

## Return-to-Work Programs

Return-to-Work programs help supervisors manage employee injury, illness, and disability and ensure that employees are able to return to the workplace as quickly and safely as possible. Programs that allow employees to resume working in an appropriate and timely manner, with or without work restrictions, are essential for minimizing health-related absences and optimizing productivity. By creating an effective and holistic Return to Work program based on communication and trust, employers can take positive steps to keep their employees productive, safe and valued in the workplace.

### The Benefits of Return-to-Work Programs

- Successful Return-to-Work programs save employers an estimated \$8-10 for every \$1 invested.
- These programs also save time, retain essential human capital, and can be beneficial to federal contractors and subcontractors in meeting their goals under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Specific benefits include:
  - Speeding employee recovery after injury or illness
  - Reducing:
    - Employee absence
    - The costs related to training new employees
    - Medical and disability costs
    - The potential for litigation
  - Increasing:
    - Employee engagement, self-esteem and morale
    - Retention of valuable employees
    - Productivity by decreasing lost work time

### The Components of Successful Return-to-Work Programs

- Written policy or procedure to help facilitate the return of injured workers
- Strong management commitment to supporting employees' return to work
- Designated Return-to-Work lead or representative
- Open and honest communication among supervisors and staff
- Job modifications, adjustments, or alterations to support returning workers with newly acquired work limitations
- Opportunities for transitional or light duty until employees can fully resume their former job duties
- Potential re-assignment throughout the organization that accommodate returning workers
- Risk reduction supports during employees' transition back to work
- Disability management approach for employees with conditions that require regular maintenance such as diabetes and hypertension
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to assist with emotional and behavioral health issues such as depression or stress
- Return-to-Work programs are most effective when combined with;
  - Injury prevention and management strategies
  - Stay-at-work strategies such as health, wellness, and prevention initiatives
  - Dedicated support from management at all levels