



A Message to all Approved Rehabilitation Providers

On 30 June this year, Comcare finalised the renewal of approval of rehabilitation providers to provide services under the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRC Act) from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2010. Providers approved by Comcare are also able to provide services to Seacare (Seafarers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1994) and Military Defence (Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004).

Comcare objectives in undertaking this exercise, which is required by the SRC Act, was to assist in improving the return to work outcomes under the SRC Act and assure quality and consistency in the delivery of rehabilitation services across the jurisdiction. To assist in achieving these objectives, Comcare sought to carry out the renewal process by involving and communicating, to the greatest possible extent, with the renewal applicants themselves as well as other stakeholders.

This communiqué seeks to summarise the outcomes of the renewal exercise and to list key messages for ARPs as well as taking the opportunity of updating ARPs on current issues in the jurisdiction.

Comcare will also be providing the findings to other stakeholders and will work to improve the operation of rehabilitation in the jurisdiction.

Summary of outcomes

Comcare renewed the approval of 133 rehabilitation providers to operate from 1 July 2007 until 30 June 2010. In addition to this and separate to the renewal process, Comcare has approved an additional 25 providers since 1 January 2007, bringing the total number of approved rehabilitation providers operating within this jurisdiction to nearly 160.

A number of rehabilitation providers were not re-approved for the period from 1 July 2007 for the following reasons:

- they had not met the mandatory criteria and operational standards in force for the last approval period, and/or
- they had not undertaken a satisfactory number of cases in the jurisdiction since they were last approved, and/or
- they failed to submit a satisfactory renewal application within the required timeframe and to a satisfactory standard.

A number of providers were granted conditional approval on the provision that they demonstrate an improvement in their performance against the outcome and service standards by a specified time, that they undertake monitoring of their performance and self-audit cases in the review period, and report the results to Comcare to ensure ongoing approval.

Key Messages for Providers

The following key messages for Approved Rehabilitation Providers (ARP) seek to ensure rehabilitation objectives continue to be met:

General

- ARPs need to have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders within this jurisdiction to operate effectively¹, particularly that the role of the ARP is as a rehabilitation service deliverer and a return to work advocate, with the responsibility for rehabilitation sitting with the rehabilitation authority (employer) and not the ARP.
- Rehabilitation authorities (employers) will be encouraged to develop service level agreements with ARPs specifying the quality, timeliness and nature of occupational rehabilitation services provided in line with Comcare's operational standards.
- ARPs should put strategies in place to ensure that they provide a timely, efficient and cost effective rehabilitation service aimed at facilitating a safe and early return to work of the injured employee.
- ARPs must track their performance against the Comcare criteria and operational standards and will be required to report this to Comcare on request.

Comcare operational standards²

- The outcome standards are just one measure of provider performance and the measures are based on median figures so that cases with greater complexity (higher plan cost and duration) are accommodated in the provider's overall performance.
- ARPs operating from more than one site must have systems in place to ensure consistency and compliance with the operational standards across all service delivery outlets.
- ARPs should develop audit checklists for use at plan closure to document conformance with the service standards.
- ARPs should recognise that Service Standard 1. states that the return to work plan goals should be functional and focussed on return to work outcomes with goals that are specific, measurable, achievable and aligned with evidence-based-medicine recovery timeframes.
- ARPs should report to referring rehabilitation authority (employer) on case closure and seek feedback regarding the level of satisfaction with the outcome of the return to work plan and the nature of the services provided.
- ARPs should recognise that Service Standard 4. requires all ARPs to notify Comcare of new staff and provide evidence of qualifications and experience.
- All ARPs must undertake Comcare training within 3 months of engagement or as soon as possible.
- ARPs are responsible to notify Comcare of any changes to the ARP business entity, or to their contact and address details. In addition they must ensure that their website entry is accurate and if any changes are required they are able to submit changes electronically to Comcare.

¹ Refer to the Comcare Return to Work –Easy reference guide (PUB 22)

² Comcare operational standards for rehabilitation program providers (effective 1 July 2007) and includes the Outcome standards and Service standards which rehabilitation program providers need to comply with.

Current Issues

To keep you updated on current issues affecting rehabilitation providers, please take note of the following:

- The new operational standards will be promoted to employer case managers as of 1 July 2007 as the benchmark that they should assess provider performance against.
- In a broader jurisdictional context, legislative changes to the SRC Act introduced in April 2007 included changes to who can provide rehabilitation programs under the Act, and to the definition of suitable employment. In short, these changes mean:
 - that a rehabilitation authority (the employer/case manager) is now able to provide a rehabilitation program itself, or make arrangements with a Comcare approved rehabilitation provider to provide the rehabilitation program,
 - the amendment to the definition of ‘suitable employment’ means that, from 13 April 2007, for employees who are no longer employed by the Commonwealth or a licensee, ‘suitable employment’ now encompasses employment outside the Commonwealth or the licensee. That is, an employee can now be ‘rehabilitated’ to outside employment.
- For additional information regarding the SRCOLA amendments please visit the Comcare website http://www.comcare.gov.au/src_amendments .
- You are reminded of the need to ensure that new staff delivering return to work services under the SRC Act, attend the next locally available Comcare Provider Training, if they have not previously done so. Below is the Calender of upcoming provider training for 2007:

Date	Time	Apply by	City
21-Aug	9.00-4.30	17-Aug	Cairns
6-Sep	9.00-4.30	27-Aug	Perth
20-Sep	9.00-4.30	10-Sep	Sydney
2-Oct	9.00-4.30	20-Sep	Darwin
2-Nov	9.00-4.30	23-Oct	Canberra
8-Nov	9.00-4.30	29-Oct	Melbourne
15-Nov	9.00-4.30	5-Nov	Townsville
29-Nov	9.00-4.30	19-Nov	Hobart

* Please note that Comcare also runs half day ARP refresher courses and details are available in the Learning & Development training calendar. Also, there is one place left available for the Cairns session.

- Please contact Comcare Learning and Development at email learning.development@comcare.gov.au or go to: http://www.comcare.gov.au/learning_and_development2/learning_and_development for further information.
- More corporations are seeking eligibility to become self-insurers under the SRC Act. This will create a greater demand for rehabilitation services across the jurisdiction beyond the

traditional Commonwealth and ACT Government customers. For details of licensees, a link to the self insurance site has been provided for your information. Go to: http://www.comcare.gov.au/self_insurance

- The Comcare National Conference in Canberra this year will be focusing on rehabilitation in the workplace and is happening on 24 – 25 October. For further information on this event, please go to: http://www.comcare.gov.au/events/2007_comcares_national_conference It would be a good chance to gain practical and useful information across this vital business area. Please note that registration has now opened and early bird offers are available until 28 Sept 2007.



If you have any queries about anything to do with rehabilitation and Comcare, please go to the Comcare web page and follow the links.

Alternatively, for queries about staff changes, web information updates, business detail changes, or any other questions regarding approval, please email: rehab.approval@comcare.gov.au or telephone **1300 366 979**.

For operational queries about specific claims or agencies, you will need to ring the number provided above and speak to the relevant customer service officer.

Hope to see everyone at the National rehabilitation conference in October.

Kind Regards

The Comcare approval team

Alex O'Shea
Gillian Clarke
Matthew Hine
Vicki Stortini
Martin Buekers (Sept- Oct 07)