

Helping injured workers heal and return to work

Employers play an important role in return to work. An active employer can help mitigate unnecessary disability or absenteeism by consistently ensuring their injured workers remain connected to their workforce and to their co-workers, including those kept on salary.

L&I has made significant progress in reducing the time from a worker's injury to referrals to private vocational providers for return-to-work and vocational services. As these services are happening much faster, we're excited that the resulting outcomes for workers and employers are exceeding historical benchmarks. But we also recognize that early services can overlap or be redundant with those provided by Retro groups and employers.

The **employer of record** (EOR), third party administrators (TPAs) and Retrospective Rating groups can (and often do) facilitate return to work with the EOR, particularly transitional or light-duty opportunities. These return-to-work (RTW) services are sometimes by vocational providers they have hired. We have reminded claim managers (CMs) of these services. In general, we've told them to anticipate RTW services with the EOR should be provided within 30 days of claim allowance and are likely completed or pending resolution within 90 days of allowance. To ensure coordination of services and reduce the risk of overlap with department-assigned private sector vocational providers, our claim files should include regular updates on the employer or TPA's progress with return to work. Services may include facilitation of light-duty or transitional jobs, permanent modified jobs and/or job-of-injury job analysis/descriptions with the EOR.

Return-to-work staff or private sector vocational providers hired by employers do not provide ability-to-work assessment (AWA) services, labor market surveys, transferable skills analysis, plan development or retraining services. This work is done by private sector vocational providers in response to referrals from the department.

When a claim is being considered for vocational services, our CMs are instructed to follow the steps below:

- Review the file for evidence of RTW services by the employer or Retro group/TPA. If there is no evidence of RTW services, consider assigning to a private sector vocational provider.
- During the call to the employer, explain vocational services, give the vocational provider's contact information, ask whether there are concerns about RTW and explain how a willing employer can help in the process.
- If the employer reports they are developing a RTW plan, the CM is to take the time to set expectations, including the need for regular updates to the claim file. Submitting these work products as soon as completed can avoid unnecessary delays or redundant services.
- Close the private sector vocational referral to allow the employer to provide services.
- Review the file at the next tickler to verify documentation of progress. CM concerns should be staffed with an internal vocational services specialist.
- If there is no evidence of a RTW plan, the CM should make the referral to a private sector vocational provider and notify the employer.

Remember, also, the important role of a vocational professional for employers and workers interested in participating in the new Preferred Worker incentives.

The **Preferred Worker Program** information can be found here:

<http://www.Lni.wa.gov/ClaimsIns/Voc/BackToWork/PrefWkr/Guides/default.asp#1>

Finally, we support a collaborative approach between the department-assigned provider and the employer representative once services are initiated.