

## RETAINWORKS Highlights Behavioral Health Needs With New Tools for Health Care Providers

*Spring 2024 RETAIN Success Story*

Like physical injury or illness, behavioral health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders, can affect a person’s ability to work. The team at Kansas’s Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network, known as RETAINWORKS, knew that health care providers needed tools to better tailor accommodations to the needs of patients with behavioral health conditions. To meet that need, the team created two forms: the *Behavioral Health 30-Day Risk Assessment* form and the *Behavioral Health Activity Prescription* form—both of which have benefited the program and RETAINWORKS participants.

### Background

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that more than one in five adults in the United States live with a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder. This includes anxiety, depression, substance use disorders, post-traumatic stress, and eating disorders. These conditions can be serious enough to affect a person’s ability to stay at work or return to work (SAW/RTW). People with physical health conditions can also have behavioral health issues that make their recovery more difficult.

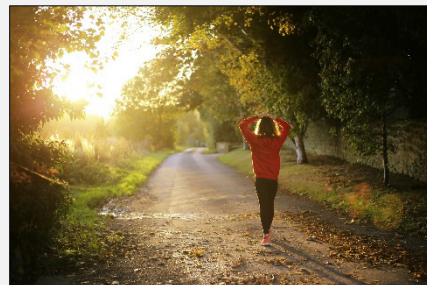
### Challenge

Many tools that health care providers use to create SAW/RTW plans or to recommend workplace accommodations focus on physical limitations. They include recommendations such as lifting restrictions or ergonomic workstations, which do not address the types of nonphysical limitations that can come with a behavioral health condition. Examples of nonphysical limitations include difficulty



### Challenge-Action-Results

**Challenge:** Most tools that help health care providers create SAW/RTW plans focus on accommodations for physical limitations. This makes it difficult to create a plan for people with behavioral health conditions.



**Action:** RETAINWORKS created a 30-day risk assessment and an activity prescription form focused on the needs of people with behavioral health conditions.

**Results:** RETAINWORKS has seen better communication with social workers and behavioral health providers as well as increased enrollment of people with behavioral health conditions.

making decisions, processing written or spoken language, and coping with stress. In addition, the RETAINWORKS team noticed that behavioral health providers, such as social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists, were not fully engaged in the RETAIN program. Those providers did not always understand how to fit their work into a framework that focused so heavily on plans for physical health recovery and physical accommodations.

## Actions

Carrie Mitzel of Stormont Vail Health and Kendall Runnebaum from Ascension Via Christi worked together to create the *Behavioral Health 30-Day Risk Assessment* and *Behavioral Health Activity Prescription* forms. They wanted to develop user-friendly tools that could be used statewide to help health care providers create SAW/RTW plans that include limitations caused by behavioral health conditions. When developing the forms, Mitzel and Runnebaum considered the following actions:

**Focus on behavioral health needs.** The forms were designed to identify and address the unique needs of RETAIN participants with behavioral health conditions, improve communication between the RETAIN program and behavioral health providers, and increase the participation of a population that can be overlooked and underserved by health care and workforce service providers.

**Tailor recommendations to those needs.** The forms give behavioral health providers options for common work accommodations that help people with behavioral health conditions succeed on the job. Examples of these accommodations include additional breaks throughout the workday, modified working conditions such as working from home or working fewer hours, organization tools, and schedule flexibility to accommodate regular appointments for therapy or medication management.

**Make the tools work for providers.** The behavioral health risk assessment complements the activity prescription by allowing providers to track their patients' progress and adjust their recommendations, as needed.

## RESULTS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Since the implementation of the forms in November 2023, the RETAINWORKS team has noted several improvements, including the following:

- Increasing the percentage of new enrollees with behavioral health conditions. RETAINWORKS began enrolling more people with behavioral health conditions because of these forms thanks in part to more behavioral health providers referring patients to the program. In October 2023, 3.8% of new enrollees had a primary behavioral health diagnosis. After the forms were implemented in November 2023, 13.8% of new enrollees had a primary behavioral health diagnosis, and 38% had a secondary behavioral health diagnosis.

- Improving communication and collaboration with behavioral health providers. For example, Stormont Vail Hospital had difficulty showing social workers how they fit into RETAIN. The RETAINWORKS team used the behavioral health forms to show these providers how their work fits into the SAW/RTW process. As a result, RETAINWORKS onboarded 23 new social workers.
- Improving services for participants. Providers now have a wider range of options when recommending accommodations for a SAW/RTW plan. The accommodations recommended in the behavioral health forms not only better fit the needs of people with behavioral health conditions, but they also help people with some physical health conditions, such as chronic migraines, seizure disorders, and conditions that cause chronic fatigue.

## RETAIN WORKS

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*Kansas 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 or illnesses stay in the workforce. The Kansas Department of Commerce leads RETAINWORKS in coordination with several partners. The U.S. Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.*

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