

RETURN TO WORK

Easy reference guide



Australian Government

Comcare

PUTTING YOU *FIRST*

The *Return to work—easy reference guide* outlines the steps in the return to work process and the role we all play in working together to achieve successful return to work outcomes for injured workers.

RETURN TO WORK

Your responsibilities

AS A SENIOR MANAGER:

- > ensure your agency complies with the *Rehabilitation guidelines for employers* issued under section 41 of the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRC Act)
- > be committed to implementing your agency's rehabilitation policy effectively
- > develop a workplace culture that prevents injuries and supports injured workers
- > support your case managers in performing their duties and achieving early intervention outcomes
- > monitor your agency's return to work performance including accessing your performance reports to track your organisation's claim costs/return to work outcomes and identify problems
- > review and improve your agency's return to work strategies.

Additional information:

Rehabilitation—managing return to work (Pub 16)

Rehabilitation guidelines for employers (Pub 19)

Guide to understanding customer reports (Comcare website, www.comcare.gov.au)

Improving outcomes through rehabilitation management systems—a continuous improvement guide (Comcare website)

AS A SUPERVISOR:

- > foster a workplace that encourages and supports safe work practices and the early reporting of injuries
- > advise the case manager when you become aware of an injury
- > take steps to prevent further injuries by understanding the cause of injuries and putting safeguards in place
- > keep contact with the injured worker—support and identify available assistance to help with returning the injured worker to work—the case manager will coordinate this process
- > identify suitable duties with the case manager while continuing to support the injured worker
- > change or modify the work and environment for the injured worker
- > contribute to developing the return to work plan for the injured worker and promptly let the case manager know if you, the injured worker or co-workers have any concerns
- > when the injured worker returns to the workplace, work with them to ensure their return to work is durable.

Additional information:

Rehabilitation—managing return to work (Pub 16)

Return to work—key steps for supervisors and line managers (Pub 21)

AS AN INJURED WORKER:

- > find out about your agency's rehabilitation policy
- > let your supervisor or case manager know if you are going to be away from work for an extended period because of your work related injury
- > undergo an assessment for rehabilitation if required
- > talk to your case manager about your obligations and rights regarding rehabilitation
- > participate in your return to work program
- > talk to your case manager or rehabilitation provider if you have any concerns about your return to work plan.

Additional information:

All about worker's compensation—a guide for employees injured at work before 13 April 2007 (Pub 12)

All about worker's compensation—a guide for employees injured at work on or after 13 April 2007 (Pub 71)

AS A CASE MANAGER:

- > talk with staff about your role and how to contact you
- > consult with all relevant parties to initiate, co-ordinate and monitor the rehabilitation process
- > decide if an assessment for a return to work program is required—particularly if an employee is likely to be away from work for more than ten days (s36, SRC Act)
- > organise the return to work program—you may need to contract a workplace rehabilitation provider (WRP) to develop the return to work plan (s37 SRC Act)
- > manage the workplace rehabilitation provider to implement a quality and cost effective program
- > write to the injured worker indicating any decisions you make about a rehabilitation assessment or return to work plan
- > manage the rehabilitation program to achieve a successful return to work
- > work with the supervisor and workplace rehabilitation provider to provide the injured worker with suitable employment (s40, SRC Act)
- > make sure your agency complies with the *Rehabilitation guidelines for employers* issued by Comcare (s41, SRC Act).

Additional information:

Rehabilitation handbook (Pub 43)

AS A WORKPLACE REHABILITATION PROVIDER (WRP):

- > provide expert, objective advice to the case manager to assist the timely, safe and durable return to work of an injured worker
- > promptly respond to referrals and other requests as outlined in *Operational standards for rehabilitation program providers* (Pub 59)
- > engage the injured worker, treating doctor and supervisor in developing and implementing a tailored return to work plan
- > monitor the return to work plan and regularly communicate with all parties to ensure goals are being achieved
- > ensure you comply with Comcare's criteria and standards for approved rehabilitation providers.

Additional information:

Criteria for initial approval or renewal of approval as a rehabilitation program provider (workplace rehabilitation provider) (Comcare website)

Operational standards for rehabilitation program providers (Pub 59)

AS A MEDICAL PRACTITIONER:

- > provide treatment to the injured worker
- > provide accurate medical assessments and advice throughout the return to work process
- > provide advice on alternative duties or workplace modifications
- > inform the case manager or WRP of the injured worker's capacity to perform tailored duties
- > monitor and support the progress of returning the injured worker to work
- > be available and accessible for case conferences or workplace visits.

AS THE CLAIMS MANAGER:

- > make accurate and timely decisions on claims for compensation
- > process the injured worker's entitlements quickly and accurately
- > manage the injured worker's claim effectively—liaising with the injured worker, their doctor, the employer, the case manager and WRP.

Steps in the return to work process

STEP 1

A WORKER EXPERIENCES SYMPTOMS OF AN INJURY, INCIDENT, OR ILLNESS THAT AFFECTS THEIR ABILITY TO DO THEIR NORMAL WORK. THE WORKER REPORTS THIS TO THEIR SUPERVISOR. AS A SUPERVISOR:

- > discuss the injury, the cause and the affect with the injured worker
- > assess the hazard and take appropriate action to prevent further injury
- > commence an early intervention process as per your agency's rehabilitation policy.

STEP 2

AS A SUPERVISOR:

- > notify the case manager as early as possible that a worker is injured or ill
- > speak with the injured worker and case manager about available workplace support and assistance to encourage a return to work.
- > advise the injured worker that the case manager will contact them to manage the return to work process.

STEP 3

AS THE CASE MANAGER:

- > undertake an analysis of the injured worker's situation
- > determine the injured worker's needs in assisting the return to work
- > determine if the injured worker requires a rehabilitation assessment for a return to work program—see part 3, section 6 of the *Rehabilitation handbook* (Pub 43).

STEP 4

AFTER IT IS DETERMINED THE INJURED WORKER NEEDS A REHABILITATION ASSESSMENT, THE CASE MANAGER INITIATES THE PROCESS. AS THE CASE MANAGER:

- > refer the injured work to a WRP to assess their capability to undertake a rehabilitation program—*Referral for rehabilitation assessment form* (SRC 116)
- > facilitate a pre-injury work description—*Pre-injury work description form* (SRC 117)
- > identify and document suitable duties if appropriate—*Potential suitable duties within the work area/employer organisation form* (SRC 118)
- > discuss with the treating medical practitioner, work restrictions the injured worker should observe in the workplace, and their recommendations for identifying suitable duties.

STEP 5

WHEN THE ASSESSMENT IS COMPLETE, AS THE CASE MANAGER:

- > decide if a return to work plan—*Return to work plan form* (SRC 40)—is needed
- > develop the return to work plan with the assistance of a WRP (if engaged), and by consulting all parties—the injured worker, the treating medical practitioner and the supervisor
- > ensure all parties understand the goals of the return to work plan
- > ensure all parties understand the expectations and responsibilities to achieve the return to work goals
- > approve the return to work plan—*Return to work plan form* (SRC 40)—as the agency's delegate.

STEP 6

ALL PARTIES:

- > participate in and monitor the progress of the return to work plan
- > communicate the injured worker's progress in achieving the goals of the return to work plan
- > identify barriers to achieving the goals, and work as a team to develop and implement strategies to overcome the barriers.

If the return to work goals do not change but the original plan needs amending to allow for additional services or time, as the case manager:

- > develop a return to work plan amendment with the assistance of a WRP (if engaged) and in consultation with all parties
- > approve the return to work plan amendment—*Return to work plan amendment form* (SRC 86)—as the agency's delegate.

If the return to work plan goals change, but return to work services can continue, as the case manager:

- > initiate the closing of the return to work plan—*Return to work plan—closure form* (SRC 41)
- > develop a new return to work plan with updated goals, with the assistance of the WRP (if engaged) and in consultation with all parties
- > approve the return to work plan as the agency's delegate.

STEP 7

WHEN THE RETURN TO WORK GOALS HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED AND THE INJURED WORKER HAS RETURNED TO WORK, AS CASE MANAGER:

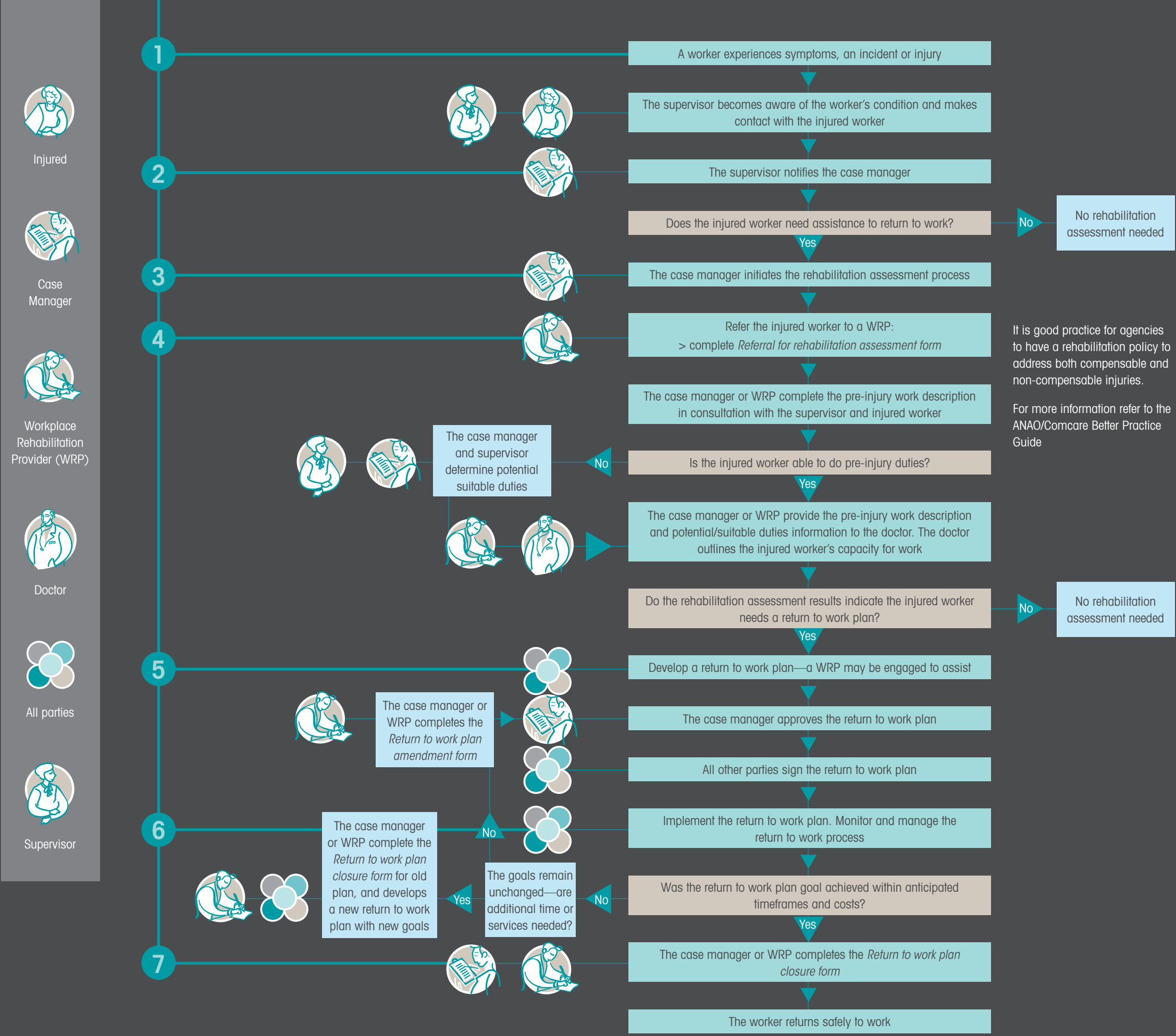
- > initiate closing the return to work plan
- > in conjunction with all parties, continue monitoring the injured worker for a period of time to ensure the return to work is safe and durable.

NOTE: The case manager distributes copies of all forms to all parties involved. Copies of completed forms should be forwarded to Comcare at GPO Box 9905 Canberra ACT 2601.

Key

Steps

Return to work process



FOR INFORMATION, ASSISTANCE, REFERENCE MATERIALS AND ADVICE

CALL COMCARE ON 1300 366 979

- > for information and advice on claims
- > for specialist advice from an Injury Management Advisor
- > to discuss prevention and injury management strategies for your agency.

LOG ON TO WWW.COMCARE.GOV.AU

- > to download or order the rehabilitation resources
- > to see the latest training calendar, including case management and supervisor training
- > to download return to work forms.

PUB 22 April 2011