

## Return to Work Services for Employees in the Disability Support Program Residential Sector

The Government of Nova Scotia remains committed to ensuring a safe work environment with practices that prevent workplace injuries and support injured/ill workers throughout their recovery. The Government has committed funding to implementation and support of **Return-to-Work programming** for Disability Support Program (DSP) service providers.

Return to Work (RTW) programming supports workers who may become injured/ill on the job by encouraging workers to stay connected to the workplace and creating a personalized plan for a timely and safe return to work. These practices can lead to the reduction of duration of absences across the sector and promote safer workplaces.

The Department of Community Services (DCS) is offering new designated, shared RTW resources to all licensed DSP residential service providers at no additional cost to you. These resources will support you with activities such as:

- Managing WCB-claims for your workers on your behalf
- Working with you to develop personalized return to work plans for transitional duties for your workers after workplace illnesses/injuries
- Coordinating and tracking communications among stakeholders (the Department, employers, injured/ill workers, union representatives, and WCB Case Workers)

A Request for Proposal (RFP) process was completed to hire a third-party provider to support the RTW shared service, and Dallas Mercer Consulting (DMC) was awarded the contract. They will start providing this service to DSP service provider employers in the coming weeks. The Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) is a key partner and will provide information on key program elements to **all licensed residential DSP employers**. This education includes roles and responsibilities, along with communication expectations. The intent is for all parties to have the same information to support consistency of RTW programs across the sector. To support **every** organization's RTW program, we strongly urge your participation in the WCB information session to gain the most benefit from this program. A WCB representative will be contacting you to schedule your session.

### Timelines and Launch Date

The Workplace Safety Initiatives project team is committed to efficiently and effectively rolling out this program. We anticipate launching the service, supported by DMC, in the coming weeks.

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

If you have questions about the implementation of the RTW program, please contact Vicki Black by email at: [vicki.black@novascotia.ca](mailto:vicki.black@novascotia.ca).

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## Frequently Asked Questions: Return to Work Implementation

### **What is a Return-to-Work program? And 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 'worker-centric' and supports the recovery of employees who experience injuries or illnesses while on the job. It keeps employees engaged and connected with the workplace while they seek the medical assistance and supports needed.

A RTW program promotes an employee's timely and safe return-to-work through a collaborative process where the employee works with their employer, a WCB Case Manager, and DMC to create and advance a personalized RTW plan. A RTW plan identifies the functional abilities of the employee and offers meaningful and productive transitional work that aligns with what the employee can do (i.e., respecting their physical and psychological restrictions, limitations, and safety requirements of the job).

### **What do we mean by worker-centric?**

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.

### **Why is the government doing this?**

The Government is committed to the safety of all workers on the job. And as part of this commitment, they are investing in a province-wide approach to implementing a Return-to-Work program for the DSP sector. This effort provides a worker-centric return to work service that will help ensure that employees who are injured on the job get the support and health care services they need. The impacts of Return-to-Work Programs reach beyond the individual and enhance workplace safety by reducing average injury durations through early interventions and support, reducing staff shortages, fostering positive working environments, 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 (DSP), Long Term Care (LTC) and Home Care (HC) sectors worked together in 2021 to inform and develop sector-specific RTW programs, roles, responsibilities, and key objectives.

All DSP employers will be offered access to shared disability and injury management services provided by DMC with extensive expertise in these services. The service will be offered at no cost to DSP residential service providers.



### **What are the benefits of a program like this?**

Behind every person hurt on the job, there is a team of people making their road to recovery and return to work as timely and as safe as possible. Just as a workplace injury or illness has widespread impacts on the workforce, implementing a RTW Program has far-reaching benefits. These include benefits for you, the employer and your employees, their households, Health Care Service Providers, the Worker's Compensation Board of Nova Scotia (WCB), and the wider economy/society.

According to the WCB, the general benefits of a program like this include, but are not limited to:

- showing commitment to properly supporting workers post-injury
- aiding in recovery; it is good physically, mentally, and emotionally for the worker and their co-workers
- keeping important skills, abilities and knowledge held by the worker, in the workplace
- helping to build, promote and support more positive workplace environments; and
- enabling better management of direct and indirect post-injury costs.

### **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
- support in staying at work or returning to work, and maintaining 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.

### **What is the delivery model for our sector?**

DSP will have a shared pool of resources that provide support to multiple residential service provider agencies. This will be referred to as the 'Zonal Model.' DMC was selected as the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 DSP residential employers and they will be active collaborators with all parties (i.e., WCB Case Workers, DSP employers) supporting the personalized RTW plan of employees who are injured on the job.

### **What types of claims are eligible for Return-to-Work programming?**

The Return-to-Work program is for injuries and illnesses that occur in the workplace.

### **What if there is a claim that is already underway when the RTW program launches?**

If there is a claim that is already underway, the claim will transition to DMC once the service starts.

### **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 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.