

“What a Sick Lot!”

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Public servants are taking more than twice as much sick leave as the average Aussie worker, costing the nation billions in lost productivity.

Figures reveal some departmental staff spend as little as nine months on the job, taking an average of five weeks' unplanned leave a year.

"It's scandalous and absolutely chronic," says Paul Dundon, of Direct Health Solutions, which organises absence management services for government agencies and the private sector.

He said research showed absentee rates in the private sector had dropped by just over a day to 8.7, while the public sector continued to climb.

The Australian Public Service Commission's State of the Service report showed that 30 per cent of federal agencies had an average absentee rate above 12 days in 2009-10, while the average Australian took only 9.8 days in that period.

Named as some of the worst offenders were the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), Medicare, Department of Health and Ageing, Centrelink, Customs and Border Protection and the **Department of Human Services**.

Two agencies recorded an absentee rate of more than 20 days, including one where employees took an average of 23.5 days' leave.

According to Mr Dundon, absenteeism costs the economy \$30 billion a year.

The report says about 75 per cent of unplanned leave is sick leave, followed by carers leave (13 per cent), compensation leave (6 per cent) and miscellaneous other leave (4 per cent).

Overall, public servants took an average of 10.5 days unplanned leave, up from 10.2 the year before.

The authors of the report suggested that high levels of workplace absence could be "an indicator of disengagement". They recommended agencies to monitor absence to identify potential issues.