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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

WorkSafeBC recognizes that early return to safe and durable employment plays an important role in workers' recovery while helping to maintain their dignity and productivity.

Who can get vocational rehabilitation?

WorkSafeBC provides assistance to:

- workers who require assistance in achieving an early and safe return to work in their pre-injury jobs, with or without modifications;
- workers who cannot return to their pre-injury jobs due to their injury or occupational disease; and
- surviving dependent spouses of deceased workers.

How does an injured worker get vocational rehabilitation assistance?

In most instances, your WorkSafeBC case manager will refer you for vocational rehabilitation if it appears you will have difficulty returning to work, or if your job is no longer available to you because of your injury. You will then collaborate with a Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant ("VRC"), who assesses your needs and determines appropriate levels of assistance. Together, you'll develop your vocational rehabilitation plan to help you return to work.

WorkSafeBC will help you:

- Return to work with your employer
- Identify a suitable return-to-work goal for employment with a new employer if it is not possible for you to return to work with your existing employer
- Get safely back to suitable, long-term work

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What services and benefits are available?

Whenever possible, WorkSafeBC helps the worker return to their old job, with or without modifications. If this is not possible, WorkSafeBC can offer job search assistance and retraining to help the worker find employment elsewhere.

The most common vocational rehabilitation services are:

- gradual return to work programs,
- worksite modifications and job duty modifications,
- job search assistance (including an allowance),
- training-on-the-job programs, and
- formal training programs.

Generally, training is limited to 26 weeks, though exceptions can be made, especially for more serious cases.

The basic amount of job search assistance is 12 weeks, but extensions can be granted, if the worker is making diligent efforts to find work. Extensions past 26 weeks are very unusual.

How much assistance does a worker get?

The extent of assistance depends on several factors, including:

- the degree to which the worker's disability impacts ability to work;
- the degree to which the worker's current skills and education can be put to use in another job;
- the amount that the worker used to earn; and
- the worker's level of motivation and commitment to return to work.

It is important to note that all vocational rehabilitation services are discretionary. This means that there are no set rules of what any worker is entitled to and each plan is tailored to the individual's circumstances.

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How is a vocational rehabilitation plan developed?

Throughout the process, the Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant will consider information from various sources such as:

- the worker,
- the attending physician,
- the employer,
- other WorkSafeBC officers, such as the Case Manager, and
- WorkSafeBC's medical advisers, including doctors, nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant will work with the injured worker to prepare a return to work plan, which should be provided in writing. Ideally, vocational rehabilitation is a collaborative process. The more a worker actively participates in the process, the better the outcome is likely to be.

Injured workers must do their best to work with the Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant, and follow the vocational rehabilitation plan. Failure to do so may result in the termination of vocational rehabilitation benefits and services.

What if the vocational rehabilitation plan doesn't work out?

A worker is entitled to one rehabilitation plan. The Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant will monitor the plan to determine if the plan is going as expected. A plan may be modified or a new plan substituted where:

- the worker's compensable condition deteriorates or improves, making the initial plan inappropriate in relation to the goal; and/or
- there are significant developments in the vocational rehabilitation process, impacting the expected outcome of the plan.

For example, a minor modification can be made if a worker needs more time to complete a school assignment. However, getting a new plan is very unusual, and requires approval from the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

What if a worker wants to pursue a vocational rehabilitation plan of their own?

Sometimes, a worker will want to pursue a plan that is different from what the Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant recommends. For example, they may have an occupational goal that requires more training that the WorkSafeBC will cover, or they may wish to start their own business.

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In such cases, the worker can provide a detailed written plan outlining their return to work goal. If the Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant is persuaded that the worker's "preferred" plan is feasible, they may agree to pay for the worker's plan up to the cost of WorkSafeBC's plan. In such cases, the worker is responsible for arranging funding for the balance of the cost of their preferred plan.

There is some risk to pursuing a preferred plan. If it is unsuccessful, WorkSafeBC is unlikely to grant further vocational rehabilitation services or benefits.

What if I disagree with a decision regarding vocational rehabilitation assistance?

If you disagree with a WorkSafeBC decision, you have the right to request a review. You must file your request within **90 days** of the date of the decision.

Decisions by WorkSafeBC's Review Division on vocational rehabilitation issues are final and cannot be appealed to the Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal.