

## **Information on provider approval/renewal and agency management of providers**

- Comcare is responsible for approving rehabilitation providers (ARPs) to operate within this jurisdiction and has just completed the renewal of providers for the new approval period from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2010.
- All providers must comply with Comcare Criteria<sup>1</sup> and Operational standards for approval or renewal of rehabilitation providers<sup>2</sup>. The Operational standards document includes three outcome standards and six service standards that the ARP must meet during the approval period.
- Throughout the new approval period Comcare may ask providers to report their performance against the operational standards (comprising outcome and service standards) to ensure ongoing compliance. If the provider fails to meet the required standards Comcare is able to revoke their approval.
- The outcome standards are based on data from closed return to work plans (rehabilitation programs). They are:
  1. The provider shall achieve a return to work rate of 90%
  2. The provider's median duration of return to work plans shall not exceed 18 weeks
  3. The provider's median cost of return to work plans shall not exceed \$1980.
- The service standards include standards covering the nature, quality and timeliness of rehabilitation assessment and return to work plan services as well as other aspects of the provider's business.

### ***Agency responsibility regarding rehabilitation and ARP service delivery***

- The case manager (on behalf of the rehabilitation authority) is responsible for engaging the services of providers to undertake rehabilitation assessments and provide return to work plans (rehabilitation programs) to injured employees.
- Employers have a number of responsibilities under the SRC Act. Section 40 requires the employer to take all reasonable steps to provide suitable employment or assist the employee to find employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Criteria for approval or renewal of approval of rehabilitation program providers- go to [http://www.comcare.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/23477/Criteria\\_for\\_approval\\_or\\_renewal\\_2007.pdf](http://www.comcare.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/23477/Criteria_for_approval_or_renewal_2007.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Operational standards for Rehabilitation program providers- (Comcare Publication 59) at [http://www.comcare.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/28276/Pub59\\_070418.pdf](http://www.comcare.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/28276/Pub59_070418.pdf)

- In addition section 41 of the SRC Act requires the rehabilitation authority to comply with any guidelines issued by Comcare.<sup>3</sup> In particular they should be encouraged to develop service level agreements with providers with respect to the quality, nature and timeliness of occupational rehabilitation services.
- Section 41 recommends that the employer should:
  - Ensure that the provider has the required skills or specialist expertise to manage the particular case
  - Consider whether it would be beneficial to put in place arrangements for preferred providers
  - Ensure services are acquired based on the organisation's procurement guidelines and procedures
  - Allow for the monitoring of the provider's performance in terms of quality of service delivery, costs and progress reports and outcomes.

### ***Relevant issues raised from the provider renewal process***

- There was often a lack of proactive management of rehabilitation activities with the service provision not always being outcome focussed, efficient and cost effective.
- The performance of the ARP was not being actively monitored or managed by the employer.
- In many instances significant delays were occurring in the referral to the ARP for early intervention rehabilitation.
- Rehabilitation plan goals were often not being reviewed regularly with the current plan goal not being appropriate to the actual circumstance. ARPs are required to close a return to work plan if the rehabilitation goal changes and may open a new plan with a revised goal. The operational standards require that the rehabilitation goals be functional and focussed on return to work outcomes with goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant and aligned with evidence based recovery timeframes.
- Some ARPs were being asked to undertake services considered as the employer or the employee responsibility such as following up medical certificates, time off work forms, arranging treatment or mediation services, or following up on claim progress or benefit issues.
- ARPs identified significant delays in some (often large) agencies identifying suitable duties for the employees return to work (contributing to an increase in time off work).

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<sup>3</sup> Rehabilitation Guidelines for Employers- issued under section 41 of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988- go to Pub 19- [http://www.comcare.gov.au/publications/publications-html-version/rehabilitation\\_guidelines\\_for\\_employers](http://www.comcare.gov.au/publications/publications-html-version/rehabilitation_guidelines_for_employers)

## ***Case manager and provider roles and responsibilities***

For detailed information on the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders in the rehabilitation progress refer to the Comcare Return to work- Easy reference guide<sup>4</sup>

In summary the role of the Case manager is to:

- Initiate, co-ordinate and monitor rehabilitation
- Actively manage the provider to ensure a quality and cost effective program
- Actively manage the rehabilitation program to ensure a successful return to work
- Work with the supervisor and ARP to ensure the employee is given suitable employment

The role of the Approved rehabilitation provider is to:

- Provide expert, objective advice to the case manager to assist the timely, safe and durable return to work of the employee
- Engage the employee, treating doctor and supervisor in the development and implementation of the return to work plan
- Actively monitor the return to work plan and communicate regularly with all parties to ensure the goals are achieved
- Ensure they comply with Comcare's criteria and standards for ARPS.

For more information regarding the Provider renewal or approval process please contact SRC Policy Section.

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<sup>4</sup> Available on the Comcare website at [http://www.comcare.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/648/PUB22-RTW-Easy-Reference-Guide.pdf](http://www.comcare.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/648/PUB22-RTW-Easy-Reference-Guide.pdf) (Pub 22)