

# Rehabilitation programs

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## Introduction

A rehabilitation program is a structured series of planned activities developed to support employees to return to their pre-injury employment, or any other suitable return to work or recovery goal identified through the rehabilitation assessment process.

A rehabilitation program should:

- be developed in consultation with the employee, the employee's supervisor, and where applicable, the Workplace Rehabilitation Provider (WRP) and any relevant treating practitioners (i.e., GP, psychologist, psychiatrist, physiotherapist)
- be individualised, outcome based and set out the steps to be followed to achieve a return to work or return to health outcome
- be available to an employee irrespective of their certified work capacity. For employees who have no capacity for work, a rehabilitation program could focus on return to health or other recovery goals to support building a work capacity
- recognise transferrable skills, experience and capabilities of the employee to enable medically appropriate suitable duties to be found, and
- if necessary, utilise retraining and redeployment when it is not possible for the employee to return to pre-injury duties or pre injury employer.

Your role is to provide any required guidance and/or advice to the rehabilitation authority, to assist them in developing rehabilitation programs.

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## Suitable employment

Suitable employment is work for which the employee is suited, taking into consideration:

- the employee's age, experience, training, language and other skills
- the location of the employment opportunity.

For ongoing employees of the Commonwealth, suitable employment is any employment within the Commonwealth.

The provision of suitable employment is the responsibility of the rehabilitation authority (in most cases the employer). Workplace rehabilitation aims to return employees to their pre-injury duties in their own workplace. This principle is supported by a hierarchy of preferences for return to work outcomes, referred to as the 'return to work hierarchy':

- same job, same employer
- similar job, same employer
- new job, same employer
- same job, new employer
- similar job, new employer
- different job, new employer.

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## Rehabilitation program requirements

Before a rehabilitation authority can make a determination under s37 of the SRC Act, it must consider all the factors listed under Section 37(3) of the SRC Act.

In order for a rehabilitation program to be lawful, it must be signed by the rehabilitation delegate from the rehabilitation authority. When making a determination for a rehabilitation program, the rehabilitation delegate must consider the following (note, this is taken from the [Rehabilitation case manager handbook](#) (published by Comcare):

<b>SRC Act reference</b>	<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Description</b>
37(3)(a)	Any written assessment given under s36(8).	Where a rehabilitation assessment under Section 36(1) has been completed, you should consider the recommendations in the report and reference these when considering the appropriateness of the rehabilitation program.
37(3)(b)	Any reduction in the future liability to pay compensation if the program is undertaken.	Consideration can be given to how a successful completion of a rehabilitation program improves the employee's work capacity and results in a reduction in the claim costs.
37(3)(c)	The cost of the program.	Consideration can be given to the likelihood of the success of the rehabilitation program, based on the availability of suitable duties, and therefore the employee's likely return to work.
37(3)(d)	Any improvement in the employee's opportunity to be employed after completing the program.	Consideration can be given to the likelihood of the success of the rehabilitation program, based on the availability of suitable duties and suitable employment, and therefore the employee's likely return to work.

SRC Act reference	Criterion	Description
37(3)(e)	The likely psychological effect on the employee of not providing the program.	<p>Consideration can be given to the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the person’s psychological health based on available medical information</li> <li>• the potential worsening of symptoms if a program is not provided</li> <li>• the employee’s motivation to participate in the program</li> <li>• support mechanisms that may be required for the employee if a program is not required.</li> </ul>
37(3)(f)	The employee's attitude to the program.	When considering the employee’s attitude, the rehabilitation delegate should note their commitment to participating in rehabilitation assessment, consult with them on the rehabilitation program and provide an opportunity to discuss the program with a medical practitioner, family and others.
37(3)(g)	The relative merits of any alternative and appropriate rehabilitation program.	Consider the return to work hierarchy when determining the program goals and whether an alternate program is more likely to be successful in achieving the same goal
37(3)(h)	Any other relevant matter.	<p>This matter provides the opportunity for the rehabilitation delegate to consider any other individual circumstance that may impact on the success of the program</p> <p><b>Note:</b> The Injury Management Team (IMT) and Return to Work Support team are available to provide guidance and support to the rehabilitation authority in relation to these matters.</p>

## Rehabilitation program options

The following are some of the options that the rehabilitation authority may consider when developing a rehabilitation program for an employee.

### Graduated return to work

A graduated return to work (GRTW):

- allows an employee to return to work on reduced hours or duties when they are initially unable to return to their full pre-injury hours or duties
- allows an employee to return to work safely and earlier than would otherwise be possible
- builds up the employee's physical and/or psychological ability to manage tasks by using actual work tasks. This form of rehabilitation is referred to as work hardening or work conditioning
- assists the employee to maintain their work habits such as getting up to attend work, interacting with co-workers, and keeping pace with changes and developments in the workplace.

Components of a GRTW program include:

- clearly defined goals and objectives
- a well-structured and documented program outlining the specific duties and hours of work, and how and when it is proposed these should be upgraded
- other conditions of the program such as exercise and rest breaks
- the roles and responsibilities of all the parties involved in the program should be clearly articulated.

### Pacing

Pacing is an alternative to an employee undertaking a GRTW. Instead of spending reduced hours in the workplace, the employee attends for the full workday, but their time is alternated between periods of productivity and rest. The productive time at work is the same as the employee would have been able to work on a part-time return to work, and consistent with

the recommended hours as prescribed by the treating medical practitioner. During periods of rest, the employee may be required to undertake exercise programs, training sessions, attend meetings etc.

The major benefit of this approach is that the employee does not have extended hours out of the workplace and maintains the routine of attending the workplace for the usual workday. It also helps the employee maintain contact with fellow employees and reduces the risk of them losing their identity as a worker.

## Work trials

For employees of the Commonwealth government, a work trial is a short-term agreement (usually for 12 weeks) where the employee is placed with a host employer for a period, while remaining employed and paid by the pre-injury employer.

While on a work trial, the pre-injury employer remains the rehabilitation authority. The host employer is the new employer that is offering the work trial to the employee. The host employer can be another employer within the scheme or private sector.

The reasons for using a work trial may include:

- rebuilding work skills, self-confidence and establishing work routines following an extended absence from the workforce and/or loss of work skills due to sustaining a work-related injury
- work hardening: whereby an employee is offered a program aimed at improving physical or psychological work tolerances so as to allow a return to pre-injury work and pre-injury employer, or placement with a new employer
- learning alternative work skills - when an employee is unable to return to work with the pre-injury employer and requires the opportunity to build new work skills in order to improve the injured employee's employment potential and increase the opportunity for placement with a new employer.

Refer to [Work Trials: A guide for Rehabilitation Case Managers](#) for information on work trials.

**Note:** If an employee has been participating in a work trial for longer than three months, you should refer the matter to IMT or Return to Work Support team, for further discussion.

# Redeployment

Where an employee is permanently unable to return to work with the pre-injury employer, the rehabilitation authority should consider redeployment to a new employer.

- once redeployment has been identified as the only return to work option, a thorough rehabilitation assessment should be arranged. A vocational assessment may be required if one has not already been provided
- a new rehabilitation program should be developed that outlines the new goal of a return to work with a new employer. Support for the program should be sought from the treating medical practitioner. The program may include job seeking activities and a job seeking agreement which outlines the agreed activities to be undertaken by the employee and WRP when pursuing a new position
- if the employee is unable to secure a new position using their existing skills, qualifications and experience, retraining may need to be considered.

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# Study and Retraining

Study and retraining should be considered when:

- the employee is unable to return to their pre-injury position or an alternate position
- the employee requires additional skills to move into a new job with the same or a new employer
- opportunities for suitable employment are limited and need to be increased
- assessment supports retraining to significantly improve employment and/or redeployment options.

A [Vocational assessment](#) should be conducted to assist in identifying suitable job options.

A [Labour market assessment](#) can also be requested to determine which of the job options are most viable considering the location, job demand, income and market trends.

The study or training course needs to be outlined in the rehabilitation program.



## How is the training paid?

The costs associated with the training course are outlined in the rehabilitation program. By signing the rehabilitation program, you are able to approve these costs

Under the SRC Act, Comcare cannot pay a training institute directly. This is because a training institute is not considered a WRP and is therefore unable to provide rehabilitation services. By including retraining in a rehabilitation program, the retraining costs can be reimbursed to the WRP. Alternatively, if no WRP is involved, the employer pays and is reimbursed for the retraining costs.

If you are unsure of the activities included on a rehabilitation program, you should refer the matter to IMT or Return to Work Support team, for further discussion.

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## Rehabilitation program exclusions

Services that relate to the treatment of an accepted compensable condition should not be included in a rehabilitation program. These services include:

- Psychological therapy/counselling, other than brief vocational counselling or adjustment to injury counselling
- clinical occupational therapy as opposed to vocational therapy, e.g., splinting of an injury
- physiotherapy, exercise physiology
- chiropractic treatment
- hydrotherapy and/or treatment designed to build fitness
- travel to and from medical appointments.

Approval for these costs are Comcare's responsibility.

Aids and appliances are not part of a rehabilitation program, neither are Household, attendant care or childcare services.

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## Procedure when a rehabilitation program is closed

When a rehabilitation program is closed by the rehabilitation authority, Comcare will receive the Rehabilitation Closure form through the general enquiries email address. CAIS will process the Closure Form and forward an e-doc notification to the Claims Operation teams in-tray. Upon receipt of the e-doc notification the following steps are to be taken:

### 1. Review the rehabilitation closure form

You will review the rehabilitation closure form against the rehabilitation program and update the Work Status Code (WSC) of the claim in Pracsys.

## 2. Escalate if needed

If the rehabilitation closure form and outcome of the rehabilitation program are not aligned, escalate to the claims manager and the injury manager.

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