

## PREVENTING WORK DISABILITY TRANSITIONAL RETURN TO WORK PROGRAM

### What is Work Disability?

Work Disability occurs when:

- A worker is unable to remain at work because of an injury or illness,
- A worker is unable to resume work because of an injury or illness, OR
- A worker's work ability is altered.

### What is the Focus of Preventing Work Disability?

The focus of Preventing Work Disability is helping workers stay productive at work, or return to a healthy productive work life.

DOC is committed to Preventing Work Disability as part of our Transitional Return to Work Program. We want to make it simple and as easy as possible to navigate through the process during a time of injury. We know it is important to be at work after an injury and that is why we are working hard to make improvements

The program includes Transitional Duty (formerly known as Modified or Light Duty) work assignments to help employees recover and return to their regular duties. The overall aim of our Transitional Return to Work Program is to promote a positive DOC culture that supports employees by emphasizing the prevention of workplace injuries, supporting our employees during a health event such as an injury or illness, and promoting recovery in the work place and timely return to work.

Evidence-based best practice tells us that the sooner injured or ill employees return to the workplace, the more supported they feel, the better the chance they have of remaining at work long term, and the lower the overall injury costs (financial, human, and social). Early and supportive discussion of stay at work options and solutions between the DOC and injured employee has an immediate and lasting impact.

The DOC engaged Correctional Officers and Administrators in a series of focus groups at various locations throughout the State of Washington. The purpose was to hear the voice of our employees and look for ways to improve our Transitional Return to Work Program that helps our employees return to work and continue working after a health event.

The voice of the Corrections Officers was heard in the focus groups and many areas were identified as being important:



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The purpose of Preventing Work Disability is very simple and addresses the concerns voiced above through the following four principles:



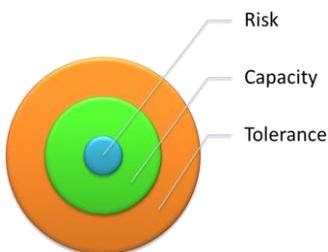
By focusing on these four principles, DOC is committed to ongoing improvements by reviewing outcomes and looking for opportunities for improvement. Our employees are important to us and they have told us that being off work is a financial hardship, stressful, overwhelming, and a confusing time for them. Our vision is to assist our employees with continuing to work and utilizing transitional duties when appropriate and returning to work in a timely manner. By focusing on this, DOC and our employees, have a common goal and that is to prevent Work Disability from occurring. This enables injured and ill employees to remain connected to the workplace based on their abilities. This focus provides a foundation for the placement of temporarily partially disabled or recovering employees into meaningful, productive work within the organization.

### How does Transitional Return to Work actually happen and how does it relate to Preventing Work Disability?

If Work Disability happens when a worker is unable to remain at or resume work because of a health problem or their work ability is altered, then helping employees stay at work, when appropriate, and return to work, as soon as medically appropriate, is a fundamental part of preventing work disability from occurring.

Simply put, the Transitional Return to Work process is triggered whenever a medical condition (illness or injury) occurs and the question of whether a worker can or should do their usual job arises.

There are three important questions that are asked to find out if a worker can or should continue to work or return to work:



1. **Risk:** Is there any risk of harm to the worker or others if they stay at work? A worker may be capable of doing an activity but doing so could/may cause harm to the worker.
2. **Capacity:** What can the worker do today? This often refers to activity limitations. In other words, is the worker not physically capable of an activity?
3. **Tolerance:** What can the worker tolerate? Tolerance means the ability to tolerate the symptoms produced by doing an activity the individual clearly can do.

The next step is to find out whether the worker's current status will allow them to remain in the job or in a Transitional Duty work assignment. The functional demands of the job and/or transitional duties are required to answer this question.

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The last step is the development of a goal or plan so the worker can continue to work, successfully return to work and/or, transition back.

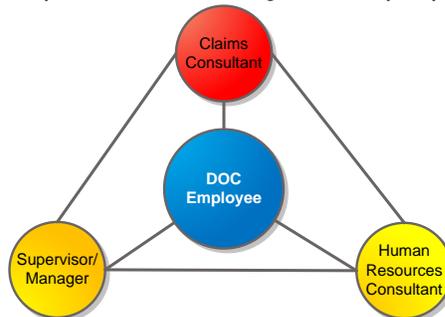
**Key Details of the Transitional Return to Work Program**

- Helps employees who have experienced an injury or illness.
- Assigns a team:
  - Point of contact: A local Human Resources Consultant.
  - For claims that have Time Loss from L&I: A DOC Claims Consultant from the Occupational Health and Wellness Unit.

The Local Human Resources Consultant and DOC Claims Consultant help employees through the process, up to and including returning to work.

- Makes available Transitional Duties (if possible) for up to 12 weeks.
- Creates a clear goal with the employee for Returning to Work.
- Keeps the employee working by performing transitional duties (unless a more appropriate arrangement is required).
- For workplace injuries, the DOC Claims Consultant continues working closely with L&I all information is submitted. In the event that time loss is required, L&I will adjudicate (decide on) the employee’s claim.

For workplace injuries, an employee gets help from the following team of people:



**Transitional Return to Work Program Benefits**

Based on the focus groups of both Correctional Officers and Administrators, the program identifies the following important benefits as forming its foundation.

- Financial security for the employee by continuing to work when appropriate.
- Increased feelings of ‘connection’ and workplace support for injured and ill employees.
- Increased chance of returning to work successfully.
- Timely and responsive service that takes an employee-centered approach.
- More supportive, engaging, and productive workplace.
- Retention of experienced workers.