

Kansas Using Relationships to Build a Statewide Network of Health Care Systems and Partners

RETAINWORKS is building partnerships with health care systems, workforce development boards, and vocational rehabilitation centers to increase the awareness and importance of viewing work as a positive medical outcome. These partnerships are expanding the program’s services across the state, and increasing opportunities for partners to work and learn together.


BACKGROUND

During the second phase of its program, RETAINWORKS is growing from a small, rural Kansas pilot to a statewide program. To achieve this, RETAINWORKS is partnering with additional health care systems to expand stay-at-work (SAW)/return-to-work (RTW) services across the state.



THE CHALLENGE

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, health care systems have less capacity to explore adding services and developing new partnerships. To expand partnerships with health care systems across the state, RETAINWORKS realized that it needed to engage experts and partners to highlight the program’s benefits to health care systems and provide consistent messages about the program’s goals.



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 newly injured and ill workers 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, is sponsoring RETAIN.

ACTIONS

To address this challenge, RETAINWORKS collaborates with the following partners:

Health Care System Lead: The RETAINWORKS Health Care System Lead is also a director of a system in Kansas. He has been the Health Care System Lead for RETAINWORKS since May 2020. This experience has strengthened his commitment to the program and recognition of its value. He meets weekly with the RETAINWORKS State Program Manager to identify potential contacts and plan outreach as well as informational meetings for promotional and recruitment purposes. Interested systems rely on the lead for in-depth information about the program and lessons learned from the health care system perspective.

Health Care Systems: When recruiting health care systems, RETAINWORKS highlights the program’s benefits, including education for health care providers, expanded awareness of employment as a health outcome, and additional services for patients. Some health care systems did not know about other public workforce services before learning about RETAINWORKS, whose patients benefit from the coordinated SAW/RTW interventions offered in partnership with local workforce development boards.

Workforce Development Boards: RETAINWORKS asked local workforce development board members and directors to connect the state RETAINWORKS Program Manager with health care system contacts. This led to several meetings with health care systems across the state and the addition of two health care system partners serving five new areas in the state. By partnering with local workforce development boards, RETAINWORKS can provide employment and training services statewide that help individuals find jobs, stay at work, or return to work.

Vocational Rehabilitation Centers: Vocational rehabilitation offers services that complement RETAINWORKS services for those who are eligible for the program. These services may include conducting worksite visits and identifying equipment or technology that helps workers function better at work. The centers can also reimburse medical providers for requested services and assessments, provide funds to support long-term employment, and train participants who need services beyond the 6-month time limit in RETAINWORKS.



Challenge–Actions–Results

Challenge: Build SAW/RTW partnerships and services across the state



Actions: RETAINWORKS teams with experts to share the program’s value to health care systems, partners with workforce boards and vocational rehabilitation centers to increase services, and sets up regular meetings so agencies and health care systems can work with and learn from each other.

Results: RETAINWORKS expanded its partnerships with health care systems, workforce boards, and vocational rehabilitation centers, and increased communication and collaboration among agencies and health care systems.

RETAINWORKS provides chances for partners to work together, develop best practices for SAW/RTW services across the state, and improve patient care standards. To do so, the program is:

Hosting meetings with peers from different agencies every quarter. Participants share ideas on best practices and strategies when facing challenges. They also learn about other resources such as self-paced training sessions for new providers.

Creating teams that pair local workforce boards and health care systems. These local teams meet twice monthly to discuss how to put SAW/RTW practices in place and maintain the program’s quality. This strengthens relationships and support among local partners and improves service quality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESULTS

By developing partnerships across the state RETAINWORKS is:

- ✓ *Expanding the network of services across the state to improve outcomes for people with illnesses and injuries.*
 - RETAINWORKS has formed partnerships with three of six major health care systems in Kansas.
 - The program’s Health Care System Lead serves as an expert on RETAINWORKS. He speaks from experience about the program’s value and its benefits for health care systems and patients.
 - Partnerships with workforce development boards and vocational rehabilitation centers have expanded SAW/RTW services for workers who are injured or ill.
- ✓ *Developing a culture of support among health care systems and partners that enhances services.*
 - The program creates opportunities for health care systems and other partners to work together and learn from each other. Regular meetings of peers and paired local teams increase communication among health care systems and agency partners.



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.