

Workplace systems for supporting injured workers


KEY
INFORMATION
FOR EMPLOYERS

Every leader will face injuries, both physical and psychological. **How you respond in the first 24 hours can get your valued workers back to work faster and feeling genuinely supported.**


Workplace injuries have worse outcomes than identical injuries occurring elsewhere. But here's the game-changer: **your response to the injury is the one factor you can directly control.**


What's in it for your organisation?


Workplaces with effective injury management see:

 **Faster returns** - Supportive responses deliver 40% higher return-to-work rates for physical injuries, 50% for psychological injuries.

 **Less disruption** - Smoother transitions when workers return to work.

 **Stronger culture** - Supporting injured workers builds trust across your workplace.

 **Retained expertise** - Keep your skilled workers instead of losing them to poor recovery experiences.

 **Better outcomes** - Workers who feel supported have quicker recovery and improved wellbeing.

 **Lower costs** - Early support can substantially reduce claim expenses and insurance premiums.

Why you're the key player

According to It Pays to Care evidence, the workplace is the single greatest influence on return-to-work outcomes. The involvement of leaders—including supervisors, managers and senior staff—is key to successful return to work because you:

- Are usually first to know when injury occurs.
- Shape how workers feel about the entire process with your initial response.
- Understand role requirements and can identify appropriate suitable duties and return to work options.
- Provide ongoing encouragement that makes returning workers feel valued.

The first 24 hours: The R.O.C.K. approach

When a worker is injured, be their R.O.C.K. of support:

R - Reach out quickly

Contact injured staff within 24 hours to show you care.

O - Offer real help

Provide regular check-ins, clear communication, and assistance connecting with healthcare providers.

C - Check for warning signs

Watch for anxiety about returning, concerns about colleague reactions, or worry about managing their role.

K - Keep communication open

Regular updates prevent misunderstandings and address concerns early.

Learn how to appropriately support injured workers from the start. The first conversation can be the most important.

What does good workplace culture look like?

Good workplace culture includes:

- **Open communication** - Everyone feels comfortable speaking up about concerns, and teams work together to solve problems.
- **Recognition and engagement** - Workers are recognised for their contributions, which boosts morale and engagement.
- **Proactive stress management** - The workplace actively looks for and addresses sources of stress before they become major issues.
- **Emotional awareness** - The workplace pays attention to how people feel and interact with each other, not just physical safety.

When workplaces create this kind of positive environment where people feel they matter, they see fewer injuries and faster returns to work when injuries do occur.

Workplace culture affects injury outcomes

Workers exposed to high levels of psychosocial risk have over three times the amount of time off work as low-risk workers.

Workplaces with supportive environments:

- Have fewer physical and mental health claims.
- Experience significantly fewer days lost when workers are injured.
- See higher return-to-work success rates.
- Benefit from lower staff turnover, improved productivity, and less sick leave.

Visit www.itpaystocare.org to explore the evidence behind this concept in more detail.

Create meaningful modified duties

When workers can return to roles that use their skills and expertise—even in a modified capacity—they recover faster and more successfully than those left with no work or meaningless tasks. The [It Pays to Care policy](#) demonstrates that workers who feel their contributions are valued and that their work is purposeful have:

- Quicker recovery times.
- Higher return-to-work success rates.
- Better long-term health outcomes.
- Reduced risk of developing secondary psychological issues.

Effective modifications ensure:

- Work is meaningful, not "busy work" (tasks that contribute to organisational goals).
- Tasks match the worker's current capabilities while respecting medical advice.
- Workers have input into planning their duties including the plan for gradually resuming full duties.
- Review and adjustments as needed based on medical advice and the worker's feedback and progress.

Moving beyond the "all or nothing" approach (either fully fit for duties or not fit at all) creates better outcomes for everyone. A gradual return with meaningful duties maintains the worker's connection to the workplace and benefits from their expertise while supporting their recovery.

Handle confidentiality smartly

Workplace environments can make injuries visible to colleagues and others. Manage this by:

- Having open conversations about what information workers are comfortable sharing.
- Developing consistent messages about modified duties that respect privacy.
- Addressing stigma through education and awareness.
- Normalising temporary modifications as supporting worker recovery.

The power of being heard

Research consistently shows that workers who report positive interactions with their supervisors, managers and case managers have higher return-to-work rates, report less pain, experience quicker recovery, and have improved quality of life. This means:

- Taking time to really listen to their concerns and experiences.
- Acknowledging their perspective and validating their feelings.
- Involving them in decisions about their recovery and return-to-work planning.
- Checking in regularly to understand how they're progressing.
- Responding to their feedback and adjusting support as needed.

Feeling heard transforms recovery outcomes. Feeling dismissed leads to significantly worse results.

Building effective evidence-based systems

The It Pays To Care policy demonstrates that effective injury management systems deliver tangible benefits for everyone involved. Combine this evidence with your organisation's operational expertise to build approaches that:

- Prevent injuries where possible.
- Ensure prompt, supportive responses when injuries occur.
- Facilitate smooth, sustainable return to work.
- Build positive workplace culture valuing worker wellbeing.
- Support workers through their recovery journey.

Ready to strengthen your approach?

Your next step: Review your current injury response process against the R.O.C.K. framework. Where are the gaps?

Quick resources

Safe Work Australia - safeworkaustralia.gov.au

National guidance on return to work and injury management.

It Pays To Care - itpaystocare.org

Resources for employers and workers.

Your state or territory workers compensation authority

Legal requirements, process explanations, suitable duties advice

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