

Return To Work Planning Guide

KEY
INFORMATION
FOR
EMPLOYERS

This planning tool provides instructions and guiding questions to help you as a leader to create practical, individualised Return To Work plans that effectively support workers to stay at or return to work after a workplace injury.

This document can also be useful for workers to understand the return-to-work planning process. Find more useful resources at www.itpaystocare.org.

Why make a Return To Work plan?

Providing suitable duties that support workers to return to work safely after workplace injury is not only the right thing to do, but also something that employers in Australia are legally required to do.

The best available evidence – collated in the 2022 It Pays To Care policy - clearly demonstrates that caring approaches to workplace injury improve outcomes not only for workers, but for their employers as well.

Good Return To Work planning can deliver real **benefits for your business** including lower claims costs, improved productivity and stronger workplace culture. Read more about the benefits of good systems for supporting injured workers in the Workplace Support Systems Guide here: www.itpaystocare.org/employers/workplaces.

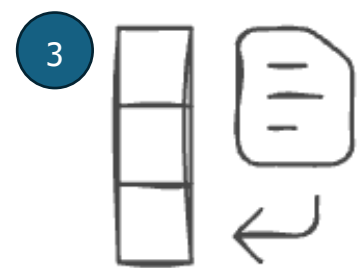
Three steps to successful Return To Work plans



**Medical expertise +
workplace know-how**



**Plan with them,
not for them**



**Document,
update and share**

A successful Return To Work plan aligns your business needs with the worker's recovery needs. Use the planning tool below to guide your thinking as you work through these steps.

1. Medical expertise + workplace know-how

Ensure you follow the instructions on the worker's certificate of capacity from their doctor, which contains essential information about their capabilities. Combine this with your knowledge of the role and input from their supervisor.

Consider one or several of these possible work modifications:

- the same job with adjusted hours or modified duties.
- a different job at the same workplace.
- a similar job in a different workplace.
- a different job in a different workplace.

Contact your insurer if you need support to identify suitable work options.

Ensure you keep the worker's medical and personal information private.

2. Plan with them, not for them

Involve the worker in developing their plan. Research shows that worker involvement in recovery planning increases success rates and reduces time away from work. Workers often have valuable insights about their own recovery needs, capabilities and work they could do safely

Plan a return-to-work meeting with the worker to discuss their return to work. You can prepare for the meeting by:

- Having a list of available tasks ready, accommodating the medical capacity recommended by the treating practitioner.

In the meeting:

- Refer to the Recovery Planning Questions below.
- Listen to the worker and incorporate their ideas into the plan.
- Address any concerns they have about the process. It is normal for workers to feel nervous or unsure about return to work especially for the first time following an injury.

3. Document, update and share

The plan should be documented and shared with both the worker and their treating doctor. The plan should be updated each time the doctor issues a new certificate of capacity or if the tasks the worker is undertaking changes.

Include essential information such as:

- ☑ Names and roles of relevant parties
- ☑ Description of the injury
- ☑ The return-to-work goal eg 'same employer, same duties'
- ☑ Dates that the plan is effective from and when it will end
- ☑ The worker's current work capacity
- ☑ A description of the duties or tasks the worker will be completing
- ☑ Required equipment, training and adjustments
- ☑ The worker's roster including what days and hours they will work
- ☑ Designated contact person for concerns or changes to the plan
- ☑ Review dates to assess progress

Some state jurisdictions have specific requirements as part of the return-to-work planning process within workers compensation including prescribed forms. Please ensure you check with your supervisor, Return To Work Coordinator or insurer if you are unsure about the requirements within your state.

Privacy:

The information contained in certificates of capacity and return to work plans is considered sensitive and private information. You need to ensure that the information is stored securely and is only shared or accessible with those people in the workplace who require it.

Addressing Barriers to Recovery and Return To Work

For most workers, the goal will be returning to their pre-injury duties within a specified timeframe. However, some workers may need support to overcome barriers to recovery such as workplace relationship challenges or feelings of stress and worry.

Critically, successful return to work requires addressing the workplace factors that contributed to the original injury. Simply waiting for the worker to heal without fixing the underlying workplace issues often leads to re-injury, prolonged recovery, or failed return to work attempts.

The evidence from It Pays To Care is clear: employers can give workers a better chance of return to work by proactively addressing these barriers rather than only focusing on physical recovery.

Common psychosocial factors that need addressing include:

- Poor workplace relationships (lack of management support, conflict with colleagues).
- Lack of preventive and responsive measures addressing workplace aggression.
- Excessive workload without adequate support or resources.
- Lack of role clarity or conflicting demands.
- Workplace bullying or harassment.

Your role as a leader:

Work with the injured worker, their case manager, return to work provider and any other key stakeholders to identify what workplace factors contributed to the injury, then develop concrete plans to address these before or during the return-to-work process. This demonstrates to the worker that the workplace is now safer and supports their confidence in returning.

Ensure you as a leader understand the types of supports your organisation may have available to support the worker. This might include things like:

- Employee assistance programs or employee wellbeing programs
- Dispute or grievance policies and procedures
- Flexible working policies and procedures
- Different types of leave and entitlements such as compassionate leave or family and domestic violence leave.

For detailed guidance on creating supportive workplace environments and addressing these psychosocial factors, see the 'Supporting injured workers' guide on the It Pays To Care website at www.itpaystocare.org/employers/employers-workplaces.

Recovery Planning Questions

Question	Notes
1. Does the plan include realistic timeframes with gradual increase in duties if appropriate?	
2. Have you scheduled regular check-ins to monitor and adjust the plan as needed?	
3. Is there are clear communication channel for the worker to discuss concerns or request changes to the plan?	
4. What psychosocial factors may have contributed to the injury (eg. workplace relationships, workload, role clarity) and how will these be addressed before return to work?	
5. How might the worker's personal circumstances impact their recovery?	
6. Is the work environment appropriate and supportive of recovery, or would a supernumerary role be better?	

7. How could alternative duties utilise the worker's existing skills and experience?	
8. What workplace modifications or equipment might help the worker perform tasks safely?	
9. Does the worker need specific training to perform modified duties safely?	
10. Are the proposed duties within the worker's physical and mental health capacity?	