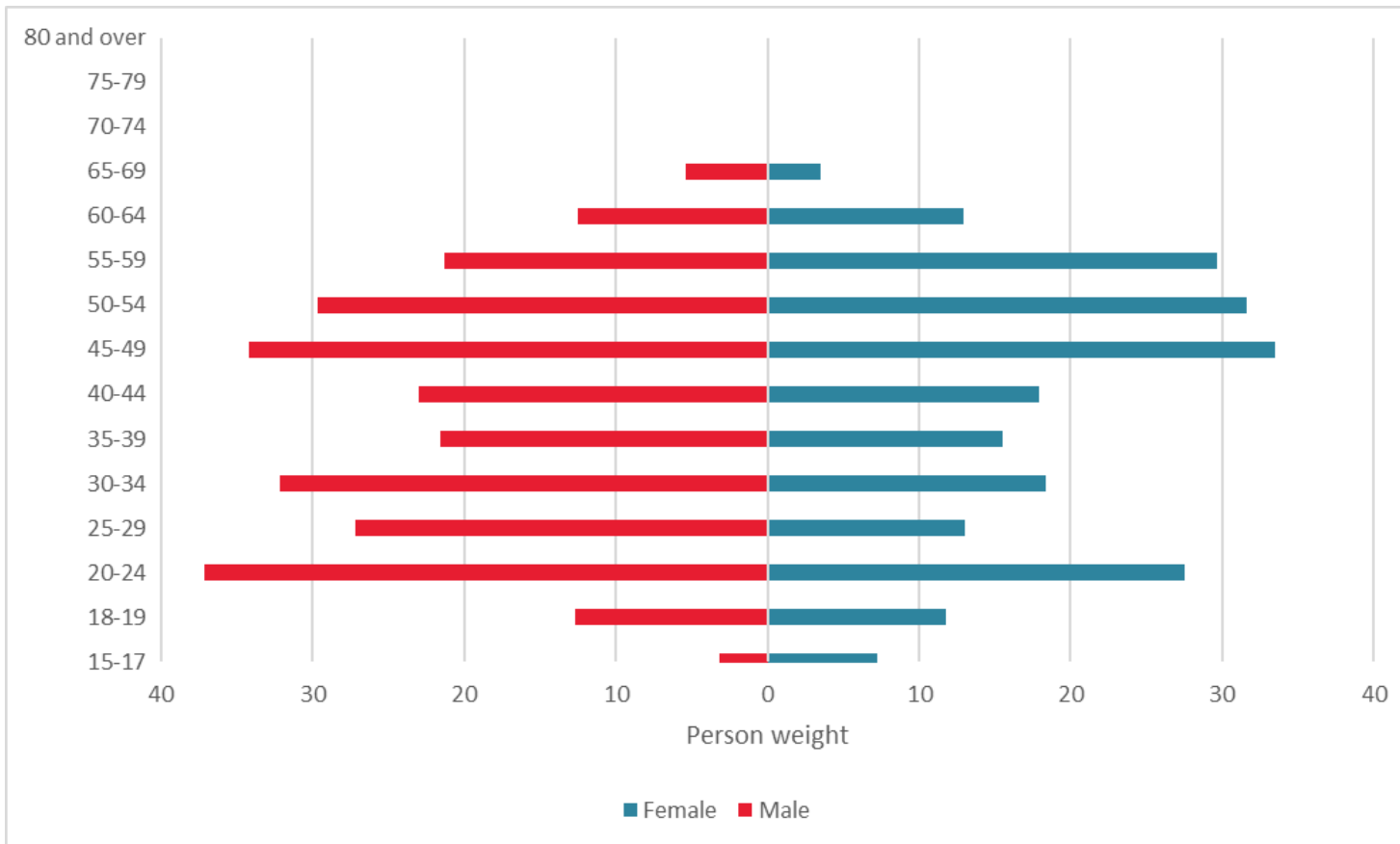


Understanding the difference between datasets

- Inconsistency between NDS and WRIS data
 - Age-related difference in eligibility for or willingness to lodge a workers' compensation claim
 - Increased injury severity in older workers

Did you guess the correct distribution?

Figure 12: Persons who have experienced a work-related injury or disease in current main job/current other job by age and sex, 2017-18.





Conclusion

- The rate of work-related injury or illness for older workers is **less than or equivalent to younger age groups**.
- However, when injuries occur for older workers, they:
 - Were more likely to be fatally injured
 - Took more time off work
 - Had higher compensation payments
 - Were less likely to return to work following an injury
- Future research should investigate whether older workers are more likely to lodge a workers' compensation claim, and how attitudes towards workers' compensation claims change over time. It would also be useful to investigate how injuries and illnesses of concern for older workers may be better prevented by targeting specific industries, or common causes of injury such as Falls, trips and slips.

Questions?



**For further
information email:**
Isabella.Caddy@swa.gov.au



www.swa.gov.au