

RTW: BENEFITS OF A RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAM

What is a Return-to-Work Program?

A Return-to-Work (RTW) program is a planned process to manage the impact of disability in a workplace. The documented processes are for the purpose of identifying and providing alternate or modified work (temporary or permanent) for injured workers. Common names for a RTW program include Disability Management program, Modified Work program, Alternate Duties program or Claims Management program.

A RTW program is operated and managed by a workplace. Successful RTW programs take a collaborative approach to decision making, with worker and/or union participation (if applicable) in the development, administration and maintenance of the program as well as individual RTW plans.

Implementing an effective Safety program is the proactive approach to mitigating the human and financial impact of injury – i.e. the easiest injury to manage is the one that never occurred.

Implementing an effective RTW program is a “proactive way of being reactive” – i.e. the best way to mitigate both the human and financial impact of injury once it has occurred.

Why is Return-to-Work the right thing to do?

RTW is about supporting the worker when he/she is at his/her most vulnerable – when he/she has become injured and the injury is interfering with his/her ability to do his/her job. It is about protecting his/her employability. It is recognizing that even though a worker may not be able to do his/her original job, that he/she can still make valuable contributions to the workplace.

RTW aims to prevent unnecessary disability. The longer a worker is away from work the greater the potential for not returning to the workplace at all.

The occurrence of a disability can have a profound impact on every aspect of workers' lives including their connection with the workplace, their ability to make a living, their role in the family and their overall health and well-being. Here are the sobering statistics:

After a six-month absence, there is only a 50% chance the worker will return to the job.

After one year, that chance declines to 20% and after two years, to 10%.

Lifestyle changes resulting from a disability can be extremely challenging, leading to secondary disabilities such as depression. Minimizing the number of life changes by offering accommodations that allow workers to quickly and safely return to work leads to better health outcomes than convalescing entirely at home.

More on the Impact of Disability on the Worker, National Institute of Disability Management and Research, Go to www.nidmar.ca Career Guide tab – Disability Management in Context – More on the Impact of Disability on the Worker

What are the Benefits of a Return-to-Work Program?

Worker Benefits

- Promotes physical health, well being and recovery of injured workers
- Promotes psychological well being of injured workers
- Assists in preventing disability
- Preserves self-identity and self esteem
- Maintains social bond with coworkers
- Maintains occupational bond with employer
- Protects worker benefits
- Protects employability
- Reduces impact of disability on families

Other Benefits

In addition to the role that RTW plays in preventing disabilities other reasons to develop a program include the potential for workplaces to:

- Promote a fair and consistent treatment of all workers
- Prevent loss of valuable workers (skill, knowledge & experience)
- Impact WCB insurance premiums
 - Decrease likelihood of company being surcharged
 - Increase likelihood of company receiving a discount
 - Increase likelihood of reduction in industry rate code/s premium over time
- Maintain chains of communication between all parties involved in the RTW process
- Minimize impact of work related injuries on productivity

In addition, a RTW program can assist employers in meeting “Duty to Accommodate” obligations under Human Rights and Saskatchewan Labour Standards legislation. It can:

- Provide a planned process to follow
- Provide the tools necessary to document accommodation practices