

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 identify and provide 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.

The workplace operates and manages the RTW. Successful RTW Programs take a collaborative approach to decision making. The worker and union (if applicable) participate in developing, administering and maintaining the program and individual RTW plans.

Implementing an effective safety program is the proactive approach to mitigating the human and financial impact of injury. The easiest injury to manage is the one that never occurred.

Implementing an effective RTW Program is a proactive way of being reactive. It is 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 supports the worker at a most vulnerable time: when he or she has become injured and unable to work at all or at their former ability. It is about protecting employability. It recognizes that even though a worker may not be able to do the original job, that they 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 National Institute of Disability Management and Research says:

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%...

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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.¹

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 (i.e., skill, knowledge and experience)
- Impact WCB insurance premiums
 - Decreases the likelihood of a company being surcharged
 - Increases the likelihood of a company receiving a discount
 - Increases the likelihood of a reduction in the industry rate code's premium over time
- Maintains chain of communication between all parties involved in the RTW process
- Minimizes impact of work-related injuries on productivity

In addition, a RTW Program can assist employers in meeting "Duty to Accommodate" obligations under Human Rights legislation and the Saskatchewan Employment Act. It can:

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

1. 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