

RETURN TO WORK INFORMATION SESSIONS

EMPLOYER-LED

ON-BOARDING TRAINING PARTICIPANT GUIDE



COURSE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this course! This course will answer the following questions:

- What is the mandate of the Workers' Compensation Board?
- What is a return-to-work program?
- What are the benefits of a return-to-work program?

The course will also provide an overview of the return-to-work process.

It concludes with a case study (or case studies, depending on time) that will encourage you to reflect on what you know about the return-to-work process, and the roles and responsibilities of the different parties that are involved in the process.

INTRODUCTION

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand WCB Nova Scotia's role and strategic priorities.
- Understand the purpose and benefits of a return-to-work program.
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the return-to-work process.

Message from Government

In 2022-23, the Government of Nova Scotia committed \$3 million dollars to continue efforts to support safe workplaces for Continuing Care (Long-Term Care and Home Care) and Disability Support Program sectors.

The implementation of a return-to-work program was a key initiative approved by Government as part of this commitment to support employees who experience workplace injuries.

The goals of the program are to:

- Support injured and ill employees in a healthy and earlier return-to-work process focused on “ability” in the Long-Term Care, Home Care, and Disability Support Programs sectors.
- Keep trained and experienced employees on the job and promote a healthy workplace for the recruitment and retention of employees.

Targeted Return-to-Work Outcomes

These outcomes are targets for all employers in the Long-Term Care, Home Care and Disability Support Programs sectors to strive for in reducing injuries. They were decided on by the Department of Community Services, and the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care approved them as goals for the program through WSI.



Targeted Outcome 1 Achieve at least a 2-5% reduction annually in all claims and time loss claims.

Targeted Outcome 2 Achieve at least a 5-10% reduction annually in the average number of weeks paid

Targeted Outcome 3 Achieve at least a 5-10% reduction annually in temporary benefits paid

About WCB Nova Scotia

WCB Nova Scotia is the province's provider of workplace injury insurance.

They provide workplace injury insurance to more than 20,000 employers and approximately 335,000 employees across the province.



Every day, WCB Nova Scotia:

- Works to reduce the human and financial impact of workplace injury.
- Works to prevent workplace injury and provide security from its impact to employees and their families.
- Supports families in the wake of workplace tragedy.

WCB Nova Scotia is a leader in Nova Scotia's growing workplace safety culture.

Workplace Injury



- The number of workplace injuries that occur in Nova Scotia has gone down significantly over the past 10 years.
- The LTC, HC, and DSP sectors are amongst the highest in injury frequency, injury duration, and time loss against provincial averages.
- When Nova Scotians are injured on the job, it's taking longer for them to return to work.

WCB NS Strategic Priorities

WCB Nova Scotia has 5 strategic priorities, which are:

- Injury Prevention
- Return to Work
- Our People and Their Service
- Supporting System Reform
- Funding Our Future

This course is focused on **Return to Work**, but **Injury Prevention** is the goal first and foremost.

Injury Prevention Mandate

"We will continue to reduce the provincial workplace injury rate and work toward the elimination of workplace fatalities"

Return to Work Mandate

"We will support people injured on the job and their employers by working to improve our support for timely and safe return to work".

To accomplish their **Injury Prevention Mandate**, WCB Nova Scotia will:

- Strive for a Nova Scotia where no one dies on the job.
- Continue to support a safety culture and tangible safety leadership in health care, particularly long-term care, and home care.

- Continue to support workers and employers in preventing and managing the long-term impact of work-related psychological injury.
- Expand and improve upon senior relationships with WCB executive leaders and major employers to inform and inspire them in injury prevention and return to work.

To accomplish their **Return-to-Work Mandate**, WCB Nova Scotia will:

- Improve their service, overall, toward supporting and partnering with workers, employers, and health care providers in better return to work outcomes.
- Ensure more workplaces have a strong, active return-to-work program, and increase awareness among those we serve about the importance of return to work.
- Add new services with a distinct focus on supporting workers with psychological injuries, and those for whom psychological factors come to influence their physical recovery.
- Leverage the potential in virtual medicine and therapy to remove geographical barriers to treatment.

What is Return to Work?

What it is:

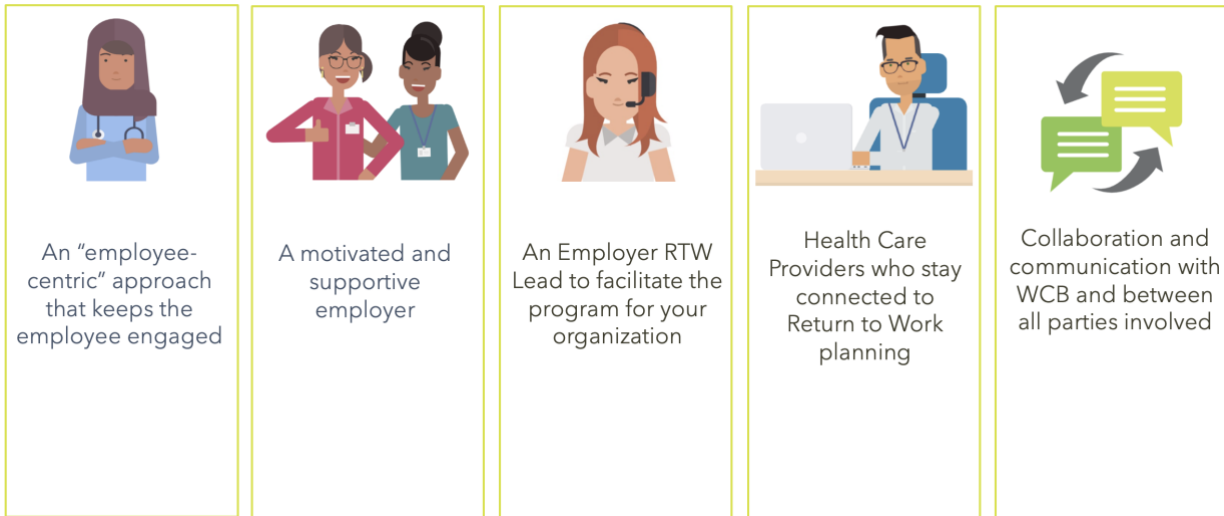
- Focuses on what a person **can** do safely at work.
- Timely and Safe Return to Work (TSRTW) is the collaborative process that considers an employee's restrictions and limitations immediately following an injury that will enable safe recovery at work.
- Looks at the functional abilities of the employee and considers applicable legislation, health, and safety requirements.

What it isn't:

- It is not the program to implement following a catastrophic injury or when restrictions and limitations permanently prevent an employee from doing their pre-injury work.

Return to Work

A Return-to-Work program includes:



An employee-centric approach is an approach that places the worker as a **central key decision maker** regarding their vocational recovery and return to work. It focuses on building employee autonomy through leading with the employees' voice regarding their situational and contextual motivation, expectations, and concerns; and actively engaging them in action planning.

Why is Return to Work Important?

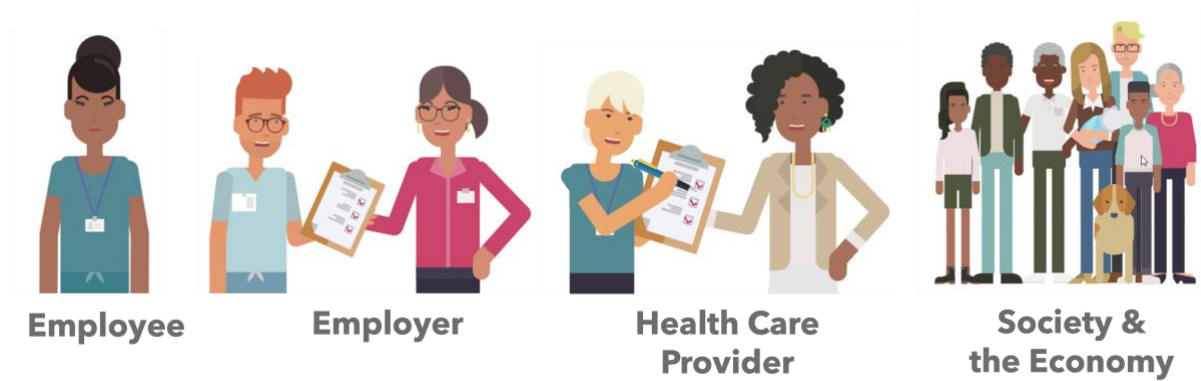
Work plays a large role in our lives. Not being able to work, for any reason, can result in financial and/or psychological hardship. There are several factors that motivate someone's return to work.

Some may include:

- Personal identity
- Staying connected to colleagues and routine.
- Avoiding financial hardship
- Being seen as a valued employee
- A 'work is healthy' mindset.
- Understanding the rehabilitative value of work

BENEFITS OF RETURN TO WORK

Implementing a return-to-work program benefits everyone!



Behind every person hurt on the job, there's a team of people making their road to return and return to work as timely and safe as possible.

Just as a workplace injury has wide-spread impacts on the workforce, implementing a return-to-work program has wide-spread benefits. These include benefits for:

- The employee and their household
- The employer
- Co-workers and supervisors
- Health care providers
- WCB Nova Scotia
- Society and the economy as a whole

Benefits for Employees



- Values the contributions of individuals to their workplaces by keeping them connected to their workplaces
- Maintains a sense of confidence and value while having clear direction and goals
- Eases the psychological impacts of being injured (i.e., reduces anxiety which can impact recovery)
- Promotes overall healthier and safer workplaces that minimize the impact of time-loss through collaboration with all parties involved

Benefits for Employers



- Promotes workplace morale and employee retention while supporting recovery at work
- Keeps employers connected to employees who are valuable resources to their workplace which
- Demonstrates value of employees and that employers care about their people
- Maintains services and reduces loss of productivity and claim costs

Benefits for Health Care Providers



- Uses expertise to provide a proper assessment of functional abilities which will help to determine an employee's RTW goals
- Remains connected to RTW planning including the expectations established by the employee, employer, and case worker
- Becomes an integral member of the 'Return to Work' team which places the employees recovery and overall wellbeing at the center

Benefits of Return to Work | Society & the Economy



- Contributes to an overall better quality of life for individuals, their families, and communities because safer workplaces are an essential component to a healthy, vibrant society and economy
- Avoids transferring the burden to other systems that are under constraints

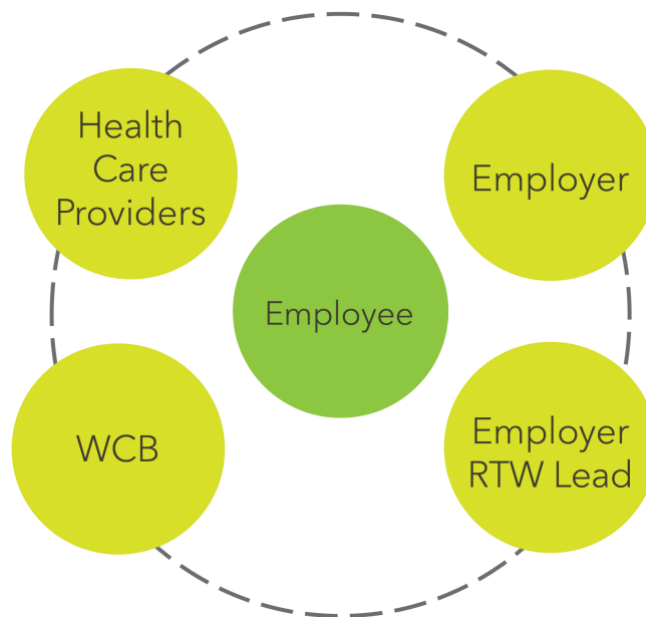
ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The next part of this course is focused on roles and responsibilities. It starts with an overview, before examining the roles of the:

- Employee
- Employer
- Employer RTW Lead
- WCB
- Health Care Provider

Roles & Responsibilities

Ensuring a timely and safe return to work requires all parties to effectively work together to support the employee. In addition, a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities for all parties involved enables better communication and decision-making.



The Return-to-Work Journey

Initiation of Process

Injury occurs; direct access to Health Care Provider is initiated; injury report is filed; parties are notified; WCB claim is registered



Treatment / Monitoring/ RTW Plan

Ongoing treatment occurs; RTW Plan progresses (or initiated); ongoing monitoring, reporting and reassessment and reducing of barriers if required



Assessment

Health Care Provider assessment conducted; treatment recommendations provided to all parties (including restrictions and limitations); RTW Plan initiated



Long-Term Accommodations

Employee at Maximum Medical Recovery/ Permanent Impairment likely & pre-injury job is ruled out; long-term accommodation is requested and initiated

The entire return-to-work journey is not a linear process. Long-term accommodations are not the end point and are rare. The return-to-work journey requires consistent communication and collaboration with all parties.

Important Note: If an employee's psychological injury is the result of a workplace event or series of events, employers should use the standard claims process to report the injury. WCB will then recommend an appropriate course of action according to the Traumatic Psychological Injury Program process.

Employee Roles & Responsibilities

Employees who have been injured must understand their roles and responsibilities in the return-to-work process, including:

- Immediately notifying the supervisor of any work-related injury or illness, with full, accurate & timely information about the incident(s) or event
- Actively participating in the return-to-work program and treatment plans, and having frequent contact with the treatment team – including the Employer's RTW Lead
- Immediately notifying the Employer's RTW Lead of changes that may affect a claim or the return-to-work plan (to be communicated by the RTW Lead to WCB and employer)

Employer Roles & Responsibilities

1. Creating a safe work environment and RTW mindset as part of the workplace culture

This involves:

- Documenting the return-to-work program including policies and expectations
- Ensuring services provided by the RTW Lead are well understood and form the basis of clear expectations, policy & procedures for return to work.
- Ensuring employees understand when and how to contact the RTW Lead
- Providing training for managers and supervisors to stay informed
- Continuing to foster relationships with the RTW Lead who administers the return-to-work program.

2. Ensuring that employees are aware of their roles and responsibilities through communications and training.

This involves:

- Making sure that return-to-work processes are well defined and available for employees.
- Supporting employees' questions about return to work through two-way communication.
- Redirecting employees to the right point person when they have questions or concerns.

3. Supporting the claims process

This involves:

- Providing first aid, arranging transportation to the health care provider in a timely and appropriate manner (e.g., ambulance for a serious injury, Direct Access provider for strain/sprain injuries)
- Supporting the employee in filing an **Injury Report** with WCB, ideally on the day of the incident
- Submitting the **Injury Report** to WCB as soon as they are aware that outside medical attention was sought, or time was lost due to injury. Exceeding 5 business days may lead to a reporting violation fine.
- Offering meaningful and productive modified or transitional work right away. Ensure that it aligns with the employee's abilities. **Employers should not wait for WCB claim decisions to provide support & alternate duties.**

4. Initiating and supporting the return-to-work process, while ensuring the employee feels they are a valued employee.

This involves:

- Notifying the RTW Lead regarding an injured or ill employee and provide injury reports.
- Providing early support for employees with personalized return-to-work plans by offering meaningful and productive modified or transitional work right away
- Ensuring that the modified or transitional work aligns with the employee's abilities.
- Consistently abiding by legislative, regulatory, and program requirements (e.g., the Workers' Compensation Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Nova Scotia)

5. Staying informed on the status of return to work

The RTW Lead will handle day-to-day administration of return to work, however other members of the organization will need to stay informed and provide input by:

- Leading the way for return to work for all employees who have been injured at work – using a direct access program when an injury is reported.
- Collaborating with the RTW Lead, key partners and WCB case workers to develop transitional work options for employees.
- Supporting accommodations
- Creating a welcoming environment
- Keeping up to date on:
 - ✓ An injured employee's functional ability status
 - ✓ Transitional work arrangements
 - ✓ Return to work date and duties
 - ✓ Duration of claim

6. Welcoming the employee back

This involves:

- Communicating the return-to-work plan with the supervisor
- Communicating with the employee
- Making sure co-workers understand their roles and how they can support the employee.

- Sharing return-to-work progress with the RTW Lead and immediately notify the RTW Lead of any issues with the progress of the return-to-work plan.

RTW Lead Roles & Responsibilities

The employer's RTW Lead acts as the employer's return to work point person and has responsibilities along the return-to-work continuum, including:

- Promoting return-to-work policies and programming to support employers' and employees' awareness of the return-to-work policy and program in place.
- Ensuring clear and ongoing communication with all parties during the return-to-work process from start to finish, including the employee, employer, health care provider, and the WCB case worker.
- Working with the employee who has been injured, supervisors, and managers to support transitional work or modified work assignments.
- Supporting the employee throughout the return-to-work process, ensuring they are well informed and feel at the center of return-to-work planning.
- Administering the overall return-to-work program (leveraging WCB My Account as appropriate); tracking injury data, providing status of injury claims & progress of return-to-work plans

WCB Roles & Responsibilities

WCB works with workplaces across Nova Scotia to help prevent workplace injuries, establish strong return-to-work programs, and inform and inspire Nova Scotians to promote healthy and safe workplaces. This includes:

- Providing workplace injury insurance to employers, which in turn offers financial and medical benefits to employees in Nova Scotia
- Working to reduce the human and financial impact of workplace injury
- Providing security to injured employee and their families by supporting their timely and safe return to work.
- Claims administration, support, and return-to-work.
- Field services and employer account support
- Classifications, assessment, rate setting
- Injury prevention coaching, outreach, education
- Prevention campaigns, social marketing, and communications
- Partnership and awareness initiatives

WCB Case Worker Roles & Responsibilities

Case workers are WCB employees who collaborate with employees, the Employer's RTW Lead, employers, and health care providers. They help keep the employee engaged in the return-to-work process by:

- Facilitating and implementing return to work planning, working with all involved parties
- Working with employees and employers to support transitional or modified work and workplace modification options.
- Coordinating and ensuring any required health care and rehabilitation services are working towards the employee's successful return to work.
- Making timely and informed entitlement and service decisions on claims
- Keeping employee recovery top of mind and helps navigate the recovery and claims process.
- Ensuring eligibility and access to benefit payments for earnings lost, along with costs for medical services, are provided.

Health Care Provider Roles & Responsibilities

Health Care Providers (HCPs) have a unique line of sight when it comes to an employee's injuries, illnesses or struggles. HCPs can support return to work by:

- Being an advocate of “work is healthy” philosophy, communicating the health benefits of timely and safe return to work.
- Conducting functional abilities assessment and other services, assisting with recovery and safe return to work
- Providing clinical care and treatment to employees
- Understanding work environment and job demands, comparing functional abilities assessment with critical demands of employee's pre-injury job requirements and available transitional work.
- Helping to identify & remove barriers to determine transitional work; with the employee, the Employer's RTW Lead, employers and WCB
- Creating a treatment plan with the employee
- Providing regular updates to all parties involved

RETURN TO WORK JOURNEY

PROCESS AND CASE STUDY

Key Ingredients of Return-to-Work Programs



- Supports and ensures the employee has access to immediate healthcare treatment and timely and safe return to work.
- Establishes early communication to coordinate services and resources.
- Reduces the personal impact of a workplace injury.
- Decreases time away from work.
- Reduces the human and financial impact of a workplace injury to both the employer and employee.
- Supports recovery and return to health and work

Employer Touch Points

Throughout the return-to-work process, employers will receive the following information:

- Claim entitlement information (e.g., acceptance, medical aid, earnings lost)
- Functional assessment report from the Health Care Provider
- When necessary, confirmation of return-to-work recommendations, including restrictions and limitations.
- Updates on transitional work from the RTW Lead
- When necessary, long-term accommodation recommendation from the RTW Lead

Employers are required to participate/collaborate in the return-to-work process. Specifically, employers are required to:

- Initiate direct health care service provider access.
- Notify their RTW Lead of employee's injury/illness.

- Support the identification of transitional work for the employee
- Collaborate with the employee on their return-to-work plan.
- Collaborate with the RTW Lead and other relevant parties to facilitate and support services for RTW (including completion of injury report)
- Review the long-term accommodation request and determine the ability to provide the respective accommodation to the employee.

Transitional Work



- Transitional work is a **temporary** change to a job that aligns with what the employee can do.
- Changes need to take into consideration an employee's abilities, restrictions, and limitations to transition back to the pre-injury job during recovery. **This includes modified pre-injury work and alternate work.**
- **This work needs to be meaningful, productive and within the employee's skills and abilities** – transitional work helps both parties feel more productive and keeps the employee at the center of the return-to-work process.

What Does Transitional Work Look Like?

Modified pre-injury work.

Enabling safe work by taking the employee's **temporary** restrictions and limitations into consideration through changes to the non-essential duties of the pre-injury job, conditions of employment (e.g., work schedule) or addition of assistive devices to the pre-injury job.

Alternate work

Enabling safe work by taking the employee's **temporary** restrictions and limitations into consideration through changing the essential duties of the pre-injury work with the goal of returning to the pre-injury work.

Restrictions

Clear and specific things to avoid during recovery because there is a specific risk of harm or a safety concern, including but not limited to specific tasks, exposures, body motions, and/or positioned tolerances (e.g., "do not drive")

Limitation

A limitation defines *the extent* to which an employee may perform an activity but does not prevent an injured employee from performing that activity. (e.g., *lift up to 10 pounds*).

Case Studies



Case Study 1

Jude is injured when they slip on something wet on the floor.



Case Study 2

Blair experienced a muscle strain while transferring someone from a bed into a wheelchair. The injury has affected their ability to repeat this specific task.



Case Study 3

Kai is assisting a person who becomes violent and experiences a physical injury with psychological impacts.

Case Study 1 | Jude



Jude is on the job when they hurt their ankle by slipping on something wet on the floor.

Jude tells their supervisor that they have been injured on the job. The supervisor informs the RTW Lead of Jude’s injury.

The RTW Lead reached out to Jude upon being informed of their injury.

How will the RTW Lead support Jude during this initial interaction? What role will the RTW Lead and Jude play at this stage?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

Jude



RTW Lead





When the RTW Lead asked Jude what work they are capable of at present, Jude said they feel they could do sedentary work. The RTW Lead made a referral to physiotherapy for Jude to assess the ankle injury.

Jude went to physiotherapy for an assessment/treatment.

How will the physiotherapist, WCB, and the RTW Lead work together to support Jude at this stage? What role will each of them play?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

Physiotherapist



WCB Case Worker



RTW Lead





Since it was determined that Jude was not capable of the physical demands of their pre-injury work, their employer’s RTW Lead communicated abilities, restrictions, and limitations from the physiotherapist to Jude and their employer.

How should the RTW Lead work together with Jude and their Employer at this stage of the return-to-work process? What role do each of them play?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

RTW Lead



Employer



Jude





After 4 weeks of doing transitional work, the physiotherapist's assessment determined that Jude was now capable of the demands of their pre-injury work, and could return to their full pre-injury duties, successfully completing the return-to-work process!

Case Study 2 | Blair



Blair experienced a muscle strain while transferring someone from a bed into a wheelchair. They injured their back in the process and they can no longer repeat this task.

Blair tells their supervisor that they have been injured on the job. The supervisor supports Blair with direct access to Physiotherapist and informs the RTW Lead of Blair’s injury.

The RTW Lead reached out to Blair upon being informed of their injury.

How should the RTW Lead support Blair during this initial interaction? What role will the RTW Lead and Blair play at this stage?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

Blair



RTW Lead





When the RTW Lead asked Blair what work they are capable of at present, Blair said they didn't feel they could do sedentary work.

Blair went to physiotherapy for an assessment/treatment through direct access.

Through the functional assessment, the physiotherapist determined that Blair could do sedentary functions, but that they were not at pre-injury capabilities. The physiotherapist notifies the RTW Lead, WCB Case worker, and the employer about the sedentary plan.

How should the physiotherapist, the WCB case worker, and the RTW Lead work together to support Blair? What role will each of them play?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

Physiotherapist



WCB Case Worker



RTW Lead



--	--	--



Since it was determined that Blair was not capable of the physical demands of their pre-injury work, the RTW Lead communicated abilities, restrictions, and limitations from the physiotherapist to Blair and their employer.

How should the RTW Lead work together with Blair and the Employer at this stage of the return-to-work process? What role will each of them play?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

RTW Lead



Employer



Jude





Through collaborative discussion with Blair and the employer, the RTW Lead determined that Blair could be accommodated with transitional work. Blair started their transitional work and worked their full hours in this role.

After 2 weeks of working full time, Blair notifies his supervisor that they must stop working and went off work due to continued pain from the injury. The RTW plan was no longer progressing.

How should the RTW Lead, WCB, and the physiotherapist work together to support Blair? What role will each of them play?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

RTW Lead



WCB Case Worker



Physiotherapist





It was decided that it would be best if an occupational therapist came to conduct a job site visit at Blair's place of employment, to support a new return-to-work plan.

Based on the OT's assessment, it was felt that Blair was able to return to work on modified hours while awaiting further medical assessment/treatment.

Blair continued to be supported by the RTW Lead and their WCB Case Worker while following the return-to-work plan and working modified hours.

Blair went to get assessed by a physician to get further tests/scans completed and it was confirmed that Blair was still not at pre-injury capabilities.

What should the RTW Lead do to support Blair at this stage? What role will they play?

Use the space provided below the character to record your response.

RTW Lead





Based on the OT's recommendations, Blair continued to gradually progress through the return-to-work plan.

After 4 weeks and completing an assessment with the physiotherapist, it was determined that Blair was at pre-injury capabilities. Blair could return to their full pre-injury duties.

How should the physiotherapist and RTW Lead work together to facilitate Blair's return to pre-injury duties? What role will each of them play?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

Physiotherapist



RTW Lead



Blair returns to their pre-injury duties, successfully completing the RTW process!

Case Study 3 | Kai



Kai is working with a person who becomes violent. Kai experiences a physical injury with psychological impacts.

The RTW Lead reached out to Kai upon being informed of their injury.

How should the RTW Lead support Kai during this initial interaction?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

Kai



RTW Lead





When the RTW Lead asked Kai what work they are capable of at present, Kai said they felt they could do sedentary work. The RTW Lead made a referral to physiotherapy for Kai.

Kai went to physiotherapy for an assessment/treatment.

Through the functional assessment, the physiotherapist determined that Kai could do sedentary functions, but that they were not at pre-injury capabilities. The physiotherapist provided their report including the RTW plan to the WCB case worker.

Kai also indicated that they had psychological impacts due to the incident.

How should the services providers, WCB and the RTW Lead work together to support Kai? What role will each of them play?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

Physiotherapist



WCB Case Worker



RTW Lead





The RTW Lead communicated abilities, restrictions and limitations to Kai and their employer.

How should the RTW Lead work together with Kai and their employer at this stage of the return-to-work process? What role will each of them play?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

RTW Lead



Employer



Kai





After two months of working full time in an administrative role Kai continued to go to counseling. Following an assessment, the physiotherapist reported that Kai was back at being physically capable of their pre-injury functions at work, but that Kai was not feeling psychologically safe to return to their previous client.

How should the RTW Lead work together with Kai and their employer at this stage of the return-to-work process? What role will each of them play?

Use the space provided below each character to record your response.

RTW Lead



Employer



Kai





It was determined that Kai was able to return to their original role under a revised return-to-work plan which included working with a new client and on-going counseling once a month.

After two additional months, the counsellor recommended that Kai no longer required counselling, permanently not go back to working with the original client, and that it was an appropriate time for the return-to-work process to be considered complete.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT | FUTURE SUCCESS



Keep an “employee-centric” approach in mind



Adapt & refine the RTW process
Know who to reach out to for help



Collaboration and communication between all parties involved is a key success factor

It’s important to keep an “employee-centric” approach in mind when implementing return-to-work processes and policies.

Collaboration and communication between all parties involved is a key success factor!

APPENDIX

Introduction | Definitions

Determination of Employment

Did the employee experience a work-related injury or illness while working for an organization that carries WCB insurance?

Timely and Safe Return to Work (TSRTW)

A collaborative process that considers an employee's restrictions and limitations, at the earliest appropriate opportunity, immediately following an injury to enable safe recovery at work.

Suitable Employment

Work that is reasonably available in geographic proximity to the employee that aligns with the employee's skills and can be performed without compromising the employee's recovery or safety.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational Rehabilitation services may consist of skills upgrading, on-the-job-training, job search preparation, and a variety of other services. The goal of any vocational rehabilitation plan is always to return the employee to their pre-injury employment, but where this is not possible, to similar/suitable employment.