

For Your Insight: Research and Practice From the Field Vol. 27

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This monthly update highlights relevant research for RETAIN states and summarizes key takeaways that may benefit program implementation. Each summary includes a link to an article, a resource, or a formal abstract. An accessible version of For Your Insight is attached to this email.

Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work Models and Strategies: Findings in Brief

This brief summarizes the finding of Epstein and colleagues' (2020) literature review to identify stay-at-work (SAW) and return-to-work (RTW) programs and examine ways to expand evidence of program effectiveness. The authors found 68 unique programs and categorized the programs along five dimensions:

- Components or services—programs with components or services that involve improving employment and reducing federal disability benefit, which may include financial incentives, medical management, employment training, and information-based services
- Administrative context—program type that involves entities responsible for program administration (e.g., workers' compensation or private disability insurer)
- Timing of intervention—when programs intervene with the worker relative to when the worker applies for federal disability
- Target population—targeting of medical conditions, including specific medical conditions (e.g., musculoskeletal, mental health)
- Stakeholders involved—groups directly involved with program implementation (e.g., employer, insurer, health care provider)

More than half of the 68 programs identified offered more than one component or service. The most common program component was information-based services, which include helping workers to navigate resources, promoting communication among employers and health care providers, and providing technical assistance to help employers implement SAW/RTW. State workers' compensation agency or private disability insurers led 40% of the programs. Nearly all the programs intervene with workers before they would apply for federal disability. In addition, most programs do not focus on a specific injury. The authors also found little evidence to support the effectiveness of SAW/RTW programs. To expand evidence on effective SAW/RTW programs, the authors recommend that future research topics include studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of providing targeted information to workers, employers, and medical professionals; and demonstrate whether partial temporary disability insurance payments encourage return to work. They also recommend conducting a longitudinal survey that would help identify target populations for SAW/RTW populations.

Brief available: [Epstein, Z., Wood, M., Prenovitz, S., & Nichols, A. \(2020\). *Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work Models and Strategies: Findings in Brief*. ABT Associates.](#)

Tags: SAW, RTW, program components, injured workers

Accommodation and Compliance: Stay at Work/Return to Work

This resource from the Job Accommodation Network describes how stay-at-work (SAW)/return-to-work (RTW) accommodation practices do and do not align with the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA). The resource focuses on 10 SAW/RTW practices, including:

- *Job descriptions*—a job’s essential job functions and the knowledge and critical skills needed to carry out those functions in outline format. Developing and updating job descriptions creates an understanding of the work duties required. A job description also can be an effective tool for creating task-specific accommodation options. The ADA requires employers to create job descriptions.
- *100% healed policies*—policies that require injured workers to be fully recovered before returning to work without any limitations. Such policies may violate the ADA because they disregard the ADA requirement that employers consider reasonable accommodations to overcome limitations caused by the injury or disability.
- *Temporary accommodations*—an option when long-term accommodations are not available immediately because of delays in acquiring equipment or purchasing a service. Temporary accommodations are compatible with the ADA and may help employers comply with the law when they may choose to provide accommodations such as reassigning essential work tasks to other employees.
- *Light duty*—an offering to workers of physically or mentally less demanding work than normal. The ADA does not require employers to offer light-duty positions, though light duty may be offered as a form of reasonable accommodation under the law.
- *Job restructuring*—a form of reasonable accommodation under the ADA that involves reassigning unessential job functions to other employees.
- *Transitional work arrangement*—an accommodation that may include modified duties, tailored accommodations, or reassignment to another position. The goal of transitional work arrangements is to help the worker slowly return to full capacity. The ADA does not require transitional work arrangements, but they can be an effective SAW strategy.
- *Plan of action*—an emergency preparedness tool that addresses medical emergencies in the workplace. A plan of action can make it possible for an injured worker or worker with a disability to return to work, making it an important part of SAW/RTW programs.
- *Reassignment*—an injured worker’s assignment to a vacant position that may be less demanding than their current position. A reassignment may be considered either a temporary or permanent accommodation.
- *Administrative modifications*—modifications made to policies that may be in violation of the ADA, such as 100% healed policies.

- *Leave*—medically necessary absence from work granted by employers. There is no required amount of leave under the ADA, but, if necessary, employers have a duty to grant leave until the worker can return to their position.

Resource available: [Job Accommodation Network. \(n.d.\). Accommodations and compliance: Stay at Work \(SAW\)/Return to work \(RTW\). Morgantown, WV: Author.](#)

Tags: Accommodations, ADA, RTW, SAW

Benefit Duration and Return to Work Outcomes in Short-Term Disability Insurance Programs: Evidence From Temporary Disability Insurance Program

Bourbonniere and Mann (2018) examined whether a short-term disability insurance (STDI) program in Rhode Island also could be an early intervention service. The Rhode Island STDI program allows workers who have a nonwork-related injury that impedes work for 7 days to make a short-term disability claim in which benefits are paid weekly up to 30 weeks. The Rhode Island STDI program also has a partially return-to-work (PRTW) benefit option that allows workers to return to work with reduced hours and collect a portion of their benefits for up to 8 weeks. PRTW claimants work at reduced hours and collect the difference between their reduced earnings and total benefit rate. Compared with workers who did not choose to receive PRTW, workers who did choose to receive PRTW benefits received STDI benefits for fewer weeks and could gradually return to work full time. Workers who did choose to receive PRTW benefits also had higher salaries compared with those who did not choose to receive PRTW. The authors conclude that Rhode Island’s STDI program may benefit from coordination with return-to-work services such as vocational rehabilitation to support claimants not receiving PRTW benefits.

Abstract available: [Bourbonniere, Annette M., and David R. Mann. “Benefit Duration and Return to Work Outcomes in Short Term Disability Insurance Programs: Evidence from Temporary Disability Insurance Program.” *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2018, pp. 597–609](#)

Tags: RTW, non-work-related injury, temporary disability insurance program

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