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The RETAIN Report: Phase One Capstone Special Edition

December 2020

Welcome to the December 2020 issue of The RETAIN Report —the internal e-newsletter for awardees of the Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration Project. This month's issue serves as a special edition that commemorates the accomplishments of all RETAIN team members in Phase 1. Please contact RETAINTA@air.org if you would like to subscribe to this e-newsletter.

Please Note: Several of the links in this newsletter take you to resources housed in the RETAIN Online Community (ROC). If you do not have access to the ROC and are a member of a state team, please visit RETAINTA.org and click "Request an Account" in the right-hand sidebar.



Celebrating a Milestone: A Note From Jennifer Sheehy

As 2020 comes to a close, all of us in the Office of Disability Employment Policy, along with our partners at the Employment and Training Administration and the Social Security Administration, would like to thank you for your efforts during Phase 1 of RETAIN. You are providing a unique and invaluable service to workers facing injuries and illnesses, and it's been a pleasure seeing your programs develop and progress.

We recognize that there are challenges associated with developing successful stay-at-work/return-to-work programs. They require coordination and collaboration between partners and stakeholders, creative recruitment and enrollment strategies, new approaches to service delivery, and so much more, even in "normal" times. But, as we all know, 2020 has been anything but normal. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted us all, and we are grateful for your resolute efforts to adapt your programs and continue serving your communities in these unprecedented times.

Thank you for your flexibility, agility, and commitment to advancing RETAIN's mission. We wish you a safe, healthy, and happy holiday season!



A Look Back

As 2020 comes to a close, it is a good time to revisit the RETAIN resources provided to state grantee teams in Phase 1. Throughout Phase 1, the RETAIN technical assistance (TA) team supported pilot programs in their efforts across [recruitment and enrollment](#), collaboration with [partners and stakeholders](#), [operational planning and implementation](#), [communications](#) and branding, [measurement and evaluation](#), and [IT and data systems](#). Resources include [webinar](#) recordings, materials from [live communities of practice](#) (CoPs), on-demand [podcasts](#), [grantee guidance](#), [publications](#), and the RETAIN TA [Blog](#).

Review some of the most popular resources visited on the [ROC](#):

- **Live CoP:** [Getting to Yes and Getting Past No: Preventing and Reversing Potential Participant Refusals](#). This live CoP—the first in the RETAIN Participant Engagement CoP series—focused on strategies to help prevent participant refusals and to re-engage potential participants after an initial refusal.
- **Live CoP:** [Case Management TIPS \(Tools, Insights, Processes, and Strategies\) for Return-to-Work Coordinators](#). Using a case study approach, this live CoP session took a detailed look at the “layers” of return-to-work (RTW) cases and taught participants about key elements of developing individualized stay-at-work (SAW)/return-to-work service plans.
- **Webinar:** [Enabling Work: Accommodations as an Essential Element of the Return-to-Work Process](#). This webinar focused on how state teams can leverage the Job Accommodation Network to inform program services and approaches and create solutions for both program participants and employers.
- **Webinar:** [Attuning Your RETAIN Program to Workers' Concerns, Wants, and Needs](#). This webinar reviewed typical questions, concerns, wants, and needs of the target population of workers whose lives and work have recently been disrupted by a new health problem.
- **Podcast:** [Shifting Focus From Pain to Function](#). This podcast provides an occupational health perspective of clinician considerations for managing pain complaints and also highlights seven strategies to address delayed recovery of returning workers.

- **Podcast:** [Recruitment and Enrollment of RETAIN Participants: A Broad Level Overview](#). This podcast provides a broad level overview of recruitment, enrollment, and retention considerations for RETAIN state awardees.
- **Resources:** The RETAIN [Continuous Quality Improvement \(CQI\) Strategies](#) resource and [Implementing CQI](#) action brief were produced to help guide state grantee teams' CQI efforts.
- **Tool:** [RETAIN Recruitment-to-Enrollment Dashboard Tool](#). The Dashboard provides a framework for data-driven continuous monitoring of recruitment efforts. The Dashboard may be used by RETAIN state teams to reach a shared understanding of, and serve as a starting point for identifying underlying problems and potential solutions.



A Look Ahead

As Phase 1 winds down, we celebrate the RETAIN state grantee teams' [successes](#) and their efforts to meet planning, start-up, and pilot requirements.

Phase 2 awardees will work with the key partners established in Phase 1, develop new partnerships, expand their pilot programs, continue to increase participant enrollment, and participate in a formal evaluation of their programs. The RETAIN TA team will also continue supporting awardees as program implementation progresses. The team looks forward to convening annual in-person meetings for Phase 2 awardees as current public health restrictions subside.

As RETAIN transitions from Phase 1 to Phase 2, here is what RETAIN state grantee teams can expect to accomplish in the coming months:

- Continue providing services to enrolled RETAIN stakeholders, which will involve the following:
 - Maintaining contact with and supporting participants;
 - Contacting employers to discuss considerations like worksite assessments and accommodations;
 - Supporting participants in the interactive accommodations process;
 - Engaging health care providers to understand the link between work and health outcomes and other areas related to participants' care that could affect SAW/RTW; and
 - Successfully transitioning participants back to employment.

- Continue employer engagement and outreach to support coordinated services and positive employment outcomes.



ICYMI: Catch Up on the RETAIN TA Blog

Did you know? The first known use of the term “blog” was in 1999!

The year 2020 will be a memorable year for many reasons. Revisiting the RETAIN TA Blog offers a refreshing reminder of how the RETAIN TA team explored topics from the field, took a closer look at live CoP topics, and provided actionable strategies to help solve problems.

Following are a sampling of blog posts from RETAIN subject matter experts and TA team members. Catch up on these and other posts now, and remember, you can post your opinion, add a comment, or ask a question. We look forward to hearing from you as you revisit these topics!

- [Refusals, Refusal Prevention, and Refusal Conversion](#) provides strategies to prevent and reverse potential participant refusals.
- This important series examines the use of data for **informed decision making**:
 - [Introduction to Using Data for Decision Making in RETAIN](#) addresses what it means to be data-driven, why data matters to RETAIN, and how to use data in your decision-making and CQI efforts.
 - [Identifying Strategic Questions and Their Related Data Sources](#) explores how to identify the right questions and select relevant data sources to maximize data analysis and gain actionable insights.
 - [Data Wrangling and Record Linkage](#) discovers how data sets need to be cleaned, organized, and wrangled or linked before they can be used to analyze RETAIN programs.
- [A Roadmap for Resource Mapping](#) addresses when to use resource mapping and how to map out the resources and assets available to a community in support of RETAIN goals and intended outcomes.
- [Assessment as a Business Engagement Strategy and a Return-to-Work Tool](#) examines a worker's functional capabilities for both the worker and the employer in a four-part series. Start with [Part 1](#); the series serves as a complement to a RETAIN TA [podcast](#) on the same topic.

- [Getting Back to Work After an Injury—Patient Issues That Often Arise and Possible Answers](#) provides tips and solutions for real-life patient situations.

Quotes From the Field

We asked, and you answered! RETAIN wouldn't be successful without the commitment from the teams in the field. We asked RETAIN state teams to share details of their experience in Phase 1 of RETAIN. Here is some of what you had to say:

"Throughout the grant, California RETAIN has learned that when working with our customers (health care providers and employers) it's important to listen to what their needs are and how RETAIN can adapt their services to meet the requests and needs of our partners. An example of this would be responding to COVID-19-related concerns. Employers we've interacted with have requested more information and training that addresses returning workers back to work after recovering from COVID-19. California RETAIN, along with the California Employers Association, are changing upcoming webinars to cover these topics."

- California RETAIN Team

"An important lesson learned from our Phase 1 RETAIN project experience in Connecticut is the importance of the patient-provider relationship for project enrollment and implementation. At the beginning of Phase 1, we trialed a system-level effort to enroll participants through insurance records, but we switched to enrolling participants at health care visits, and this was a much more feasible route to support acceptance and participation by workers. Our CT project focuses on musculoskeletal pain as a source of work disability, and we believe workers with pain are especially reliant on their providers to understand the nature of their pain, their ability to resume activities, and how and when to return to work. This trusted relationship is an important cornerstone for engaging participants in rehabilitation and job modification efforts."

- RETAIN-CT Team

"Perseverance, resilience, flexibility, and Continuous Quality Improvement are essential elements in responding to changing environmental issues impacting a collaborative project such as RETAIN. An example from 2020 has been the challenges associated with COVID, which has limited face-to-face interaction between staff and participants, medical providers, cross system interaction and RETAIN Leadership Team meetings. As a result, virtual meetings with customers and cross agency staff have been successfully implemented and embraced as well as the use of electronic signature software for obtaining forms required for enrollment. At the core of our project is an integrated team of dedicated professionals whose number one goal is ensuring the best possible outcome for each of our participants."

- RETAINWORKS (Kansas) Team

"In Kentucky, we've learned that successful Return to Work/Stay at Work outcomes grow when there is awareness and understanding across health care, employers and employees. It takes more than a single champion. It requires concerted, unwavering expectations and supports that help people remain as valued and productive members of the workforce."

- RETAIN Kentucky Team

"We learned about the power of partnerships to enable the work of RETAIN to move forward. Partnering with the worker first and foremost, emphasizing what the RETAIN program can do for them, while also engaging the provider and employer to help RETAIN participants return to work as soon as safely possible."

- Minnesota RETAIN Team

"It has been eye-opening to learn how much our communities need RETAIN services. We've learned the true value of a helping hand. As a patient copes with their recovery (pain, complications, loss of income, lack of physical/emotional assistance, childcare during recovery), we as the RETAIN team are there to help guide them in the direction of calm healing. We have helped companies realize that keeping their employees, if even in a modified position, is beneficial for both the company and employee. We've learned that living in our area, there are many warm-hearted individuals that have devoted their lives to helping one another through several community resources."

- Ohio RETAIN Team

"Having excellent supports for individuals at risk to fall out of the work force is not enough. Even when robust services are available to support individuals in their efforts to SAW/RTW, many of the options and access points are confusing and difficult to navigate. These problems are often related to communication, education, system navigation, and connecting people. This need has become more acute, and more obvious to those outside the return-to-work field, since the pandemic. We learned the value of spending time talking to the individuals, organizations, agencies, providers of services, and policy makers involved in the current system, including the worker/patient, to understand unmet needs."

- Vermont RETAIN Team

"RETAIN has services to offer that are not available otherwise and fill a critical need. It is a program that provides hope to people who otherwise might not return to the workforce. RETAIN encourages workers, employers and medical

providers to talk about how non-work injury impacts work. Often this conversation doesn't happen, and workers are left to figure out how to navigate the situation on their own. By each entity engaging in the conversation everyone wins. RETAIN gives workers, employers, and medical providers an ally to have critical conversations that support recovery and full engagement in work."

- RETAIN Washington Team

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