

Return-to-Work Strategies for Ill or Injured Employees*

When employees experience illness or injury, it can impact their ability to perform their jobs. When such employees are out of work, it's in everyone's best interest to return them to work in some capacity as soon as they are able. Return-to-work (RTW) strategies and programs have traditionally been used to reduce workers' compensation costs; however, they can do much more:

- improve productivity and morale across an organization
- save organization's time and money
- protect agencies from loss of talent



Effective RTW strategies include offering the opportunity to work part time, telecommuting, modifying work duties, modifying schedules, and implementing reasonable accommodations to provide employees with the tools and resources they need to carry out their responsibilities. These efforts can help employees return to work sooner, even while recovering. This allows the employee to protect their earning power boosting the organization's productivity. The ability to return to work plays an important role in the employee's actual recovery process.

Conditions that cause disability and long-term absence from work include cancer, heart disease and diabetes, and also mental health conditions, back pain, arthritis and injuries. Every worker has a probability of acquiring a disability or illness that hinders their ability to work. (Not all of these are work-related injuries and thus not all are covered by workers' compensation.)

Accommodations for RTW employees are highly cost effective, with most incurring little expense. Data collected by the Job Accommodation Network reveal that more than half of accommodations cost employers nothing. Of those that do cost, the typical one-time expenditure is \$600 — an expenditure that most employers report recouping many times over in the form of increased productivity and the savings associated with not having to recruit, hire and train a new employee. 74% of employers who implemented accommodations rated them as either "very effective" or "extremely effective."

Resources

- [Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work: Supporting Employees Who Experience Unexpected Illness or Disability](#)
Informs employers about resources available to help employees who have sustained disabilities or chronic illness to return or stay at work. It also explains provisions of the Family and Medical Leave Act that are applicable, and how intermittent leave may assist employees to remain on the job.
- [Accommodation and Compliance Series: Return-to-Work Programs](#)
From the Job Accommodation Network. Helps employers determine effective accommodations and comply with Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The guide provides information about RTW programs, including the intersection of return-to-work and the ADA.

**Excerpted from <http://www.dol.gov/odep/return-to-work/employer-background.htm>*

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