

## **Return to Work Program**

### **Participants' Guide**

#### **What is a Return to Work Program?**

The Return to Work Program is a plan to assist injured or ill employees return to productive employment as soon as it is safe to do so. Supporting an employee in returning to work is an important aspect of their recovery process.

The key to a successful Return to Work Program is a strong collaboration and a shared responsibility between the ill or injured employee and the return to work partners.

#### **What are the goals of a Return to Work program?**

1. To enable injured employees to be productive during their recuperation and to maintain a connection to the workplace.
2. To develop an individualized return to work plan which meets the needs of the employee and the department/faculty operational requirements.

#### **How does the Return to Work program benefit an employee?**

- promotes physical health, well-being and recovery of the injured employee
- promotes the psychological well-being of injured employees
- assists in preventing disability
- maintains a social bond with coworkers
- maintains an occupational bond with the employer
- protects employee benefits
- protects employability
- reduces the impact of disability on families

#### **Who are the key participants in the Return to Work Program?**

The employee, manager and the Health and Disability Management Specialist are the key participants. Depending on the complexity and individual circumstances, the Return to Work Program may also involve the Health and Safety Officer, Disability Case Manager and the WSIB Officer (in cases of workplace injuries).

#### **What are the main responsibilities of the Return to Work partners?**

##### **Employee**

- Be an active participant in the return to work process.

- Promptly provide necessary medical documentation to clarify relevant limitations or restrictions needed for return to work planning.
- Make return to work/accommodation needs known and actively participate in discussions for the identification of suitable modified work.
- Maintain regular contact with the Manager throughout the recovery process and during the development and implementation of the return to work plan.

### Manager

- Engage in the planning and implementation of a return to work program while working in collaboration with the employee and return to work partners.
- Actively identifying and reviewing reasonable return to work/accommodation solutions to assist the employee in a safe and suitable return to productive employment.
- Provide job demands information to support the goal of returning the employee to work in a timely and healthy manner.
- Meet with the employee and provide support throughout the return-to-work program.
- Monitor and report on employee progress.

### Health and Disability Management Specialist

- Accountable for the overall management of the Return to Work Program.
- Ensure terms of policies and procedures as well as Collective Agreements are applied fairly and consistently.
- Foster the importance of maintaining confidentiality and upholding the dignity of the employee.
- Engage with both employee and manager to maintain open communication throughout the process and provide information and guidance as needed.
- Through a collaborative and consultative approach, create, implement and monitor return to work plans, which may also include temporary or permanent accommodations.

### Disability Case Manager

- Receive and adjudicate employee medical documentation in a timely manner.
- Ensure that there is sufficient and appropriate medical information to validate functional limitations and restrictions.
- Provide details on the employee's limitations and restrictions as part of the return to work and/or accommodation process based on medical documentation provided by the treatment provider.
- Protect the confidentiality of employee medical information by sharing only information as it relates to the employee's limitations and restrictions and not details of the diagnosis.

### What questions need to be answered as part of the Return to Work planning process?

#### Timelines:

- What is the anticipated start date for returning to work?
- Is the employee returning gradually?
- What is the projected end date of the return to work plan?
- What weeks does this plan cover?
- What days of the week will the employee work?
- How many hours a day will the employee work?

- What essential tasks and duties will the employee resume during this return to work plan?
- What is the proposed schedule for resuming job tasks?

### **Employee restrictions and accommodation considerations:**

- Are there any medical restrictions and limitations that the employee and employer need to adhere to?
- Are the restrictions temporary or permanent?
- If temporary, how long are the restrictions expected to last?
- Are any work accommodations needed?
- If so, what are the accommodations?
- Why is each accommodation necessary?

### **Return to Work Monitoring:**

- How and who will monitor the employee's progress during the return to work process?
- How will changes to the return to work plan be made if needed or required?

### **Where can you go if you need more support?**

1. Check out Ontario Tech's [Employee Family Assistance Program](#).
2. Contact your Health and Disability Management Specialist.
3. [Institute for Health and Work](#) - a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, protecting and improving the health of workers
4. [Mental Health Works](#) – a great resource for tools, tips and information regarding mental health in the workplace.

**Additional Resources:**

[Conference Board of Canada Disability Management: “Opportunities for Employer Action”](#)

[Morneau Shepell best practices in absence & disability management for people leaders](#)

[Mental Health Works CMHA](#)