Return-to-Work planning meeting (RTWPM) – psychological injuries

Every work-related injury is unique. At WCB-Alberta, we help Alberta's workers access the right service, at the right time. Our goal is to help them back to their life and work after an injury on the job. We care about the worker's experience and tailor our treatment plans to their individual needs and circumstances. As a return-to-work services (RTWS) provider, **you are one of the key contributors in a worker's recovery and return-to-work (RTW) plan**.

Work plays an important role in recovery. A Return-to-Work Planning Meeting (RTWPM) assists workers, employers and claim owners (COs) in developing a safe, suitable and sustainable return-to-work (RTW) plan. Collaboration between all involved parties is the fundamental basis for a successful RTWPM. **We aim to build the simplest, most effective, modified RTW plan that keeps workers connected to their job and workplace.**

Pyschological injuries

Claim owners determine entitlement for psychological injury by evaluating whether the work-related events meet the policy criteria and if there is a psychological diagnosis related to those events. The adjudication process includes examining confirmed work events, confirmed psychological diagnosis and the causal link between the two. These types of claims include:

- **Presumptive coverage for first responders** – if a first responder has a confirmed PTSD diagnosis, it is presumed, in part, this diagnosis resulted from their job, unless there is evidence to the contrary.
- **Traumatic event** – direct personal experience that is sudden/ unexpected, frightening or shocking, occurred at a specific time and place, **and** involved actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or others or was a threat to one's physical integrity (e.g., assault, high speed motor vehicle accident).
- **Emotional reaction to an accepted physical injury** – psychological condition(s) may develop in response to a compensable physical injury or treatment.
- **Chronic onset** – objectively confirmed events that are excessive or unusual compared to normal pressures and tensions of work that accumulate over time, have lasted a long time, or include a repeated incident of objectionable or unwelcome conduct, comment, bullying or action intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular group or person.

Our goal is to quickly identify and treat work-related psychological injuries. Suitable modified work is part of the treatment plan.

Return to work

For both physical and psychological injuries, our goal is early, suitable return to work (RTW). We focus on maintaining job attachment within the worker's previously chosen field, with creative RTW solutions to increase psychological stamina.

We work to build a supportive RTW transition, keeping people in their chosen employment in creative ways, while they recover. Employers are encouraged to think about meaningful modified work options to help build workers back to better.

A safe RTW considers both the compensable physical and psychological fitness of a worker and whether there are any limitations in capability. Providing modifications and/or work accommodations can help a worker feel supported and able to engage in a modified RTW plan.

Discussion surrounding RTW with some workers can be complicated due to the nature of the injury, their perception of the employer and established expectations regarding the purpose of the RTWPM. The best way to open a conversation with the worker about RTW is to simply ask about their concerns. The worker's response may reflect unstated goals or barriers related to the RTW process.

Psychological injury modified work considerations

Due to their nature, work-related psychological injuries require unique approaches. Awareness and sensitivity to the accepted psychological injury(ies) will enhance the likelihood of a safe and sustainable RTW. At the time of the RTWPM, a treatment provider may have outlined compensable psychological work capabilities, which may be best supported by:

- **Workplace accommodations** (e.g., no safety sensitive work, no work with specific populations).
- **Work-task accommodations** (e.g., modify the duties required to complete the job, modify scheduled rest breaks, partnered/supervised work, self-pacing techniques, reduced volume, no direct supervision of others, assignment to only independent work tasks).
- **Change in work location** (e.g., work in a different job site, consider tasks that can be completed at the worker's home, provide a quiet workspace with fewer distractions, modify the triggers in the physical environment).
- **Change to hours of work and/or days of work (**e.g., graduated RTW, split shifts, allow for frequent breaks).
- **Remove specific items, objects and/or equipment** (e.g., avoid customer interactions, specific equipment work around forklift or no occupational driving).
- **If needed, worksite-based exposure therapy sessions with occupational therapist** (e.g., allow necessary emotional support during the workday, access to site after hours to remove triggering items prior to full reintegration into the workplace, use of headphones to listen to calming sounds or music).

Cognitive Psychosocial Job Demands Analysis

A Cognitive Psychosocial Job Demands Analysis (CPJDA) is an objective analysis of the essential cognitive and psychosocial components of a job, the resources required to perform the job and outlines potential workplace and work-task accommodations to assist with RTW planning.

- **Cognitive demands**: tasks that require thinking, information processing, learning, imagining, and anticipating.
- **Psychosocial demands**: includes both psychological and social aspects of work, such as mental, emotional, work environment and social interaction.

The CPJDA is an important tool to help identify modified work opportunities and enhance the employer understanding of psychological barriers such as trauma, stress or emotional triggers and mitigate the impacts to the worker's wellbeing, safety and ability to perform work.

If a CPJDA was completed prior to the RTWPM:

- Review the CPJDA tool with the worker to confirm job demand and obtain consensus.
- Assess different domains to determine if there are any specific deficits in relation to the job demands or safety concerns that may warrant work restrictions or recommendations for RTW.
- Identify suitable parts of the job or modified work opportunities.

If a CJPDA fillable form (C1447) has not been completed prior to a RTWPM, the clinician can utilize this tool to further identify possible modified work opportunities.

Assisting workers refusing a RTW plan

Creating a simple and effective modified RTW plan that addresses the worker's concerns can help mitigate barriers. It is important to be mindful of if the worker wants to RTW or not, and if their motivation directly relates to the injury.

- While some workers may make their reasons clear, others may require more tactful approaches.
- Sometimes a refusal may be rooted in miscommunication or misunderstanding. In many cases, encouraging assertive communication skills can remove resistance to RTW.
- Returning to a supportive environment, where the supervisor is supportive of a RTW, is more likely to result in a sustainable plan.
- Your clinical interviewing skills may help elicit reasons for a refusal to RTW.

For more detailed information on the RTWPM service, please refer to our general RTWPM fact sheet**.**