

How to complete the *Vocational recovery plan*

The vocational provider must engage the worker to develop a *Vocational recovery plan*. The plan should include the needs and goals of the worker and steps or strategies to address these. When a plan is completed, you must provide the worker with a copy and send documentation of the plan to the claim file using the *Vocational recovery plan* message in EVOC.

This is a good tool for engaging the worker in a conversation about their work future, and helps you build rapport and trust by showing that you respect the worker's goal.

You do not need to create the plan at the initial meeting. The worker may be too overwhelmed with getting medical treatment for their injury to think beyond that point. Instead, set the next meeting to begin discussing their goals, and their plan to achieve them. Research shows that the worker is more likely to achieve goals they agree to early in the process, short-term goals can lead to long-term commitments.

Section instructions

Please refer to the *Vocational Recovery Reference Manual* for a list of motivational interviewing questions (for example see Mitchell, 2012).

“What are your goals?”

Write the worker's goals in their own words if possible. Short-term goals are fine, such as getting a referral to see a surgeon or securing a modified duty position. Use your professional discretion to determine how much detail is relevant.

“What is being done to achieve your goals?”

This includes both what the worker is doing and what the VRC is doing to meet the stated goal. For example, the worker can maintain contact with their employer and look on the AskJAN website for assistive technology. The VRC will talk to the employer about modified duty and explain loss of earning power benefits at next meeting. **Do not** list completed actions.

“What needs to happen before you can go back to work?”

This list can include anything from medical treatment to resolving barriers. Remember that back to work may include gradual return to work, or other modified duty.

Another way to think about this question is, “Why isn't the worker able to be at work today?” Can the attending provider release the worker to modified duty? Can the employer accommodate the worker's restrictions for modified duty?

“Next Steps”

At the first meeting with the worker, the VRC can identify next steps, even if the worker has not identified their vocational recovery plan goals. The idea is to help the workers find their own path to vocational recovery.

Commitments are strongest when they satisfy three criteria:

- **Small leads to big.** Getting agreement and voluntary compliance with small commitments can pave the way to making and keeping big commitments.
- **Voluntary.** When it is their idea.
- **When it is early.** Establishing small commitments (from both parties) early in a process can help build trust to set the stage for a positive working relationship.

This is not a compliance tool. If a worker does not follow up on their next steps, this is an opportunity to have a conversation with the worker to find out what the barrier is and re-set goals if necessary, not to start a non-coop process.

Special instructions for Limited English Proficiency workers:

- In order to ensure that the worker receives meaningful access to our services, you must make special accommodations.
- As a vocational provider it is your responsibility to decide, together with the worker, if an interpreter is needed. If due to unforeseen circumstances, an interpreter is not available, use [Language Link](#).
- Once written, the interpreter should read the *Vocational Recovery Plan* to the worker and ask if they agree with the plan. If that is not the case, you should work with them to make changes. Additionally, the VRC should ask the worker to take their own notes (if possible) so the next steps are clear.

VRC feedback on the *Vocational recovery plan*

We asked VRCs who participated in a pilot to tell us what they thought about using the *Vocational Recovery Plan*.

Why?

“Having a plan eases the worker’s fears of the unknown.”

“I think it's very empowering for the clients who feel little control at times with what's going on in their lives after an injury.”

“My experience is that they do appreciate some concrete assignments, and dates. Helps to frame where we're headed, what we can do to move things vs. just ‘throwing themselves on the mercy of the system’.”

What?

“Yes I make a copy and make sure they take it upon leaving the meeting.”

One claimant told me he really appreciated the plan as he had previously felt he should be “doing something”. This gave him clear direction of both his and VRC next steps which he indicated his appreciation.”

“By establishing a goal-oriented plan, I feel that the worker will be able to focus on their vocational recovery and what needs to be done to ensure the best chance for a return to work.”

When?

“Yes, what I do is usually do it at the end of the meeting and I go along reading the questions out loud and then discuss what we talked about and what needs to be done - and what to put down and say, does that sound right? or does that date work for you? and they agree - I find that a lot of times they want me to add things - dates etc.”

“What worked for me was we did the form at the end of the meeting, like a meeting wrap up as all of the topics are things I review/discuss with them during my meetings anyhow. So I approach it as a "okay, so you talked about that your goal is to do....." , etc.”

“I find myself jotting down items as we go through the meeting and then use the Vocational Recovery Plan at the end to recap and solidify the plan.”