



Return to work

Why return to work is good for everyone

Good work is good for our mental and physical health and wellbeing. In addition to being away from the workplace for a significant period, an injured or unwell employee may:

- become isolated and depressed
- suffer adverse socioeconomic consequences
- become unemployable in the long term
- experience family disruption, loss of self-esteem and quality of life
- have higher rates of many health conditions and an increased risk of death.

It's important to get people back to work as soon as it is safe to do so—employees don't have to be 100 per cent well to be at work, and good work can help in recovery from injury and illness.

We also know that it's important for an injured employee to have a timeframe for their rehabilitation—**employees are three times more likely to return to work** if they are given a return to work date by their doctor.

Good work is engaging, fair, respectful and balances job demands, autonomy and job security. Good work accepts the importance of culture and traditional beliefs. It is characterised by safe and healthy work practices and it strikes a balance between the interests of individuals, employers and society. It requires effective change management, clear and realistic performance indicators, matches the work to the individual and uses transparent productivity metrics.

Providing early support to injured employees to enable their recovery and return to work is critical.

The longer someone is off work, the less likely they are to return to work. Work absence tends to perpetuate itself—if the person is off work for:

- **20 days**—the chance of ever getting back to work is 70 per cent
- **45 days**—the chance of ever getting back to work is 50 per cent
- **70 days**—the chance of ever getting back to work is 35 per cent.

The role of employers

While many employers actively support their injured or unwell employees to recover at and return to work, more can be done. Evidence indicates the following strategies will improve return to work outcomes.



Make early contact with the injured employee (within three days)

This results in a **26 per cent** higher return to work rate for physical claims and **45 per cent** for psychological claims.



Develop and maintain a positive workplace culture

A positive view of work and work environment leads to **25 per cent** higher return to work rates for physical and **10 per cent** for psychological claims.



Reduce the concern associated with lodging a claim

Workers who were not concerned about making a claim were 3.1 times more likely to return to work.



Ensure injured employees have access to early and appropriate medical care

A greater focus on medical support and care results in a **8 per cent** higher return to work rate for physical claims. Pre-claim assistance from an employer is associated with a **18 per cent** higher return to work rate for physical claims and **33 per cent** for psychological claims.



Respond positively to an employee's injury

A positive response from an employer to an injury results in a **43 per cent** higher return to work rate for physical claims and **52 per cent** higher for psychological claims.



Prevent delays in reporting injury or illness

The longer the delay in reporting, the longer the employee will be away from work. A delay in reporting the injury or illness to the workplace of greater than 90 days, led to more employees being off work (incapacity) for 45 weeks or more.



Reduce the incidence of disputed claims

When a dispute is present, return to work is less likely for both physical (**22 per cent**) and psychological (**33 per cent**) claims.



Treat employees fairly during and after the claims process

Employees' perceptions of fairness significantly influence recovery and return to work outcomes.



Help injured employees find suitable employment

Providing modified and suitable duties can improve the injured employee's health and recovery outcomes as well as reduce the cost and burden to an organisation.



Stop the injury from occurring again

Employers play a role in secondary prevention.

Physical vs psychological injury and return to work

Return to work survey results indicate a marked difference in the way employers respond to employees with a physical injury in comparison to those with psychological injury.

When it comes to contact from the workplace 59 per cent of employees with a physical injury claim say their employer contacted them about their injury, compared to only 33 per cent of employees with a psychological injury.

Employees with a psychological injury report feeling they were *less likely to receive*:

- support from their employer
- effort from their employer to find them suitable employment
- enough information on their rights and responsibilities
- help from their employer during their recovery
- fair treatment during or after the claims process.

The workplace provides the most cost-effective opportunity to lessen work disability.

Return to work survey outcomes

Results from the 2018 survey indicate at the time of interview:

- **86 per cent** of employees were working, a 2 per cent increase from 2017
- **93 per cent** of employees (within premium paying agencies) had returned to work at any time since their injury or illness, a 3 per cent improvement from 2017
- **79 per cent** of employees (Licensee) had a plan to get back to work
- **67 per cent** of employees (premium paying agency) had a plan to get back to work
- **74 per cent** of employees (overall) had a plan to get back to work

References available

For a copy of the reference list please contact Comcare on 1300 366 979 or send an email to general.enquiries@comcare.gov.au

The National Return to Work Survey measures the outcomes of injured employees receiving workers' compensation, to better understand the experience of those injured employees and the factors that may influence their return to work. Comcare undertakes the biannual survey with Safe Work Australia.