

Bulletin

Return to work plans (RTWP)

This information bulletin has been developed to assist employers in their understanding and development of a Return to Work Plan (RTWP).

Employers must give a proposal in writing for a RTWP to the worker within 7 days after the employer becomes aware that the worker's total or partial incapacity is likely to exceed 28 days.

A RTWP is a tool for employers to proactively help injured workers safely return to work as soon as practicable.

NT WorkSafe is a signatory to the position statement, *Realising the Health Benefits of Work*, introduced by the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM). The paper highlights the longer someone is off work the less likely they are to return. Providing suitable duties will help the injured worker recover at work while reducing disruption to their life and disruption to the business.

An effective RTWP relies on the cooperative efforts of all participants – employers, workers, insurers, medical professionals, allied health professionals and vocational rehabilitation providers. The key principles underlying the safe and early return to work of injured workers include:

- A RTWP based on the principle that an employer can facilitate a coordinated return to work
- The plan is delivered according to medical advice and where necessary the use of a vocational rehabilitation provider.

The *Return to Work Act* defines rehabilitation as a process designed to:

- ensure the worker's return to work as soon as practicable, or
- maximise the worker's ability to live independently.

A RTWP as part of a rehabilitation program should:

- be developed in consultation with the injured worker and the treating medical practitioner (and vocational rehabilitation provider if appointed)
- be tailored, outcome-based and set out the steps to achieve return to work
- be available to an injured worker with a work capacity
- recognise the existing skills, experience and capabilities of the injured worker to allow suitable employment to be found
- if necessary, utilise retraining when it is not possible for the employee to return to pre-injury duties.
- consider the use of host employers as part of the alternative employer incentive scheme developed by the Work Health Authority.

An example of a RTWP template is provided at the end of this document.

There are several important steps involved in preparing an effective RTW plan:

1. Gathering information

A good starting point is to have a copy of your worker's pre-injury job duties and a copy of the workers current medical certificate of capacity.

Compare the pre-injury duties physical requirements with any medical restrictions listed on the medical certificate of capacity. Identify if any pre-injury duties can be achieved on a return to work plan.

If the worker's medical restrictions do not allow for any pre-injury duties to be performed, then consult with other work areas within your business to find suitable duties to allow for the injured worker to safely return to the workplace as soon as practicable.

RTWPs are unique to the individual worker and will vary on the nature of their injury. Studies have shown that staged RTWPs, developed with the input of the worker are most successful.

A RTWP should start when the worker has any capacity to work. A good RTW plan should clearly outline the different 'stages' the worker will go through until the worker is ready (and declared fit by their treating medical practitioner) to return to their full time pre-injury work, including hours.

2. Determine the return to work goal

The RTWP goal should be decided in consultation with the employer, the worker and the treating medical practitioner. In the majority of cases, the goal would be for the worker to safely return to their pre-injury job as soon as practicable.

Consultation with the worker and their treating medical practitioner will be required in determining the date expected to achieve the RTWP goal.

3. Document the plan

The RTWP should be considered a draft in the first instance and given to the worker and their treating medical practitioner to review. Any changes to the plan should be made if possible. Once the RTWP is complete, it should be signed by the employer, the worker and the treating medical practitioner.

4. Implement the plan

A RTWP should start when the worker has any capacity to work as provided on the medical certificate of capacity and the plan has been agreed by the parties.

5. Monitor the plan

Keep in touch with your worker and their supervisor. Set up weekly informal review meetings to ensure the plan is followed and any concerns are discussed. Be flexible to any changes that need to be made and update the RTWP to reflect the changes.

6. Review the plan

Generally the plan would be reviewed at intervals agreed with the worker and their treating medical practitioner. The review date may be proposed in conjunction with the updated medical certificate of capacity, which would be at least every 28 days.

Returning to work – guide for employers Video

This short video will assist you getting your injured worker back to work, and explain what to do and what help is available - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1A3hM0K9eA>

Contact us

For further information please contact us on 1800 250 713, facsimile (08) 8999 5141, via email at datantworksafe@nt.gov.au or go to the NT WorkSafe website at www.worksafe.nt.gov.au

Sample return-to-work plan

Name of Insurance Company:	
Claim number:	

The following return-to-work (RTW) plan has been developed for:

1. Last, surname, or family name:			
First or given name:			
2. Job title:			
3. Supervisor:			
4. Work location:			
5. Name of Treating Medical Practitioner:			
6. Suitable alternative duties:			Restrictions (including specific medical):
7. Specific duties to be avoided:			
8. Long term goals and/or steps to be taken to facilitate a return to work:			
9. Hours/days of work:			
10. Return date:			
11. Length of plan:			
12. Review dates:			

Disclaimer

We have reviewed, understand and agree to the tasks assigned and the above medical restrictions. If any problems occur in completing tasks, they will be immediately communicated to the worker's Supervisor/Manager.

The following parties have agreed to the plan:

Worker:		Date:	
Supervisor/Manager:		Date:	
Treating Medical Practitioner:		Date:	