

RETURN-TO-WORK

Getting Started



WORK SAFE. FOR LIFE.

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RETURN-TO-WORK: THE BEST OUTCOME FOR YOU, THE BEST OUTCOME FOR YOUR EMPLOYEE.

Injuries are happening. In fact, in Nova Scotia they are happening more often than they should. Preventing injuries is our best option, but if an injury occurs, the best result is a safe and timely return to work. Still injured employees in Nova Scotia take longer to return to work than in every other province or territory on Canada. Too many employees are off work for too long in our province – and some never return to work.

Work is healthy, and research proves it. When injury occurs, staying connected to the workplace and continuing to work is the most important factor in recovery.

The longer employees are off work, the less likely they are to return. So when an injury does occur, the best result for everyone is a safe and timely return to work. The Workers' Compensation Board's (WCB) goal is to work with employers, employees, unions and health care providers to ensure this happens.

Employers have a key role to play. Big employers, small employers, self-employed businesses with one part-time helper – across all industries, the fact is this: return-to-work isn't just good for your employees, it's good for business. You'll reduce downtime, keep morale high, and ultimately lower the premiums you pay for workplace injury insurance.

WORKPLACE INJURIES PUT MORE THAN

8,000

**NOVA SCOTIANS
OFF THE JOB EVERY YEAR**

WHY YOU NEED A RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAM

A Return-to-Work program can reduce the human impact of injury in your workplace, save you time and it can save you money. When you, your management team, injured employees, the WCB, union and health care providers all work together, an effective Return-to-Work program will:

- Allow your employee to continue working, keeping valuable skill sets and knowledge at work for you.
- Reduce or eliminate a wage loss for employees.
- Ensure communication between you and your employee, maintaining the connection to the workplace.
- Minimize lost productivity.
- Eliminate or reduce the costs of retraining new employees.
- In many cases, reduce the risk of re-injury.
- Maintain morale.
- Help reduce your WCB premiums.

An employee – let's call him Joe – is injured on the job, and he may lose time from work. A good Return-to-Work program maintains the focus to what Joe can do, not what he can't do. Here are some of the benefits:

- When Joe returns to work, things return to normal and disruption of his life is minimized.
- Joe's lost earnings are reduced or eliminated.
- Joe stays active which speeds up recovery.
- Joe keeps important social networks at the workplace which supports recovery.
- Joe's risk of being re-injured may be reduced.
- Joe maintains a sense of value, purpose and self confidence.

Document your Return-to-Work program and ensure everyone understands what to do if an injury occurs. And remember, your program can be scaled to the size and complexity of your organization.

STEP 1

SELECT A RETURN-TO-WORK COORDINATOR OR CREATE A COMMITTEE

First things first – you’ll need to attach a name and a face to return-to-work in your workplace. The coordinator guides the day-to-day function of your Return-to-Work program.

Depending on the size of your workforce, you may have a safety representative. The Return-to-Work coordinator will work closely with the safety representative. Be sure to choose individuals who will work well together. Both should have a balanced understanding of employer and employee points of view. Experience or knowledge of processes across your workplace is also valuable.

In larger workplaces, the coordinator should spearhead the creation of a committee to help develop the Return-to-Work program. In some cases, you could ask the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHS) to take on this responsibility. You should also try to have representatives from all aspects of your operation on your committee. If your workplace is unionized, it is important committee members reflect the viewpoints of both labour and management.

ABOUT COMMITTEES...

If you have 20 or more employees regularly employed at a workplace, you’re required to have a JOHS committee. If you like, this committee may also coordinate your Return-to-Work program.

Your Return-to-Work committee may also be a sub-committee of the JOHS committee. It may involve some members or not all, or it may be completely separate. It’s up to you. It’s all about what works for you and your employees.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD RETURN-TO-WORK COMMITTEE MEMBER?

- An understanding of the challenges injured employees face in returning to work.
- An awareness of the human and financial costs associated with workplace injuries.
- An understanding of the role work can play in injury recovery.
- Knowledge of occupational health and safety, human resources and employee benefits is ideal.
- Open to creative approaches in addressing return-to-work issues and challenges.

EXAMPLE: RETURN-TO-WORK COORDINATOR

Joanna is ABC Manufacturing's Return-to-Work coordinator. She helped develop the program.

Joanna is part of ABC's JOHS committee – which also handles return-to-work issues for ABC and their 350 employees. One day, Travis is seriously injured at work. After Travis receives first aid, and while JOHS committee members investigate the injury, Joanna talks to Travis and helps him get the immediate care he needs. She contacts the WCB to file an Accident Report Form. She keeps in touch with Travis regularly to see how he's doing. Meanwhile, she works with the WCB case worker, Travis and his health care providers to develop a plan for transitional duties so Travis can come back to a job that he can perform safely while he recovers from the injury. Once back to the workplace, Joanna and the WCB case worker support Travis's recovery and continue to enhance his job duties until he is fully able to perform his pre-injury job. By returning to work, the human and financial impact of the injury on both Travis and ABC is reduced.

**INJURED EMPLOYEES STAY
OFF THE JOB
LONGER IN NOVA SCOTIA
THAN IN ANY OTHER PROVINCE**

One of the first tasks of the coordinator or committee will be to advise you regarding a Return-to-Work policy.

A Return-to-Work policy is your guide to creating a spirit of health and productivity in your workplace. It clearly outlines the commitment of management, unions or employee representatives, and employees themselves.

The goal of the program is safe and timely return-to-work. All policies, procedures, roles, responsibilities and communications must support and reinforce this goal. The policy is the anchor for return-to-work in your organization.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

It's critical you show leadership in your Return-to-Work policy. It must not be simply a poster on a wall or a piece of paper in a filing cabinet – it must be a philosophy lived and breathed across your organization. From the CEO to the entry-level employee, strive to foster a work environment based on the fundamental belief that work is healthy and helps recovery.

Ensure the policy is clearly worded and easy to understand.

The policy should outline the values and philosophy of the program and include agreed upon terms of reference. It should also include the expectations of both management and employees if an injury occurs.

Your policy should be signed by a senior leader, underlining the organization's commitment to helping employees return to meaningful, healthy and safe work. In addition, you might want to have employees sign the policy during their orientation, to ensure they are aware of their return-to-work rights and responsibilities.

For examples of Return-to-Work policies, visit <http://www.wcb.ns.ca/return-to-work/>

STEP 3

PERFORM A JOB TASK ANALYSIS

As part of your safety program, it is helpful to have a detailed task or process analysis of all jobs in your operation. This is valuable information to assess potential injury risks or hazards before they become an issue.

A similar process can be used to develop a job task analysis – an incredibly valuable tool in your Return-to-Work program that takes a detailed look at the work tasks each job involves.

This can help you determine the duties that can be assigned to an injured employee based on their functional abilities. Remember – work is healthy, and it's all about what an employee can do – not what they can't do.

Job task analyses varies from one organization to the next. Find the one that works for you.

A GOOD JOB TASK ANALYSIS INCLUDES:

- Detailed descriptions of each job and tasks involved including the tools, machines, and equipment used, postures required, and the height and weight of objects lifted or moved.
- Endurance factors such as strength required for lifting, how long one has to walk, stand, sit, and the physical demands placed on the shoulders, back, arms and legs.

EXAMPLE: JOB TASK ANALYSIS

Position description:	Baker
Job task analyzed:	Baking donuts and other foods
Machines involved:	Ovens, kitchen utensils, knives, mixers, conveyors
Objects lifted or moved:	Mix packages, 8 kg, storage (knees) to mixer (waist) height
Frequent motion:	Bending to low oven
Strain, work demand:	MEDIUM work (lifting 8kg bags frequently)

NOTE: From a prevention point of view, the job task analysis identifies hazards and potential injuries and suggests controls to mitigate them. Every step of the process is broken down – for example, removing the pan from the oven involves a risk due to heat, which is controlled with heat-resistant gloves. This information can be developed at the same time as the job task analysis above.

Your local physiotherapist is a great resource in helping you analyze jobs and write descriptions. See your Preventing Workplace Injuries (PWI) resource manual on the prevention section of www.wcb.ns.ca for more information.

STRAINS AND SPRAINS ACCOUNT FOR

60%

OF ALL TIME-LOSS INJURIES IN NOVA SCOTIA

When an injury occurs, the goal for both the employer and the employee is to help get things back to the way they were before the injury. This is where defining transitional duties comes in.

Transitional duties must be meaningful, productive and within the injured employee's skills and abilities. When an employee returns to transitional duties, work together to progressively increase duties as their function improves.

Transitional Duties:

Any temporary change to the employee's job tasks that align with the employee's functional abilities – what the employee can do.

General questions of wages and salary around transitional duties, should also be addressed and documented when planning your Return-to-Work program – not decided on a case-by-case basis.

Although, it is important to be flexible and have the ability to tailor decisions as appropriate. Transitional duties should be as closely related to the original job as possible given the employee's restrictions. The transitional assignment should be short-term. A date to return to regular duties should be clearly determined at the outset based on when the employee is physically able to return to the original pre-injury job.

Effective and efficient assessment of injuries and assignment of transitional duties will minimize work time lost.

EXAMPLE: TRANSITIONAL DUTIES

Tyler works in a warehouse and strains his back. Depending on various factors, there are numerous options for transitional duties.

- **Pre-injury job with modifications of some duties;**

Example: Tyler returns to his same job, but now moves boxes with a cart, instead of by hand.

- **Pre-injury job with elimination of some duties;**

Example: Tyler returns to his job, but no longer moves heavier boxes.

- **Some pre-injury duties with some new duties;**

Example: In addition to moving lighter boxes, Tyler helps with inventory and tracking shipments.

- **New duties;**

Example: Unfortunately, Tyler, is temporarily unable to return to his pre-existing job. He now helps with accounting and costing in the office until he can return to the warehouse.

PROMOTE YOUR RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAM

STEP 5

You've appointed a Return-to-Work coordinator, you've chosen a committee, and you have a policy in place. All job functions in your organization have been evaluated, and you've done some thinking about transitional duties for injured employees.

Now it's time to promote the return-to-work message across your organization.

Face-to-face meetings are the best way to deliver information about new programs. When it's logistically feasible, hold staff meetings and outline the approach to return-to-work in person and ensure responsibilities are understood. This sends a strong message of commitment.

Coupled with your prevention message, make return-to-work part of every orientation. An information package will help to lessen the concerns about what happens if an injury occurs and reassures new employees you will be there for them.

Take every opportunity to promote the importance of return-to-work, and your company's commitment to the new policy. Mention it informally whenever possible and ensure your policy is posted prominently. Ensure your actions support the goal of safe and timely return-to-work.

As you promote return-to-work, keep a few themes in mind:

- Show the human and financial impact of workplace injury.
- Outline the responsibilities of return-to-work partners (employee, health care provider, employer and WCB).
- Promote the benefits of return-to-work for both you and your employees.

It's also very important to share consistent messages with staff, managers, supervisors, executive team, union executive, and your Board of Directors.

SPREAD THE NEWS: RETURN-TO-WORK INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Here are a few ideas to let employees know return-to-work is key to what you do:

- Mention the program at key staff meetings.
- Promote the program in employee newsletters.
- Send a memo or an email to all employees.
- Post your policy in common areas.
- Dedicate a section of your employee Intranet to return-to-work success stories (always consider confidentiality).

NOVA SCOTIA HAS THE HIGHEST RATE OF SELF-REPORTED DISABILITY IN CANADA

MANAGING RETURN-TO-WORK WHEN AN INJURY OCCURS: STEPS TO FOLLOW

Despite your best intentions, an injury has occurred at your workplace. You've provided first aid and medical attention to your employee as needed. Your investigation of the incident is underway to discover how the injury happened and to ensure it doesn't happen again. This section outlines what's next.

MONITOR YOUR CLAIMS COSTS

MyAccount: All of your WCB account information can be accessed quickly and easily through MyAccount, including online reporting, payment details and details of injury cost associated with your workers' claims. This 24/7 online service is free, but you must sign up to access it. Register at www.my-account.ns.ca.

Advice Notices: If you would like details of injury costs associated with your workers' claims, you may request an Advice Notice by calling 1-800-870-3331.

The return-to-work process starts immediately following an injury:

1 Report the injury – If the employee needs medical attention or will lose time from work, fill out and submit a WCB Injury Report. This report must be submitted within five days of your being notified a workplace injury has occurred – penalties may apply for late reporting. A WCB case worker is assigned to the claim once we receive this report. The WCB Injury Report is available at www.wcb.ns.ca, under Forms/Employers.

Submit the WCB Injury Report online using MyAccount or fax the completed form to 902-491-8001.

2 Keep in touch with the employee – Let the employee know you are concerned for their health and wellness. Reassure them you will help them get back to work as soon as it is safely possible.

3 Provide health care – The type of health care required depends on the severity of the injury. If the employee experiences a sprain or strain at work, they can go directly to a WCB-approved physiotherapist for an assessment. Contact the WCB or visit www.wcb.ns.ca/physio for a list of approved physiotherapists. For injuries more serious than a sprain or strain, or when in doubt, the employee should immediately go to the hospital or doctor.

STRAINS AND SPRAINS

For sprain and strain injuries, you also need to:

3(a) Complete the PT Intake Report (Form A) – Fill out the worker and employer sections of the report and send it to the physiotherapist or have the employee take it with them to the clinic. Be sure to attach the employee’s current functional job demands, or a job description, and available transitional duties. The physiotherapist will complete the form and send a copy to the WCB and the employee’s doctor.

If what the employee can safely do matches the functional demands of their job, the employee can return to their job right away.

If the employee is unable to return to their regular job right away, the physiotherapist will provide a Physical Abilities Report – Form E. This report is updated every two weeks to show the employee’s functional progress toward recovery and returning to their regular job.

A Worker’s Guide to Early Assessment of Sprains and Strains at Work explains Direct Access to Physiotherapy. Both the guide and information are available on our website, at www.wcb.ns.ca/physio.

4 Develop a Return-to-Work plan – The WCB case worker will work with you, the injured employee, union representative (if unionized workplace), and the employee’s health care providers to determine the employee’s Return-to-Work plan.

5 Provide transitional duties – If the employee returns to transitional duties, we will continue to work together to ensure the Return-to-Work plan includes appropriate duties based on the employee’s improving function. The objective is the employee’s safe return to full, pre-injury job duties.

6 Support your employee – You can support your employee throughout the return-to-work process by:

- Reassuring your employee you are concerned with their health and wellness.
- Helping to maintain your employee’s dignity.
- Maintaining communication with your employee, WCB case worker and health care providers.
- Providing meaningful work, and monitoring it.
- Accommodating your employee’s scheduled health care appointments.
- Ensuring the job duties are increased as your employee’s abilities increase.
- Focusing on the objective of returning your employee to full pre-injury duties.
- Maintaining your employee’s connection to the pre-injury job.

In the unlikely event your employee does not recover to their pre-injury condition, and is unable to perform the duties of their pre-injury job, you will need to find an alternate but suitable job. Your WCB case manager and vocational rehabilitation counselor will assist with permanent job changes.

If you have concerns at any time, contact your WCB case worker.

MORE WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR EMPLOYEE

EIP: Employment Incentives Program

A fast, easy way of doing better business

Introduction

Using a variety of technical and financial incentives, the Workers' Compensation Board's Employment Incentives Program (EIP) is designed to help employers stay competitive, while giving workers who have been injured on the job a chance to once again make a productive contribution to their lives, their families and their province.

EIP Works

Since it was introduced in 1987, the EIP has helped many workers find and keep rewarding, full-time jobs with employers who have benefited from the EIP's valuable, cost-saving incentives.

Incentives

Your regional Case Manager can help you identify one or more financial and technical incentives to maximize your business potential. These may include:

Workplace Modifications

We may design and finance a fully accessible workplace to ensure your worker's safety and that your operational needs are met.

Our workplace modification incentives range from providing simple cushioned standing mats to such custom-made equipment as:

- height-adjustable desks
- ergonomic chairs
- raised foot rests
- wheelchair ramps

Simple or complex, our EIP workplace modifications are meant to provide your employee with a safe, comfortable and, above all, productive place to work.

Technological Enhancements

Computers and their operators have fast become a necessity in today's high-tech business world.

Depending on your needs and your worker's abilities, EIP can offer you technological support, such as computer hardware and software, when you hire one of our qualified operators.

And, we can modify the equipment to enhance your worker's performance. For example, such technical modifications may include:

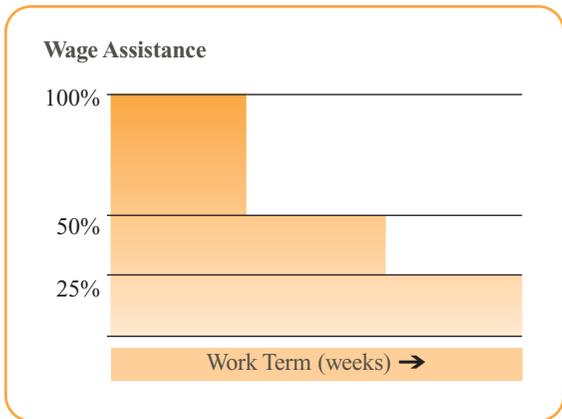
- wrist rests
- enlarged or "split" keyboards
- large-screen monitors
- voice-activated command consoles

Wage Assistance

Our EIP wage assistance is a forgivable loan, paid in decreasing amounts over a pre-approved employment period.

For example, depending on the terms of your EIP contract, we will cover the full amount of your worker's salary and benefits for the first period of a work term—while the worker is training. Our coverage will then decrease to 50% and then again to 25% in periodic stages over the remaining wage assistance period depending upon your worker's capabilities.

Wage assistance is available to employers who are reasonably certain that their worker's full-time employment will continue after their EIP contract ends. And, if it does, the employer's EIP wage assistance loan will be forgiven.



Injury Cost Protection

All employers accepted for an EIP contract will automatically benefit from our injury cost protection incentive.

Here's how it works. Any payments we make to compensate your worker for an old, or new, workplace injury during the EIP period will not be charged against your WCB account. In this way, you will avoid having such costs added into the calculation of your WCB assessment rate.

Our EIP injury cost protection incentive is meant to protect both employers and workers. It's just one more way the EIP works to benefit everyone.

Benefits

At the WCB, we believe the best compensation for an injured worker is getting back to work. By working toward this goal, you, your worker and your community benefit.

The worker is happier and healthier

With the right training, conditioning and support, a worker injured on the job can return to being an active and productive member of the workforce. Research shows that workers recover more fully and are more satisfied when they are back at work.

As the employer, you also benefit from having a qualified worker as part of your staff. Hiring a skilled worker under EIP will increase your productivity and lower your costs.

And the WCB benefits, too.

With your help, we are able to place qualified workers in new and rewarding jobs, and move toward a healthy, working Nova Scotia.

EIP Contract

Working with one of our experienced Case Managers, you and the worker can design an EIP contract that meets both your needs.

EIP contracts are easy to develop and clearly outline the conditions of your participation in the EIP. Your contract will specify the length of the agreement, the amount and payment period of any wage assistance, and the costs the WCB will cover for any specialized equipment or workplace modifications needed to accommodate your worker.

EIP Applications

It's easy to participate in the EIP. Contact us to arrange for a no-obligation meeting with the Case Manager for your area. Your Case Manager will take you through the application process and match you with a trained and motivated worker.

EIP: Summary of Benefits

Reduced costs

Increased productivity

Customized contracts

Ongoing support

Call Us to Learn More

Your Case Manager will be happy to discuss our Employment Incentives Program with you.

OJT: On-the-Job Training Program

On-the-job Training (OJT) helps train a worker now for mutual benefits in the future. It is a risk-free, cost-saving program offered by the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia.

Highlights

- Provide a worker with new skills, as outlined in their vocational rehabilitation plan.
- Get additional help at no cost, no obligation.
- Pay no wages and benefits to the worker during the agreed upon training period.
- Obtain no-cost technological support or adaptive devices for your worker's training period, depending on the worker's needs and the requirements of the job.
- Retain a worker who is familiar with your business, your operations and your customers at the end of the OJT period, if you wish.
- Attain an easy, risk-free investment in your company's future.

Call Us to Learn More

CASE CONFERENCES: WORKING THROUGH CHALLENGES, TOGETHER

If your employee has not returned to work as planned, your WCB case worker will schedule a case conference. You, your employee and health care providers will discuss the situation to find solutions to the barriers they face and agree on a go-forward plan. Open and ongoing communication and team work are essential to return-to-work success.

GET STARTED TODAY

Creating a Return-to-Work program in your company doesn't need to be complicated. But it does take commitment from you and your employees to do things right. By taking the steps outlined in this booklet, you can help your employees return to work in a safe and timely manner.

If you have additional questions or want more information about workplace safety or return-to-work, please contact us.

At any step along the way we are here to help.

View complete return-to-work information at:
www.wcb.ns.ca/return-to-work

WORK SAFE. FOR LIFE.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD OF NOVA SCOTIA

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