

RETAIN Evaluation: Updates and Insights from Enrollee Interviews

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Presented by: Jayna Jones and Jillian Berk



Mathematica presenters



Jill Berk (she/her)
Evaluation Lead



Jayna Jones (she/her)
Research Analyst



RETAIN evaluation

Process and participation study

- / **Goal:** Develop a deep understanding of how RETAIN programs operate.
- / **Key data sources:**
 - Two rounds of site visits
 - Interviews with enrollees
 - Cost data and staff activity logs
 - RETAIN enrollment and service use data

Impact study

- / **Goal:** Learn how RETAIN services improve outcomes.
- / **Key data sources:**
 - RETAIN enrollment data
 - Two rounds of follow-up surveys
 - Wage records
 - SSA administrative data



Evaluation progress

- / Completed site visits, enrollee interviews, and staff activity logs**
 - THANK YOU for your support with evaluation data collection
 - Early Assessment Report available on SSA's RETAIN website
 - Process Study report coming in early 2024
- / Active fielding of enrollee surveys (2-month and 12-month follow-ups)**
- / Developing special topics reports**



Agenda

- / Our approach to enrollee interviews**
- / Key findings**
- / Next steps for the evaluation**



Our Approach



Elevating treatment enrollees' voices

/ Recruited diverse group of RETAIN enrollees

- All states represented
- Race (oversample of enrollees of color)
- Oversample of enrollees with reported behavioral health conditions
- Age
- Levels of RETAIN service use

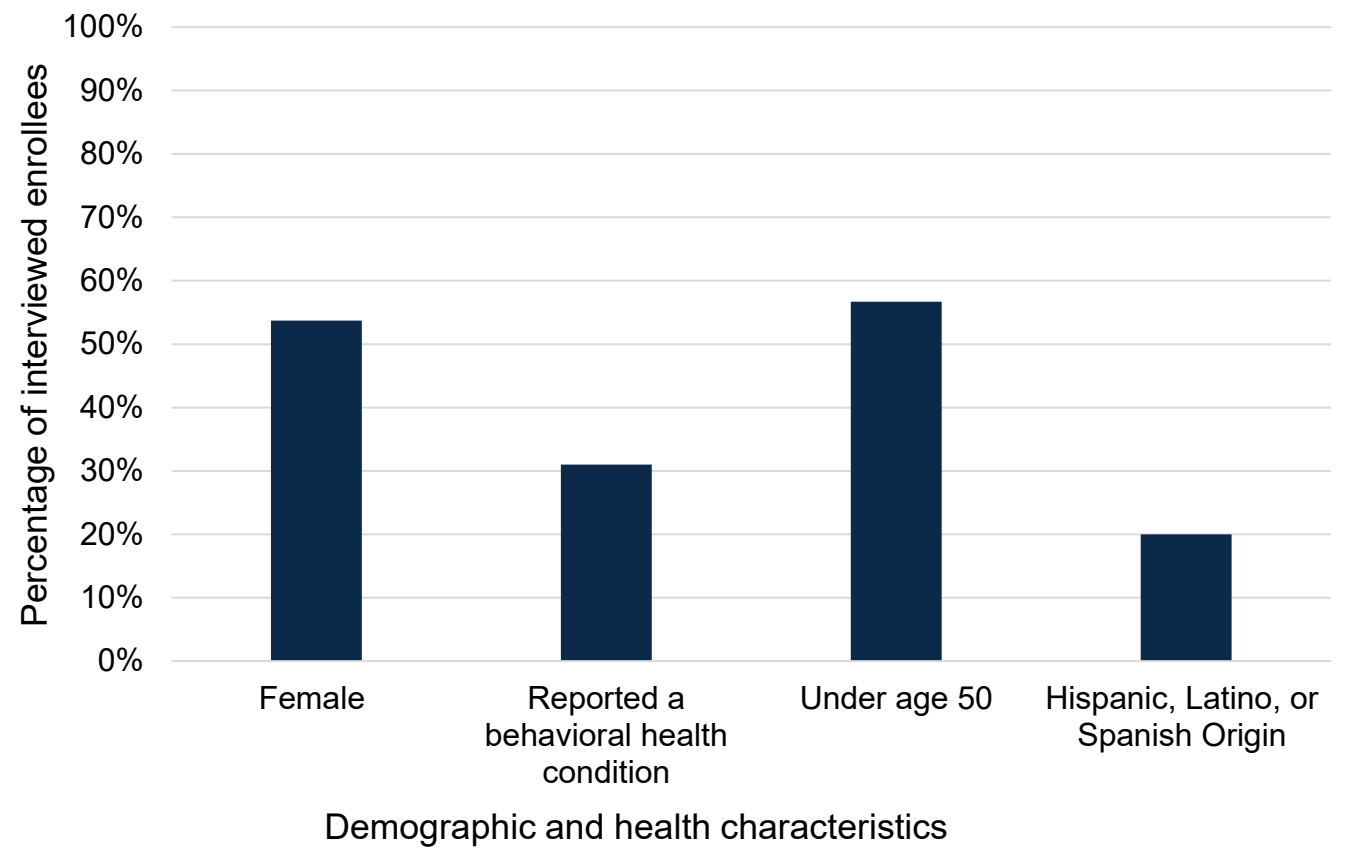
/ Completed 67 interviews



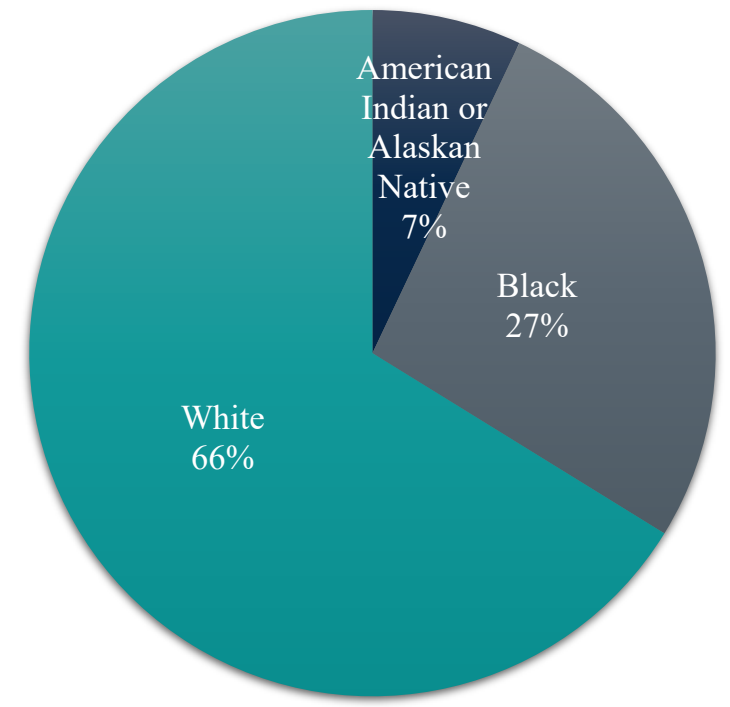


Final number of interviews completed by demographic and health characteristics

Interviews by enrollee characteristics



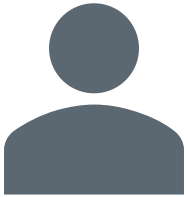
Race of interviewed enrollees



n=3 enrollees that represent two or more races



Explored enrollees' experiences



Enrollment



Work



RETAIN services



Key Findings



Treatment enrollee experiences with RETAIN enrollment



Motivations for enrolling in RETAIN

Access to information, resources (e.g., financial, housing payments) or services to stay at work or return to work

Participating in a study could help others

Financial incentive



Understanding of what RETAIN offered

Mixed reports on whether RETAIN staff clearly explained the program during recruitment and enrollment



Concerns about RETAIN

Legitimacy of the program

- More comfortable after talking with RETAIN staff and reviewing materials

Time commitment and low energy due to injury/illness



Employed enrollee experiences with staying at work or returning to work

/ **Many continued with their employer**

- Enrollees worked directly with their employers to modify their workload, hours, and responsibilities
- RETAIN was a helpful resource if their job status changed

/ **Several changed their job due to injury/illness**

/ **A few credited RETAIN with helping them find a new job**



Unemployed enrollee experiences with staying at work or returning to work

/ **Many plan to return to work**

- RETAIN supported the job search process

/ **Several do not plan to return to work**

- Do not plan to return to work due to the health impacts of their injury or illness
- Application to Social Security Disability Insurance

/ **Additional barriers to employment**

- Enrollees experiencing housing instability or who are justice-involved



State employment environmental impact on experiences with employment

- / **Employment environments generally did not affect enrollees' jobs or ability to work**
- / **Many jobs require physical labor**
 - Could not perform due to their injury/illness
 - Lack of work experience outside of physical labor markets
- / **Frustrated with lower wage offerings**
 - Uncertain of the benefit of returning to work
- / **COVID-19 did not have a long-term affect on their job or ability to work**
 - Many workloads remained the same or increased during the pandemic, which placed additional stressors on several enrollees and negatively impacted their health



RETAIN's impact on experiences with employment

Valued the practical support from RETAIN staff

- / Getting medical supplies needed to return to work
- / Career counseling
- / Making car and utility payments while they were not working
- / Guidance navigating medical providers' recommendations for returning to work
- / Assistance coordinating with employers to request accommodations

Valued the emotional support from RETAIN staff

- / Increased enrollees' confidence, motivation, and encouragement to return to work
- / Some enrollees were too early in recovery to benefit from RETAIN



Treatment enrollee experiences with return-to-work (RTW) coordination services



/ **Valued the individualized support**

- Caring and empathetic support motivated them to stay focused and they didn't feel "forgotten about"

/ **Appreciated the help with understanding their medical care**

- Check-ins after medical appointments and translation of medical terms
- Better understanding of work restrictions and physical limitations
- Improved rapport with their medical provider

/ **Mixed experiences with referrals**

- Appreciated the connection to services even when not ready to use them
- Confusion about the services, not always applicable to them
 - o Supportive employer/support network



Treatment enrollee experiences with RTW coordination services



I don't know how many other people decided to participate, but I think it's a unique program. It's nice to know that there are people out there that really care and want you to move yourself back to work, and so that's good.



Treatment enrollee experiences with their medical provider



/ Limited and inconsistent communication with providers

/ Enrollees said medical providers helped to:

- Document work restrictions and accommodations
- Assist with FMLA paperwork or clearance to return to work
- Help with pain management and recovery for their injury/illness
 - Prescriptions
 - Referrals to physical therapy



Treatment enrollee experiences with other RTW services

- / Did not feel they needed other employment services**
- / Limited and inconsistent communication with employment counselors**
 - Frequent turnover with employment counselors
 - Difficulty understanding the full scope of services available to them
- / Enrollees that connected with employment counselors reported:**
 - Interest in financial support rather than career counseling/job-related services



Reasons treatment enrollees did not engage with RETAIN



Were not aware of all the services



Received support from other sources

E.g., family, employer, outside organization



Challenges during recovery

E.g., behavioral health, cognitive, and other impacts of their injury/illness



Changes in program eligibility/participation

Abruptly discharged from the program before returning to work



Treatment enrollee experiences with RETAIN overall

Would recommend RETAIN to a friend/family member

/ Felt RETAIN staff cared and supported them

- Navigating new experiences in complex systems

/ Appreciated information about available services

- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Social services (car, utility, and housing payments; transportation; nutrition services) and peer support

/ Wanted more communication from RETAIN staff

- Clearer, proactive communication about services and resources

/ A few experienced geographical barriers

- Limited access to services (e.g., meeting RTW coordinator in person)



Treatment enrollee experiences with RETAIN overall

Being able to have somebody there to help you, encourage you and guide you through getting a new job ... And being able to have somebody that's just right there for you and a phone call, an email, a text away is wonderful.



Next Steps for the Evaluation



Be on the lookout for...

/ **Special topics reports**

- Comparing RETAIN Enrollees with Other Populations
- Stay-at-work and return-to-work challenges and experiences of RETAIN enrollees with behavioral health conditions

/ **Process Report (Early 2024)**

/ **Short-term Impacts and Experiences Report (Early 2025)**

/ **Final Impact Report (Early 2026)**



Questions?



Lunch Break