

Removing psychosocial barriers to recovery — how VRCs can help

Labor and Industries (L&I) has been working on increasing awareness of the role psychosocial factors play in work disability and recovery for workers. With an overall better awareness of preventing needless long-term work disability in our system, we're sharing this knowledge with VRCs so you can use it to help workers heal and return to work.

- Everyone has psychosocial issues that are, or could become, barriers to return to work and recovery.
- Unaddressed psychosocial barriers are strongly associated with long-term work disability and overall poorer outcomes.
- A mental health diagnosis is not required to identify an unaddressed psychosocial barrier.
- L&I offers access to services to help workers develop coping capacity and adaptive behaviors.

VRCs often address psychosocial barriers directly with clients

As a vocational rehabilitation counselor (VRC), you already identify your client's psychosocial barriers (such as catastrophic thinking, fear and avoidance, perceived injustice, and perceived disability) and help them locate community resources if needed. In conversations, you effectively remove barriers and help your client heal and return to work. Sometimes your client may need further assistance, and this is where additional interventions can be helpful.

Here's how VRCs can help

- Continue having regular and engaging conversations with your client.
- Encourage your client to talk with their claim manager about resources that may be available and the necessary next steps to access that help.
- Encourage, facilitate or participate in critical conversations between your client and their medical provider(s) regarding psychosocial barriers such as fear and avoidance. Ensure all parties are on the same page about next steps and are aware of available interventions (see below).

When additional help is needed, VRCs can assist in identifying next steps, such as:

- **Activity coaching using the Progressive Goal Attainment Program (PGAP)**
Your client meets weekly with a coach for up to 10 sessions and sets their own goals. If your client may benefit from this service, contact the attending provider for a referral (required). If you need assistance, contact the L&I coordinator at 360-902-6261.

Make sure to remain in contact with your client, the attending provider, the activity coach and any other appropriate stakeholder to ensure all services are maximally integrated. Make sure your client understands the process. Remember, preventing an unclear process is one of the four guiding principles for work disability prevention.

- **Behavioral health interventions**
Targeted brief interventions can help your client with removing psychosocial barriers. The interventions may include emotion management/behavioral training, and acceptance interventions. If your client may benefit from this service, facilitate the conversation between them and their attending provider for a referral (required). Psychologists and psychiatric advanced registered nurse practitioners (ARNP) are most likely to provide these services.

They can bill under the health and behavior codes 96150, 96151, and 96152, which do not require authorization.

Make sure to remain in contact with your client, the attending provider, the psychologist/psychiatric ARNP and any other appropriate stakeholder to ensure all services are maximally integrated. Make sure your client understands the process. Remember, preventing an unclear process is one of the four guiding principles for work disability prevention.

- **Structured Intensive Multidisciplinary Program (SIMP)**
A SIMP is a structured chronic pain management program to assist in your client's recovery, typically used after three months of chronic pain. Please discuss a referral with the attending provider and/or claim manager if your client may benefit from this service. (Prior authorization is needed.) Make sure to remain in contact with your client, the interdisciplinary team at the SIMP program, the attending provider, and any other appropriate stakeholder to ensure all services are maximally integrated. Make sure your client understands the process. Remember, preventing an unclear process is one of the four guiding principles for work disability prevention.

For any of the interventions described above, the claim manager and vocational services specialist are good resources for collaboration.