

## Vermont Interventions Help Ensure That All Vermonters Have Equal Access to RETAIN Services

*Vermont RETAIN (VT RETAIN) is using a systematic assessment and implementation approach to increase the pool of participants who receive stay-at-work and return-to-work (SAW/RTW) services and ensure that its programs and services are accessible and reflect the diverse worker populations in Vermont.*

### BACKGROUND

As VT RETAIN recruits primary care practices and enrolls workers with injuries or illnesses in the second phase of its program, a top priority is to ensure that all Vermonters have access to the program. This includes worker populations that are historically underserved by health care and



SAW/RTW services. The program model partners with primary care practices to reach workers with injuries or illnesses that affect their work. However, through stakeholder input, the team has identified worker populations that may face barriers to accessing SAW/RTW services in primary care settings or may not seek services when they are injured or ill. In addition, during the first phase of the program, only 2% of participants were Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), lower than expected in a representative sample of Vermonters (8% according to the U.S. Census Bureau).

## RETAIN VERMONT

*Vermont 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 newly injured and ill workers stay in the workforce. The state Department of Labor’s Division of Workers’ Compensation and Safety, in coordination with several partners, leads Vermont RETAIN. The U.S. Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.*

## CHALLENGE

VT RETAIN wants to ensure that the RETAIN program is accessible to all Vermonters and represents the diversity of Vermont’s population. To do so, the program realized that it needed to identify and implement strategies to reach historically underserved worker populations beyond primary care practices.

## ACTIONS

To address this challenge, VT RETAIN has:

**Conducted an equity impact assessment.** VT RETAIN partnered with the Vermont Office of Racial Equity to conduct an equity impact assessment that identified critical areas to improve the program’s diversity, equity, and inclusion. From this, the team created a framework for its efforts to address barriers and implement strategies to ensure that the program is accessible to all worker populations.

**Created an Equity and Accessibility Workgroup (EAW).** The EAW guides and informs VT RETAIN’s efforts to ensure inclusion, equity, and access. The EAW is building relationships throughout the state to ensure that more underserved worker populations are represented in the program.

**Partnered with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and free clinics,** which provide care to historically underserved worker populations. By targeting FQHC and free clinic participation, VT RETAIN works to reach individuals across primary care practice settings.

**Developed resources for diverse worker populations.** VT RETAIN’s RTW Inventory provides a searchable database of existing, culturally relevant, and accessible resources that work-health coaches can use for referrals. The team is working with state stakeholders to identify and fill resource gaps, and updating the directory as new resources are identified.

**Identified primary languages for accessible training and materials.** VT RETAIN identified a list of core languages used throughout the state, including at FQHCs and free clinics, so program materials could be translated and accessible to a diverse workforce.

**Implemented equitable hiring practices for program staff positions.** To reduce any potential subjectivity in the interview and selection process, VT RETAIN deliberately circulated job postings widely to attract diverse candidates. They also revised the interview process to use standardized interview questions—which were reviewed for inclusive language—in all interviews.



## Challenge-Actions-Results

**Challenge:** Ensure program is accessible to all worker populations.



**Actions:** Conduct an assessment, partner with clinics serving historically underserved populations, develop accessible resources, and implement equitable hiring practices.

**Results:** Partner with FQHCs and free clinics, engage interpreter services, implement a self-screening process, provide access to people with disabilities, and leverage technology to expand accessibility

## KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESULTS

VT RETAIN is actively taking steps to ensure that its program is accessible and reflects Vermont’s diverse worker populations.

- ✓ *Facilitate access to SAW/RTW support services for worker populations that historically have had limited or no access to health care and other SAW/RTW services.*
  - Two FQHCs representing eight practices—about a third of the initial participating clinics—have begun screening patients. The goal is for 50% of participating practices to serve historically underrepresented worker populations.
  - A patient self-screening process reduced potential subjectivity and bias in the referral process.
  - The program is hiring a more diverse team and working with organizations that serve traditionally underserved populations such as migrant and refugee workers; people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or blind; seniors; and the LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities.
  - The program is developing training and program materials in the identified core languages. In addition, it is engaging interpreter services so participants can access program resources and supports in their primary language or mode of communication.
  - VT RETAIN RTW coordination services use a strength-based coaching model to prioritize the needs of the individual, recognizing and respecting each individual’s goals and values.
- ✓ *Engage stakeholders to identify and create accessible best practice SAW/RTW resources for a diverse worker population.*
  - The team collaborates with state agencies and other partners to identify gaps in existing resources and services, create best practices that support all types of Vermont workers with an injury or illness, and provide statewide access to telehealth and videoconferencing sites to address digital inequity in a very rural population.



*This document 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.*