

**Alberta WCB
Policies &
Information**

Chapter:

BENEFITS

Subject:

RETURN-TO-WORK SERVICES

Authorization:

BoD Resolution 2021/02/09

Date:

March 22, 2021

APPLICATION 1: GENERAL

1. *What is WCB’s role in return-to-work services?*

Successfully returning injured workers to their employment involves a number of parties including WCB, the employer, worker, union, health care professionals, and other service providers.

WCB’s role is to work with the worker, employer, union (if applicable), and health care providers to return the worker to the date-of-accident or other suitable employment, ideally with the accident employer. As of April 1, 2021, employers and workers both have a duty to cooperate with WCB in efforts to achieve the worker’s early and safe return to work (see Policy 04-11, *Duty to Cooperate*).

If the employer is unable to, or does not, accommodate the worker, or if the employment relationship has ended, WCB is responsible for helping a worker return to employability (see Part I, 6.0).

WCB may use a variety of tools as part of a return-to-work plan to help the worker return to work with the accident employer or to employability. WCB works with the worker, the employer, and when appropriate, the union and health care providers to develop the return-to-work plan. Other parties are consulted as needed.

WCB is also required to manage the Accident Fund effectively by ensuring that the services provided are appropriate and cost-effective

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2. *How does WCB determine the worker’s eligibility for return-to-work services?*

Workers are eligible for return-to-work services while they have a compensable disability. Once the worker’s disability and entitlement under s.56 of the *WCA* have ended, then the worker’s eligibility for return-to-work services also ends, except for the reinstatement provisions under s.88.1 (see Application 2). Therefore, the nature of the injury and the extent of any residual disability determine which return-to-work services are appropriate.

The following questions are a guide for determining whether a worker is eligible for return-to-work services:

Does the worker have any compensable work restrictions?

There are two parts to this question:

- are there work restrictions, and
- are they compensable?

The worker is only entitled to return-to-work services if there are compensable work restrictions, see Part I, 2.0.

Are the identified compensable work restrictions temporary or permanent?

Part of the case management process is determining the anticipated outcome of an injury. The key question is whether the worker is expected to recover with or without permanent compensable work restrictions.

Work restrictions are normally considered temporary during medical (clinical) convalescence. The work restrictions may change as the worker’s recovery progresses. When the worker’s condition has reached a medical plateau (see Glossary) and no significant change is anticipated, any remaining work restrictions would be considered permanent, unless there is evidence to the contrary.

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If temporary, do the work restrictions result in total or partial disability?

Work restrictions are considered total when the worker is not medically fit to return to employment. They are partial when a fitness-to-work examination indicates that the worker is able to return to some type of modified work.

Do the work restrictions affect the worker's earning capacity?

The effect of compensable work restrictions on the worker's earning capacity must be taken into consideration when determining entitlement for either temporary or permanent earnings replacement benefits and return-to-work services.

At the conclusion of the return-to-work process, any remaining impairment of earning capacity resulting from the injury will be considered when determining permanent disability compensation benefits.

3. How are return-to-work goals determined?

The ideal outcome is to help the worker return to the same job with the accident employer, with no loss of earnings. However, this is not always possible when the worker has permanent compensable work restrictions. In such cases, WCB will work with the worker and employer to identify other options. In all cases, priority will be given to using the skills and knowledge the worker already has.

If it appears that the worker must change occupations, WCB will help the worker identify transferable skills and may arrange a vocational assessment, including a career assessment inventory, and tests to determine aptitude, interests, IQ, manual dexterity, etc. The preferred option is a suitable occupation that is available with the accident employer; however, WCB will also consider whether the work is available in the general labour market so that the worker has similar job opportunities with other employers if the employment relationship with the accident employer ends. While this is an important consideration, there are circumstances where it is of less importance than maintaining the relationship with the accident employer

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Determining return-to-work goals (continued)

(for example, if the nature of the worker’s restrictions are such that there are very limited job opportunities).

4. Will WCB retrain a worker?

WCB may sponsor retraining. See Applications 6 and 7 for details.

5. Will WCB help modify the workplace to accommodate work restrictions?

WCB may help modify an employer’s premises to enable a worker with permanent work restrictions to gain access to the workplace and perform the required job duties. Portable aids may be given directly to the worker, so that they can be transferred to another workplace if necessary.

Limited modifications such as an ergonomic chair or vehicle hand controls may be made to accommodate temporary work restrictions.

6. What about tools and equipment needed for a new job?

WCB may lend tools and equipment or give the worker financial assistance to buy tools and equipment for assessment, retraining, or employment. The worker is responsible for maintenance, repair, and replacement of the tools and equipment.

7. What counselling services does WCB provide?

WCB may provide counselling services to lessen the financial, social, vocational, or psychological effects of the compensable injury.

In addition to return-to-work counselling, WCB may also provide the following counselling services:

- early interventional counselling to help the worker adjust to the compensable disability
- assessment of the financial implications of the resulting employment disruption
- assistance with personal and family problems which are delaying rehabilitation

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Counselling services (continued)

- counselling for any other concerns delaying the worker's rehabilitation, such as pain management, substance abuse, etc.

WCB may provide the counselling directly or refer the worker to other agencies.

8. *What if there are no suitable employment opportunities within commuting distance?*

If a worker needs to change jobs because of permanent compensable work restrictions, and there are no suitable jobs available in the worker's area, WCB may recommend that the worker relocate to an area with appropriate employment opportunities. See Application 8, Relocation, for further details.

9. *What services are available for a worker who is expected to recover with no permanent work restrictions?*

Workers who are expected to recover with no permanent compensable work restrictions may be eligible for limited services such as a temporary modified work program or limited job search assistance while still convalescing. They are not eligible for services such as retraining, which are intended to help workers who have to change occupations.

If the worker is assessed as fit to return to modified work, WCB will try to arrange a temporary modified work program. See Applications 2 and 3 for details regarding an employer's obligation to reinstate and accommodate for claims with dates of accident from September 1, 2018, to March 31, 2021, inclusive, and Application 4, Temporary Modified Work Programs.

If the worker does not have a job to return to with the accident employer, WCB may provide limited job search assistance, such as help with resume writing, job leads, etc., while the worker is still disabled (see Application 5, Job Search). This assistance will end when the worker has recovered with no remaining compensable work restrictions.

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10. *Under what circumstances will WCB consider ending return-to-work services?*

WCB may end return-to-work services for any of the following reasons:

- the worker voluntarily ends employment
- the worker refuses to accept suitable employment
- the worker does not cooperate in the vocational or rehabilitative process
- the worker moves from Alberta to a place where employment opportunities are limited or return-to-work services are not readily available
- any other circumstances which, according to WCB policy, are considered harmful to the worker's vocational rehabilitation

See also Policy 04-11, Part II, Application 1, Question 5 and Policy 04-04, Part II, Application 1: Determining Impairment of Earning Capacity, Questions 4 and 5.

11. *When is this policy application effective?*

This policy application (Application 1 – General) is effective April 1, 2021, except when noted otherwise in a specific policy section(s).

[Document History](#)

Previous versions

- [Policy 0405 Part II - September 2018](#)
- [Policy 0405 Part II - April 2018](#)
- [Policy 0405 Part II - August 2015](#)
- [Policy 0405 Part II - June 2011](#)
- [Policy 0405 Part II - January 2004](#)
- [Policy 0405 Part II - January 2002](#)
- [Policy 0405 Part II - September 2001](#)

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- [Policy 0405 Part II - October 1997](#)
- [Policy 0405 Part II \(consolidated manual 1st Issue\) - February 1997](#)