

## **WHSM WORKPLACE RETURN TO WORK (RTW) MODEL**

**A workplace model of RTW that promotes strategic, creative and innovative service provision to achieve a successful return to work outcome for the worker**

### **1. Triage/Screening:**

- Referral is received and allocated to the Consultant with the relevant experience by The Director. (E.g. Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Rehabilitation Counsellor).
- Contact established with all parties within 24 hours of receipt of referral. This may be by email or phone calls and an introduction letter is forwarded to the referrer and copied to all other parties.
- Appointment arranged for initial and workplace assessment by Consultant (WRP) allocated case.

### **2. Assessment of client's RTW needs at the initial assessment.**

- Initial assessment conducted within 3 to 5 days of the referral (as practical as possible). Ideally this is conducted at the place of work however, may need to be conducted elsewhere depending on the worker's current situation.
- During the assessment the process of RTW is explained and the Privacy and Consent form disclosure agreed to by the client. The Consent form is then signed by the client.
- The following is considered during the assessment:
  - Current and past medical status
  - Current and past medical treatment
  - Current functional capacity
  - Availability of suitable duties
  - Evidence based tools are used to determine psychosocial factors
  - Other areas of concern

The workplace is assessed and suitable duties are identified. Additional ergonomic advice is provided regarding workstation set up, provision of ergonomic aids, functional education and exercise prescription. A tentative agreement to participate in a graduated suitable duties plan is agreed to by the client and employer with realistic upgrades and time frames discussed.

The initial and workplace assessment report is completed within 7 to 10 days with recommendations developed following discussion with the referring agent, treating doctor, employer and client.

### **3. Return to work planning**

This can involve one of three situations:

- a) Return to pre-injury employer.
- b) Physical upgrading or transitional duties with a host employer prior to return to pre-injury employer.
- c) Redeployment to a new role and or job.

The Consultant (WRP) will specify strategies in the written Return to Work plan that address the risks, needs and capacities as identified in the initial assessment with respect to the worker's medical status, functional capacity, vocational status, psychosocial status, employer requirements, workplace issues and other return to work barriers.

The Consultant (WRP) will discuss the strategies with the worker, the treating doctor, the employer (if the worker is still employed), the union (if involved) and other treating practitioners to ensure that all parties have the same expectations regarding the management process to facilitate a return to work.

The Consultant (WRP) will review the Agent's Injury Management Plan (where provided) to ensure the return to work plan is consistent with this.

The Consultant (WRP) will consider:

- The return to work hierarchy below for placement but not at the expense of the worker's needs, and the employer's capacity:
  - Same job/same employer;
  - Different job/same employer;
  - Similar job/different employer;
  - Different job/different employer.
- Personnel management and industrial issues in the workplace and adopt strategies to address these issues if they act as barriers to return to work.

The strategic Return to Work Plan is operationalised through:

- A Suitable Duties Plan for all cases involving a:
  - Return to the pre-injury employer on transitional duties; and
  - Participation in a Work Trial.
- A New Employment Placement Plan when a worker cannot return to pre-injury duties and is ready to seek work.
- Services will consider independence in the community as a mechanism to promote a return to work.
- Services will be innovative and aim to achieve a return to work outcome.

### **Suitable Duties Plan**

The Suitable Duties Plan is a working document that:

- Considers the specific duties, hours and frequency of work attendance and tasks matched to the worker's functional capacities.
- Specifies any restrictions and precautions and details workplace or work process modifications.
- Includes proposed review points designed to facilitate upgrading the worker's duties and/or hours of work.
- Is time-limited in accordance with the worker's prognosis and the availability of alternative employment.
- Is reviewed and updated regularly. It acts as a communication tool amongst the key parties to gain agreement on the strategies and to inform the key parties of any changes or developments.

To develop a Suitable Duties Plan the provider will have detailed, recent knowledge of the workplace obtained through a site visit and, where necessary, and a Workplace Assessment.

### **New Employment Placement Plan**

A New Employment Placement Plan is developed when a worker cannot return to pre-injury duties and is seeking work with a different employer.

A New Employment Placement Plan is a working document that:

- Considers job placement services.
- Is matched to the worker's needs, such as work preparation training, facilitated job search and placement support.
- Is reviewed and updated regularly, and outlines the responsibilities of the worker, the provider and any other parties assisting in the return to work process.
- Acts as a communication tool amongst the key parties, to gain agreement on the strategies and to inform the key parties of any changes or developments.

A suitable return to work goal based on appropriate assessments is established. The goal can either be a specific job or a range of occupations:

- Suited to the worker's skills and knowledge, interests and preferences, physical and psychological capacities, pre-injury work status and wage.
- Available within a reasonably accessible labour market.

### **Active implementation and review**

To implement return to work services the Consultant (WRP) will:

- Coordinate and mobilise services and resources in a timely manner.
- Provide cost effective service delivery that avoids unnecessary duplication, is integrated with treatment and provided in a timely manner.
- Will actively review of Return to Work Plans will be conducted to:
  - gather evidence of progress towards outcomes;
  - review the impact of interventions on identified return to work needs;
  - consider and act on new information;
  - maintain contact and align expectations of all relevant parties.

### **Durable Return to work**

These services include:

- Setting expectations, developing agreed goals and defining the extent of the rehabilitation intervention.
- Advising on the need for ongoing treatment or rehabilitation.
- Negotiating these with the insurer, employer or treating doctor if these are required to maintain the worker at work.
- Confirming durability of employment after 13 weeks from case closure.

### **Service delivery is recommended**

- To commence on the basis of the findings following the initial assessment process.
- To cease with case closure after ensuring any follow up required is allocated to a party who can competently complete the follow up.
- To cease with case closure on the basis that the rehabilitation goal agreed upon has been achieved and is sustainable.

### **WHSM Consultants**

- Focus on an early safe and durable return to work and emphasise to all involved parties that the focus of the rehabilitation is to link in with the return to work goals.
- Will develop respectful, open and effective working relationships with all involved parties.
- Use motivational interviewing techniques and focus on positive feedback to enhance workers' confidence to meet the challenges involved in a return to work.
- Act on customer requirements by discussing requirements prior to service delivery, seeking verbal feedback during service delivery and verbal and survey feedback post service delivery.

### **References:**

WorkCover NSW, *Supplement to: Guide: Nationally consistent approval framework for workplace rehabilitation providers.*  
<http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/formspublications/publications/Pages/workcovernswsupplementguide.aspx>