

Kentucky Inclusive Workforce Summit Elevates RETAIN Message of Inclusion and Accessibility

Spring 2024 RETAIN Success Story

In September 2023, RETAIN Kentucky co-hosted an Inclusive Workforce Summit. This summit helped to amplify the RETAIN message of stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) best practices, accessibility, and inclusion in the workforce. Hosting the event also strengthened RETAIN’s relationship with partners like the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board, enabling RETAIN to better connect with the business community and legislators.

Background

The Commonwealth of Kentucky adopted an [Employment First](#) framework through Executive Orders issued in 2018 and 2020 and subsequent legislation passed in 2022. Employment First sets an expectation of work as the first and primary option for people with disabilities who want to work. The state’s Employment First Council includes members representing the workforce, employers, and providers of disability services, among others. The RETAIN Kentucky team recognized that Employment First helps advance RETAIN’s goal of improving the employment outcomes of people with work-limiting injuries and illnesses. This meaningful connection provided a powerful opportunity to leverage state legislation to promote the RETAIN program.

Challenge

Employers often overlook people with disabilities, injuries, or illnesses. This creates barriers to achieving RETAIN’s goal of helping people stay at or return to work after experiencing a work-limiting injury or illness. This can lead to ripple effects including financial and health consequences, employers losing productive workers, and people applying for disability benefits.



Challenge-Action-Results

Challenge: Employers overlook employees with disability, injury, or illness, creating unnecessary barriers to SAW/RTW goals.



Action: RETAIN Kentucky co-hosted an Inclusive Workforce Summit to spread the word about its program and promote SAW/RTW best practices.

Results: The 259 people who attended the summit included legislators, employers, human resource professionals, community leaders, and service providers.

Actions

RETAIN Kentucky, led by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, partnered with the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board to bring together key constituents in Kentucky's workforce system; raise awareness about RETAIN services; and increase attendees' awareness of SAW/RTW best practices, accessibility, and inclusion. This included the following actions:

Building Partnerships. RETAIN Kentucky partnered with the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to sponsor the event. These partnerships helped RETAIN more effectively reach employers (including health-care providers), workforce leaders, and legislators.

Raising Awareness About RETAIN. The team planned a program that was relevant and interesting for the audiences they wanted to reach, while remaining faithful to their purpose. In doing so, they introduced a key audience to the RETAIN program, its services, and its goals. The program also sowed the seeds for sustainability by highlighting the importance of SAW/RTW in addressing workforce shortages and growing a healthy Kentucky economy for legislators and workforce leaders.

RESULTS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Kentucky Inclusive Workforce Summit took place on September 13, 2023, in Lexington, Kentucky. The event achieved the following results:

- It brought together 259 leaders and interested parties from throughout the Kentucky workforce and business communities. Attendees included health-care providers, legislators, employers, human resource professionals, community leaders, and service providers.
- It strengthened state and regional partnerships. The benefits of this collaboration extended beyond planning a successful event. These new relationships provide another avenue for the RETAIN Kentucky team to reach key audiences like employers and legislators.
- It promoted the RETAIN program and best practices in SAW/RTW, accessibility, and inclusion to employers, workforce leaders, and policymakers throughout the state. Plans are underway to host a second event in 2024, providing an opportunity to build program sustainability.
- It spurred the development of a how-to guide to help other states mirror this success and advance the overarching RETAIN goal of reducing workforce disability.



Kentucky is participating in RETAIN (Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network) to build connections and improve coordination among employers, health-care providers, and other key parties to help workers with new injuries and illnesses stay in the workforce. The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation leads Kentucky RETAIN, together with the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute and committed project partners, including the Council of State Governments. The US Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.

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