



# Stay at Work/Return to Work Models and Strategies Study

## SUMMARY

In 2017, the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) partnered with the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) to fund independent contractor Abt Associates to conduct the Stay at Work/Return to Work (SAW/RTW) Models and Strategy Study. The study aims to document and expand the knowledge base of SAW/RTW strategies and identify promising models and best practices. The final study also includes evaluation design options, which could be implemented to build on and add to the evidence produced.

The study includes four reports and a summary of findings:

- **Synthesis of SAW/RTW Programs, Models, Efforts, and Definitions** describes programs that were operating in the U.S. in 2018.
- **Synthesis of Evidence about SAW/RTW and Related Programs** includes evidence published between 2008 and 2018 on the effects of SAW/RTW or related programs on employment and the receipt of federal disability benefits.
- **Early Intervention Pathway Map and Population Profiles** analyzes public data to estimate the characteristics of the SAW/RTW target population and examine pathways from illness/injury to federal disability benefits as a way to identify opportunities for intervention.
- **Evaluation Design Options Report** presents five options for new research to build evidence about the target populations for SAW/RTW and to test the effects of interventions on employment outcomes.
- **Findings in Brief** includes information about the study, the process, and findings from each report.

This Department of Labor-funded study was a result of the annual process to determine the Department's research priorities. It contributes to the labor evidence-base to inform employment and training programs and policies and addresses Departmental strategic goals and priorities.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The SAW/RTW programs in the U.S. that were identified in this study differ in the components or services they offer, their administrative context, the timing of intervention, the target population served, and the stakeholders involved, but there are common themes. **The most common SAW/RTW program component identified in this project is information-based services.** More than 90 percent of programs provide at least one of three services: information, accommodations, or financial incentives.
- **There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of SAW/RTW interventions.** Most studies identified that offer credible evidence of impact were conducted outside the





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U.S. and not generalizable to a broad U.S. context. There are promising findings but meta-analytic review found few stable patterns in how impacts vary with disability type or program component.

- **This project developed five strategies to expand evidence on effective SAW/RTW interventions.**
  - **Three strategies focus on providing targeted information to workers, employers, and medical professionals to help improve employment outcomes.** Each of these groups plays an integral role in the SAW/RTW process. However, these groups may lack critical information to make choices or policies that encourage continued work.
  - **One strategy is to test the impact of financial incentives by providing temporary disability insurance partial benefits to workers who are unable to work due to a medical condition.** Partial payments may increase incentives to work, because workers can continue receiving part of their benefit while working part-time.
  - Identifying workers at risk of exiting employment or the labor force because of an injury or illness and determining when to intervene are major challenges for SAW/RTW programs. **One strategy developed by this project is to construct a new data source that would match nationally representative data to administrative records to support descriptive analyses of the target population.**

**TIMEFRAME:** 2017-2020

**SUBMITTED BY:** Abt Associates

**DATE PREPARED:** December 2020

**PARTNER AGENCY:** Office of Disability Employment Policy

**SPONSOR:** DOL Chief Evaluation Office

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