



Australian Government

Comcare

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

- > keep in close contact with the employee—be supportive and offer assistance to enable a return to work
- > develop a workplace culture that aims to prevent injury, support employees and shows commitment to rehabilitation and RTW
- > advise the RCM as soon as they are aware of an employee's injury
- > ensure steps are taken to prevent further injury by understanding the cause of injury and putting safeguards in place
- > work with the RCM to identify suitable duties and provide ongoing support
- > be involved and contribute to the development of the rehabilitation program for the employee
- > manage performance issues, workloads and the operational needs of the work area
- > promptly advise the RCM of any concerns raised by the employee or co-workers
- > work with employees to ensure that a return to work is sustained
- > maintain the employee's privacy.

As an employee

- > understand the organisation's rehabilitation and return to work policy and talk to the RCM about obligations and rights regarding workplace rehabilitation
- > undergo an assessment for rehabilitation if requested
- > actively participate in the development and implementation of their rehabilitation program(s)
- > talk to the RCM or supervisor about any concerns regarding the rehabilitation program
- > advise their supervisor or RCM about leave due to an injury.

As a case manager

- > lead the management of rehabilitation for employees
- > initiate, coordinate and monitor the workplace rehabilitation program
- > promote the health benefits of good work, early intervention and the organisation's return to work approach
- > encourage an organisational commitment to rehabilitation
- > engage workplace rehabilitation providers and manage these providers to achieve strong outcomes
- > inform employees about the case management role, the role of other stakeholders, and the part they play in supporting recovery and RTW
- > connect and coordinate multiple stakeholders involved in the RTW process
- > document communication with stakeholders and maintain accurate records
- > make accurate and timely rehabilitation decisions
- > provide employees with advice regarding their rights and responsibilities as they relate to rehabilitation under the SRC Act
- > where liability sits with another employer, consult with the delegate from the liable employer.

As an approved workplace rehabilitation provider (WRP)

- > assess an employee to determine their capability to undertake a rehabilitation program
- > promote the health benefits of work and educate stakeholders on rehabilitation and return to work
- > identify potential barriers to recovery and return to work, and develop strategies to address these risk factors
- > translate improvements in the employee's recovery to meaningful work
- > engage the employee, the treating medical practitioner(s), other treatment provider(s) and supervisor(s) in developing and implementing a tailored return to work plan
- > deliver the services in the program
- > communicate with all stakeholders regularly to ensure goals are being achieved.

As a medical practitioner

- > provide medical treatment for the employee that improves functional outcomes
- > provide accurate medical assessments of capacity to recover at and return to work, which is documented on Comcare's certificate of capacity
- > provide advice on alternative duties or modifications to the workplace
- > ensure that both RCM and the WRP are informed of the employee's abilities so that tailored duties can be organised within the employee's capacity
- > monitor and support workplace rehabilitation
- > be available for and participate in case conferences.
- > promote and facilitate the health benefits of good work
- > respond to requests for information and reports.

As the claims manager:

- > make accurate and timely decisions on compensation claims
- > communicate with all stakeholders
- > apply the principles of the health benefits of good work
- > support and participate in case conferences
- > advise employees about what to do if they disagree with a decision.

Key

Steps

Return to work process



Employee



Case Manager



Workplace Rehabilitation Provider (WRP)



Doctor



All parties



Supervisor

1

An employee experiences symptoms, an incident or injury

2

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

3

The supervisor notifies the case manager

4

Does the injured employee need assistance to return to work?

Yes

No

No rehabilitation assessment needed

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

The case manager and supervisor determine potential suitable duties

No

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

Yes

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?

Yes

No

No rehabilitation plan needed

5

The case manager or approved WRP complete the *Return to work plan closure form* for old plan, and develops a new return to work plan with new goals

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

6

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?

Yes

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

7

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

An employee 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 rehabilitation 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—*Rehabilitation assessment/examination form* (SRC 116)
- > prepare a pre-injury work description—*Suitable duties form* (SRC 109)
- > identify and document suitable duties if appropriate—*Suitable duties form* (SRC 109)
- > 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—*Rehabilitation program form* (SRC 40)—is needed
- > develop the rehabilitation program 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 rehabilitation program
- > ensure all parties understand the expectations and responsibilities to achieve the return to work goals
- > approve the rehabilitation program—*Rehabilitation program form* (SRC 40)—as the organisation's delegate.

STEP 6

All parties:

- > participate in and monitor the progress of the rehabilitation program
- > communicate the injured employee's progress in achieving the goals of the rehabilitation program
- > 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 rehabilitation program amendment with the assistance of an approved WRP (if engaged) and in consultation with all parties
- > approve the rehabilitation program amendment—*Rehabilitation program alteration form* (SRC 86)—as the organisation's delegate.

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

- > initiate the closing of the rehabilitation program—*Rehabilitation program closure record form* (SRC 41)
- > develop a new rehabilitation program with updated goals, with the assistance of the approved WRP (if engaged) and in consultation with all parties
- > approve the rehabilitation program 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 rehabilitation program
- > 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 2019

Rehabilitation Case Manager Handbook

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

PUB 022 August 2019

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