

CCIR#

**CONTINUING CARE
INFORMATION RELEASE**

TO: Long-Term Care Facilities & Home Care Agencies

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DATE: May, 2023

RE: Workplace Safety Initiatives: Return to Work Program Update

The Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care (SLTC) has continued to advance Workplace Safety Initiatives (WSIs) to support and promote worker safety across the continuing care sector.

On December 15, 2022, CCIR #22-148.0 was sent to the sector with an update on all WSIs underway. As part of this CCIR, SLTC noted the progress of the Stay-at-Work / Return-to-Work Initiative (referred to as Return to Work (RTW)), which highlighted the results from the June 2022 survey.

We are now excited to announce that after an extensive Request for Proposal (RFP) process, Dallas Mercer Consulting (DMC) has been chosen as the third-party provider for the **zonal model option**, and those who opted into this option (via the survey) will receive support from a designated resource. DMC is an Atlantic Canadian company with more than 20 years experience in providing disability management services.

Those that opted into the **internal services model option** to maintain and enhance their own established RTW programs will be receiving their funding contribution to be put towards their programs.

Timelines and Next Steps

Letters will be sent to each organization in both options (i.e., zonal and internal), detailing specific information that pertains to their organization and the option they've chosen. This includes the requirement to complete and submit quarterly reports.

For employers with their own established RTW programs, we anticipate funding letters will be sent in May 2023 which will indicate funding to offset some of the costs

of the program you are currently offering. As noted in CCIR #22-097.0, established programs must meet the key elements of a RTW program, and SLTC reserves the right to request supporting documentation to verify this.

For employers in the zonal RTW program, we anticipate launching the service, supported by Dallas Mercer Consulting in late June and into the second quarter (July - September) of 2023.

An evaluation process is slated to begin in late Fall 2023 so we can track the progress of these RTW programs and services as we move toward achieving the targeted outcomes.

Information Sessions

All employers in both the zonal and internal services model are required to attend a **mandatory information session**. Each session is tailored to the employer's respective model and includes details on what a RTW program entails, roles, responsibilities (e.g., employee, supervisor, Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) case worker, Dallas Mercer Consulting etc.), case study activities and an opportunity to ask questions.

WCB Workplace Consultants will be scheduling and conducting these sessions, so employers can expect an invitation from WCB in the coming weeks. The sessions are scheduled to begin in **late May** and will be completed by mid-July.

For more information, please review the frequently asked questions provided below. Should you have questions, contact ContinuingCare@novascotia.ca.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is a Return to Work (RTW) program? Why is it needed?

The Government of Nova Scotia is committed to workplace safety initiatives and is funding the opportunity for employers in long-term care, home care, and the disability support program to establish a 'Return to Work' program for their residential care and continuing care employees. A Return to Work (RTW) program is a 'worker-centric' program that supports the recovery of employees who experience an injury or illness while on the job. It keeps the employee engaged and connected with the workplace while they recovery and seek the medical assistance needed. There will be two RTW models in long-term care and home care in Nova Scotia.

You said there are two models. Why not just offer the same program everywhere?

Some employers have already invested in and have their own RTW program established with designated resources to support employees who have been injured on the job. Government wants to provide an option for those employers to keep their in-house programs and designated staff in place to deliver these services to their employees. The Government will offer a funding contribution (not intended to cover all costs) to better support and resource their program. These programs are required to have key elements within their existing RTW programs, as laid out by WCB. This option is only available for Long Term Care Facilities and Home Care Agencies funded by SLTC.

Other employers may implement a program for their employees with the support and expertise of a 3rd party disability management service provider. They may be a smaller employer or not have designated resources for this work or the experience in-house to offer a program like this. By providing this program, the department intends for them to leverage that assistance to better support employees and build a culture of safety and RTW in continuing care and residential care.

What is my delivery model?

Your delivery model depends on the option you, the employer, selected. In June of 2022 a survey was sent to all LTC and HC workplaces where employers were asked to choose between one of the two service options. Any employers who failed to respond to the survey were defaulted into the zonal model.

The two options were:

1. A **zonal model** with 3rd party support at no additional cost:

In the Zonal model you will have a shared pool of resources that provide support to multiple facilities / agencies. This will be referred to as the 'Zonal Model.' In early 2023, Dallas Mercer Consulting was selected as the 3rd Party Provider through a competitive procurement process. Their expertise and services will be funded by the Province of Nova Scotia at no additional cost to LTC and HC employers and they will be active collaborators with all parties (i.e., WCB Case Workers, LTC and HC employers, employees, etc.) and supporting the personalized RTW plan of employees who are injured on the job and returning to work. Those who have chosen the Zonal model option will receive a letter in Spring 2023 that will outline information and next steps, what to expect, along with the accountability reporting requirements as part of this funding approach.

2. An **internal services model** to continue with employer established RTW program:

In the Internal Services model, you will receive a funding contribution toward your own established RTW program with the understanding that your program meets the WCB key elements and that you have a designated resource in place. This model entails collaboration with all parties (i.e., WCB Case Workers, LTC and HC employers, an employer RTW Lead, employee, etc.) that are supporting the personalized RTW plan of employees who are injured on the job. Those who have chosen the internal services model option will receive a funding letter that will outline the contribution amount that will be provided, along with the accountability reporting requirements as part of this funding.

What if I already have a 3rd party (not Dallas Mercer Consulting) that provides services for my organization for RTW?

This would be considered an internal services model. As part of this model, you should continue that relationship and your focus on RTW Programming. You should take the information session designed for employers with their own internal service, and you will be responsible to report service status, progress and accountability requirements to SLTC directly.

How will the government know if this program is successful?

The government will establish a baseline of key data points to describe the current situation in these sectors, by employer, such as injury frequency, duration, time lost, cost and potentially others. An evaluation will also be completed to ensure the program is effective in addressing their key concerns.

What type of RTW program will Dallas Mercer Consulting offer?

DMC will take a worker-centric approach. A worker-centric approach in the RTW program places the worker as a central key decision maker regarding their timely and safe return to work. It focuses on building worker autonomy by actively engaging them

in action planning and thoughtfully listening to their perspectives regarding their motivations, expectations, concerns and wellbeing.

Can I join the zonal model if I change my mind?

Currently, there is no opportunity to switch models. Only newly built LTC facilities will have the option to opt into the zonal model at any time, as neither option was ever presented to them.

Why is the government investing in this initiative?

The Government is committed to the safety of all workers on the job. As part of this commitment, they are investing in a province-wide approach to implementing a Return-to-Work program for the SLTC sector. This effort provides a worker-centric return to work service which will help ensure that employees who are injured on the job, get the support and health care services needed. The impacts of Return-to-Work Programs reach beyond the individual and enhances workplace safety by reducing average injury durations through early interventions and support, reducing staff shortages, fostering a positive working environment, and encouraging the recruitment and retention of workers in the sector.

Has the sector asked for a program like this?

Yes, the sector has been asking for additional support and resources to help address rising injury rates and time lost due to injuries to workers while on the job. Representatives of the disability support program, LTC and HC sectors worked together in 2021 to inform and develop sector specific RTW programs, roles, responsibilities, and key objectives. The service will be offered at no cost to these sectors.

What are the benefits for employees? Is this a way to get employees back to work faster?

Employees see numerous benefits from a RTW program, including:

- Being supported through an injury to receive needed healthcare services;
- Being supported in stay at work or return to work, and maintain their connection to the workplace;
- Minimizing wages lost while injured or recovering;
- Having a positive experience in proceeding through the WCB-claims process; and
- Demonstrated commitment to safety, health, and well-being in the workplace.