

WorkCover Scheme Modernisation

FACTSHEET

Establishing *Return to Work Victoria*

Workers are best off when injury at work is prevented, or if in the case they are injured, they return to productive work in a supportive environment.

That's why we are establishing Return to Work Victoria, to support employers with the tools they need to prevent work injuries from happening in the first place – and if injuries occur at work, to ensure that every worker gets the support they need as early as possible to rehabilitate and get back into work.

Return to Work Victoria will bring a dedicated focus to piloting initiatives designed to improve return to work and prevention outcomes, as we know that the longer workers stay on the scheme the sicker they get.

We will work with unions, employers, mental health specialists and occupational health specialists to trial different initiatives.

We lose too many workers to the workers compensation system – and the longer a person is out of work, the sicker they get, and the harder it is to help them back to work.

Return to Work Victoria will prioritise these workers to reduce the adverse health and social impacts associated with being disconnected from work long term.

Every Victorian has a contribution to make, and Return to Work Victoria will support employers to prevent injuries and help them intervene early to address emerging mental health concerns, keeping more Victorians at work.

We also know that work has an important role in rehabilitation – because doing so can help to promote a worker's recovery.

That's why Return to Work Victoria will also provide pathways for injured workers to return to their existing jobs, if safe to do so, or find suitable alternatives in partnership with the worker, employer and treating professionals.

Boosted assistance to help workers get back to their job, or find a new position, is good for workers and business. It will help workers to avoid the negative health impacts of being disconnected from work long-term and help to keep business premiums lower.

How will *Return to Work Victoria* work?

Return to Work Victoria will work in partnership with worker and employer groups, together with mental health and occupational health experts, to pilot prevention, early intervention and return to work programs. This will provide an evidence base to assess which programs can and should be scaled and rolled out across the state.

Return to Work Victoria will also ensure we are engaging with injured workers early, providing the supports they need, which may include initiatives such as:

- *Stressed at work helpline* to intervene early and provide practical support before a claim is made
- *Improving worker mobility* which can pose a barrier for workers who have capacity to work but can't return to pre-injury workplaces
- *Early assessment and planning* to better understand impairment, co-ordinate rehabilitation and provide tailored pathways back to work.

Further consultation will take place with unions, business and key stakeholder groups to ensure Return to Work Victoria meets the modern needs of workers and employers.

Treatment at the earliest sign of mental health issues is an important intervention to prevent the development of significant mental injury. This is why workers with mental health concerns will retain the ability to claim for the reasonable cost of treatment and support for 13 weeks.

These supports will be complemented by the government's landmark investment into the mental health system, including the establishment of 60 mental health and wellbeing locals across Victoria – so that emerging mental health vulnerabilities are addressed before these begin to negatively impact workers' experiences at work.

Why are these changes necessary?

The Scheme was created in 1985 with the aim of providing effective rehabilitation and suitable employment for injured workers to support their early return to work. We knew then as we know now that the longer a person spends away from work, the less likely they are to ever return which, in turn, increases the risk of negative health outcomes for these workers.

Therefore, Return to Work Victoria's core purpose will be to support employers with the tools they need to prevent injuries from occurring in the first place, and ensure that employers, workers and their medical practitioners are taking a co-ordinated approach to help workers get back to work as early and as safely as possible, because we know that work plays an important role in rehabilitation and promoting a better recovery.

Examples of how Return to Work Victoria could assist

1. Rob is a government worker who lodges a claim for stress and burnout caused by feeling overwhelmed after receiving some constructive feedback about his work. He has been feeling stressed due to a change in team structure and about some recent requested deadlines for policy advice.

On the basis of stress and burnout alone, Rob would not be eligible for weekly payments on WorkCover. However, Rob would still have access to 13 weeks of provisional payments through the WorkCover Scheme.

Return to Work Victoria will pilot initiatives for enhanced psychosocial supports which might include a 'stressed at work helpline' which could serve as an initial point of support to help Rob manage through a difficult period and improve coping skills.

2. Lisa is a high school teacher. She lodges a claim for bullying and harassment after being abused by a student's parents. Her claim is substantiated.

Lisa would continue to be eligible for WorkCover weekly payments, as her claim is for bullying and harassment, and there is no change to eligibility for this.

Return to Work Victoria will also consider piloting initiatives to improve worker mobility, including in the public sector. In this instance, it is envisaged that Return to Work Victoria will engage with Lisa to explore a tailored plan for her to return to a different school, a different role that uses her skills in another organisation or help connect her with a training pathway if she wishes to consider a change of job.

Return to Work Victoria will work with worker and employer groups as well as mental health and occupational health experts to develop and pilot initiatives, as well as bring an increased focus on prevention from injuries occurring.

When will *Return to Work Victoria* be established?

We will continue to consult with unions, employers, and advocates as we develop the proposed changes.