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RETAIN REPORT

Retaining Employment
and Talent After
Injury/Illness Network



The RETAIN Report

December 2021

Welcome to the December 2021 issue of The RETAIN Report – the internal e-newsletter for awardees of the Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Initiative. Please feel free to share this subscription link with other RETAIN team members as appropriate.

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 grantee team, please visit RETAINTA.org and click "Request an Account" in the right-hand sidebar.



Join Us Today!

The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is excited to host the RETAIN Phase 2 quarterly cohort meeting today, December 16 at 2 PM ET. Joanne Lastort from the DOL's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) will discuss Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and demonstrate practical ways to increase accessibility of your electronic RETAIN materials. We look forward to having you [join us](#) for this meeting!

The agenda is as follows:

- Welcome & Announcements: ODEP
- Evaluation Site Visit Updates: Mathematica
- Section 508 Presentation: Joanne Lastort
- Closing

A recording of the Section 508 Presentation will be posted on the [ROC](#) in the coming days.



First Annual Convening Recap

We proudly presented the first [RETAIN Annual Convening](#) on November 2–4, 2021. Thanks to all the attendees, facilitators, subject matter experts (SMEs), and ODEP leadership for your parts in making this year's event a resounding success.

Key themes that emerged from the Annual Convening sessions and conversations included:

- Integrating strategies and promising practices for employer recruitment and engagement;
- Leveraging the role of the Return-to-Work Coordinator—and their specific knowledge, skills and competencies—as a key to success;
- Identifying and communicating the return on investment for all key

RETAIN stakeholders to encourage their engagement and sustained participation; and

- Connecting within and across state teams and roles to share ideas and thoughts about challenges and promising practices.

Below are highlights from several sessions held during the conference:

Day 1

- Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) leadership Taryn Williams (Assistant Secretary) and Jennifer Sheehy (Deputy Assistant Secretary) delivered an encouraging opening, expressing their excitement for this year's Annual Convening. Assistant Secretary Williams shared her enthusiasm about returning to ODEP and continuing to help integrate those experiencing an injury or illness into the workforce. The two discussed how the RETAIN program is generating new knowledge to help inform policy and practice, and emphasized ODEP's eagerness to learn from grantees.
- Speakers shared moving stories of their experiences returning to work after an injury in **The Participant Voice: Highlighting the Voice and Experience of Former Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) Participants**. They discussed their motivations to return to the labor force after their illness or injury, including maintaining connections with colleagues and friends. They also shared that access to RTW Coordinators and SAW/RTW tools can help participants navigate the health care and workforce systems and establish workplace accommodations. Speakers included:
 - Timothy Moore (RETAIN Ohio Phase 1 Participant), and
 - William Robinson (Director, Michigan Bureau of Services for Blind Persons).
- States were provided an opportunity to talk with and learn from other state team members with similar roles in the **Serving RETAIN Participants: Roles and Impacts** breakout sessions. During the breakout sessions, discussions were facilitated between:
 - RTW Coordinators and Nurse Navigators;
 - Workforce Representatives;
 - Medical Partners;
 - State Directors; and
 - Evaluation Liaisons/Technical Assistance Liaisons.

Together, state teams discussed how their work aligns with the RETAIN mission, challenging aspects of their work, and how their roles may have changed from Phase 1 to Phase 2.

Day 2

- The **Business Perspective: Engaging and Sustaining Business/Employer Partnerships for SAW/RTW** panel shared business approaches to SAW/RTW programs and the benefits, including better mental and physical health outcomes for participating associates and retention of productive employees. Panelists included:
 - Brian Stierle (Director, Human Resources, Sysco Michigan), and
 - Jeff Cofield (Manager, Disability Management, Alabama Power Company).
- The plenary session, **Role of Return-to Work Coordinators and Interventions Designed to Prevent Workplace Disability**, led by Glenn Pransky, MD, M.Occ. Health (Associate Professor, University of Massachusetts Medical School), discussed

the themes of successful workplace interventions, including:

- Adequate workplace accommodations;
- Direct contact between health care providers and the patient's workplace;
- Early worker contacts and workplace visits; and
- The presence of RTW coordinators or facilitators.

Participants also learned the importance of effective communication and education, as well as how to promote positive interaction and trust to foster impactful outcomes.

Day 3

- Building on September's State-to-State Exchange webinar series, the **State-to-State: A Deeper Dive** gave states the opportunity to present on program elements that interested them as they continue into Phase 2. Topics and presenters from each state included:
 - **Ohio:** Marketing to Build a Partnership, led by Dina Zidian (Referral and Enrollment Supervisor) and Kristina Urick (Education and Training Supervisor).
 - **Kentucky:** A Deeper Dive Into Sustainability, led by Shirley Kron (Director of Outreach and Engagement), Kimberly Wickert (Director of Organizational Partnerships), and Johnny Collett (Workforce Development Lead).
 - **Vermont:** LINK-VT and Training Grant Program, led by Christine McDonough, PhD (Director, Data Coordinating Center), Carrie Freitag (Project Manager), and Deborah Kennedy, PhD (Senior Strategist for Value-Based Services).
 - **Minnesota:** MN RETAIN Program Overview, led by Nancy Omondi (Director of Adult Programs, MN DEED, MN State Director), Laura Breeher, MD, MPH (Chief, Section of Occupational Medicine, Mayo Clinic, MN Medical Director), and Cameron Sherrard (RETAIN Grant Coordinator, Workforce Development, Inc.).
 - **Kansas:** RETAIN WORKS, led by Dale Tower (RETAIN State Lead), and Jodi Hearn (RETAIN Referral and Enrollment Lead).
- During the **Peer-to-Peer Round Robin**, each state raised problems of practice or issues of interest to discuss with other states that would benefit from thought partnership. States shared and learned about different approaches for employer outreach and stakeholder surveys and discussed suggestions for tracking program progress to inform future strategy.



New to the ROC: The Peer-to-Peer Exchange

As part of our continued support for direct connections between states, we recently launched the [Peer-to-Peer \(P2P\) Exchange](#) on the ROC, which allows RETAIN state teams to converse with peers on topics of importance. This space is intended for team members to share experiences, ask questions, respond to inquiries, and contribute to a rich RETAIN dialogue about project challenges, solutions, and strategies for success.

Please feel free to start new discussion threads on topics that matter to you. We also welcome your suggestions for new forum areas for discussions in the [Comment Box](#) as we build this platform to best suit your needs. If you need assistance posting or responding to threads in the P2P Exchange, accessing the ROC, or require a new account, please contact your RETAIN TA state liaison.



Recent Resources

Employment as Prevention: A Public Health Response to the Overdose Crisis

This [podcast](#) with SMEs Amanda Latimore (PhD, Director of the Center for Addiction Research and Effective Solutions at AIR) and Ashley Shaw (MBA, Director of Creating Opportunities for Recovery Employment at Marshall Health in West Virginia) highlights ways that employers and businesses can address workforce challenges related to the opioid crisis, and potential strategies for states to implement when supporting impacted employers and participants.

The SMEs discuss perspectives on research and program services including:

- Myths about hiring people in recovery;
- The return on investment for employers;
- Experiences and challenges of individuals wishing to stay in or return to the workforce; and
- Considerations for supporting recovery-friendly workplaces.

RETAIN FYI: Research and Practice from the Field

The [November edition](#) of the RETAIN FYI covers topics including tasks and activities most often conducted by RTW Coordinators working in large organizations, a review of early intervention pathways and interventions for SAW/RTW, and approaches to improving pain management policies for workers with musculoskeletal disorders. Check out this latest edition!

Do you have a research article, brief, or report on promising or evidence-based SAW/RTW practices we should highlight in an upcoming FYI? [Email us!](#)



Upcoming Resources: Sneak Preview

RETAIN Communications Plan Video Blog

As its first resource for states in the new year, the RETAIN TA team will publish a video blog (vlog) to assist states in developing or enhancing their state's communications plan. This vlog will provide step-by-step video instruction on how to use the [RETAIN Strategic Communications Plan Guide](#). It will also introduce methods and best practices to enhance each state's communications efforts throughout Phase 2. Be on the lookout for this resource on the ROC in early January as you start developing your communications activities for 2022!

State Success Stories

We are excited to work with state teams to develop the next round of Success Stories illustrating the impactful work of Phase 2. We look forward to sharing these with you in early 2022!

This publication was prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy and Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) state grantees, by the American Institutes for Research under DOL Contract Number 1605DC-18-F-00429. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DOL, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.



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