RETURN TO WORK
Easy reference guide
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 employees.

## RETURN TO WORK

### YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

#### As a senior manager

> ensure your organisation complies with the *Guidelines for rehabilitation authorities* (the Guidelines) issued under section 41 of the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRC Act)
> show visible commitment to implementing your organisation’s rehabilitation policy effectively
> develop a workplace culture that prevents injuries and supports injured employees
> support your case managers in performing their duties and achieving positive early intervention outcomes
> monitor your organisation’s return to work performance—including tracking your organisation’s claim costs and return to work outcomes, identifying problems and set the direction to address any identified issues
> review and improve your organisation’s return to work strategies.

#### 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 their causes and putting safeguards in place
> keep contact with the injured employee to support and identify available assistance to help with returning the injured employee to work
> identify suitable duties with the case manager while continuing to support the injured employee
> change or modify the work and environment for the injured employee
> contribute to developing the return to work plan for the injured employee and promptly let the case manager know if you, the injured employee or co-workers have any concerns
> when the injured employee returns to the workplace, work with them to ensure their return to work is durable.

#### As an injured employee

> find out about your organisation’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.
As a case manager

> talk with staff about your role and how to contact you
> consult with all relevant parties to initiate, coordinate 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 10 days (section 36, SRC Act)
> organise the return to work program—you may need to contract an approved workplace rehabilitation provider (WRP) to develop the return to work plan (section 37, SRC Act)
> manage the WRP to implement a quality and cost-effective program
> write to the injured employee 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 WRP to provide the injured worker with suitable employment (section 40, SRC Act)
> make sure your organisation complies with the Guidelines issued by Comcare (section 41, SRC Act).

As an approved 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 Comcare’s Criteria and operational standards for workplace rehabilitation providers 2015
> engage the injured employee, 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 workplace rehabilitation providers.

As a medical practitioner

> provide treatment to the injured employee
> 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 employee’s capacity to perform tailored duties
> monitor and support the progress of returning the injured employee 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 employee, their doctor, the employer, the case manager and WRP
> support the return to work process.
An employee experiences symptoms, an incident or injury

The supervisor becomes aware of the worker's condition and makes contact with the injured employee

The supervisor notifies the case manager

Does the injured employee need assistance to return to work?

The case manager initiates the rehabilitation assessment process

Refer the injured worker to an approved WRP:
> complete Referral for rehabilitation assessment form

The case manager or an approved WRP complete the pre-injury work description in consultation with the supervisor and injured employee

Is the injured employee able to do pre-injury duties?

The case manager or an approved WRP provide the pre-injury work description and potential/suitable duties information to the doctor.

The doctor outlines the injured employee's capacity for work

Do the rehabilitation assessment results indicate the injured employee needs a return to work plan?

Develop a return to work plan—an approved WRP may be engaged to assist

The case manager approves the return to work plan

All other parties sign the return to work plan

Implement the return to work plan. Monitor and manage the return to work process

Was the return to work plan goal achieved within anticipated timeframes and costs?

The case manager or approved WRP completes the Return to work plan closure form

The employee returns safely to work

It is good practice for employers to have a rehabilitation policy to address both compensable and non-compensable injuries.
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 employee reports this to their supervisor. As a supervisor:

> discuss the injury, its cause and effect with the injured employee
> assess the hazard and take appropriate action to prevent further injury
> start an early intervention process as per your organisation’s rehabilitation policy.

STEP 2

As a supervisor:

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

STEP 3

As the case manager:

> carry out an analysis of the injured employee’s situation
> determine what the injured employee needs to help them return to work
> determine if the injured employee needs a rehabilitation assessment for a return to work program.

STEP 4

After it is determined the injured employee needs a rehabilitation assessment, the case manager initiates the process. As the case manager:

> refer the injured employee to an approved workplace rehabilitation provider (WRP) to assess their ability to take on a rehabilitation program—Referral for rehabilitation assessment form (SRC 116)
> prepare 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)
> have a discussion with the treating medical practitioner about work restrictions the injured employee should observe in the workplace, and obtain the practitioner’s recommendations for 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 an approved WRP (if engaged), and by consulting all parties—the injured employee, 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 organisation’s delegate.

STEP 6

All parties:

> participate in and monitor the progress of the return to work plan
> communicate the injured employee’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 an approved 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 organisation’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 approved WRP (if engaged) and in consultation with all parties
> approve the return to work plan as the organisation’s delegate.

STEP 7

When the return to work goals have been achieved and the injured employee has returned to work, as case manager:

> initiate closing the return to work plan
> in conjunction with all parties, continue monitoring the injured employee 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.
For information, assistance, reference materials and advice

Call Comcare on 1300 366 979

> for information and advice on claims
> for specialist advice from the Injury Management Advisory Service (IMAS)
> to discuss prevention and injury management strategies for your organisation.

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.

Email Comcare at general.enquiries@comcare.gov.au

Additional Information

Guidelines For Rehabilitation Authorities 2012
First Steps Back: A guide to suitable employment for rehabilitation case managers (PUB 078)
First To Action: Early intervention to support psychological health and wellbeing (PUB 046)
Working for recovery: Suitable employment for return to work following psychological injury
Criteria and operational standards for workplace rehabilitation providers 2015