



**RETAIN** | Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network

## Phase 1 Interim Summary – California

*The Phase 1 Interim Summaries were completed in January 2021.*

**RETAIN California** uses a team of Resource Navigators, local area workforce partners, and health care providers to help injured and ill workers stay at work (SAW) and return to work (RTW). Built on a strong base of existing relationships with workforce partners, RETAIN California developed an innovative program that coordinates effectively across the health care and workforce disciplines by providing vocational and RTW counseling and individualized SAW/RTW plans for workers.

### Program Description

**Partners.** The Employment Development Department leads RETAIN California. Their key partners are:

- Concentra Health Care
- Interwork Institute at San Diego State University (SDSU)
- Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA)
- Sacramento Occupational Medical Center (Sac-OMC)
- San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP)

**Target Population.** RETAIN California participants must live or work in Sacramento County or San Diego County and not be out of work for longer than 12 weeks. They must also meet at least 1 of 10 criteria associated with their medical care or their current work situation such as receiving a surgical consult, seven or more physical or occupational therapy, chiropractic, or acupuncture visits, or if a clinician determines the patient to be at risk for prolonged, needless work disability.

**Service Coordination.** RETAIN California uses a team of Resource Navigators (equivalent to RTW Coordinators) from SDSU, SETA, and SDWP to coordinate both health and employment service delivery for RETAIN participants. The Resource Navigators are on site at the health care clinics at least once a week to support their participant recruitment efforts. During the on-site “clinic days,” Resource Navigators meet face to face with the potential participant referred by their health care provider, answer additional questions about the program, and (if the potential participant is interested) complete the enrollment process. Upon enrollment, in conjunction with the local area workforce partners, the Resource Navigators work with the participant to develop an individualized SAW/RTW plan and provide vocational and RTW counseling, as needed. The Resource Navigators also provide guidance to employers on implementing interventions for individual workers and supporting those workers’ ability to SAW/RTW. Participants receive a \$25 gift card for completing intake forms and participating in an initial meeting with the Resource Navigator.

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*California is participating in the Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor in collaboration with the Social Security Administration. RETAIN states are building connections and improving coordination among employers, health care providers, and other key parties to help newly injured and ill workers stay in the workforce.*

## Program Successes

**Implementation and Participant Successes.** Since launching their program in 2019, one of RETAIN California's achievements has been its engagement with a physical therapist based at the occupational medicine clinic in Sacramento. RETAIN California recognized that the physical therapist has frequent contact with patients and is aware of how their illness or injury affects their daily lives. Thus, the physical therapist provides input into the participant's Accommodation Suggestion Plans developed by the Resource Navigator and helps to facilitate returning to work safely and productively. In response to slow recruitment and enrollment, RETAIN California refined their target population inclusion criteria, such as revising the criteria associated with their medical care to ensure that the team recruited participants who would benefit the most from the program. RETAIN California also implemented the use of the CalJOBS system to support the enrollment process and to help Resource Navigators track participant progress toward RTW goals.

**Outreach and Program Milestones.** Through their regular communication with providers at Concentra and the Sac-OMC, Resource Navigators were able to identify employers with potential RETAIN participants and they reached out to those employers to inform them about SAW/RTW best practices and the program's work. In addition, SETA began coordinating with the California Employers Association to conduct a survey of California employers. This survey helped RETAIN California identify employers who were interested in learning more about SAW/RTW best practices.

## Program Challenges

**Challenges.** RETAIN California experienced two main challenges during the first year of planning and implementation. First, there were delays in RETAIN California receiving state-level authorization to begin planning the launch of their pilot. This caused delays in program planning activities, including hiring staff and identifying health care partners. Second, California was one of the early epicenters of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in delays in ramping up recruitment and their ability to finalize an agreement with their health care partner, Concentra.

**Strategies to Address Challenges.** Once they received state-level authorization, RETAIN California hired an occupational medicine provider to serve as a medical ambassador and support outreach to identify new health care partners. Based on the medical ambassador's efforts, RETAIN California developed partnerships with the Sac-OMC and Concentra. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, RETAIN California has conducted telephone follow-ups to recruit participants in Sacramento, and they have successfully transitioned to providing services to current participants via telephone, text, and e-mail. RETAIN California also took time during the pandemic to plan how to connect with employers virtually to share information about SAW/RTW best practices and RETAIN California as a program to support employers during and after the pandemic.

## Looking Ahead

The RETAIN California team plans to expand their partnership with Concentra clinics to recruit and enroll participants from multiple clinic locations across San Diego and Sacramento counties. The team hopes that expanding this partnership will help their recruitment efforts. With their Sacramento and San Diego workforce partners, the team plans to expand their outreach to educate and engage employers via webinars and focus groups about RETAIN and RTW best practices.

As a result of RETAIN, California was able to build a relationship with both the health care and workforce system to establish knowledge of and support for SAW/RTW. These relationships across sectors can positively affect outcomes for both the workers and employers, which may not have occurred without RETAIN's presence.

*Making effective use of the existing CalJOBS (the State of California's online job search system), RETAIN California supports Resource Navigators tracking participant progress toward RTW goals. CalJOBS is the primary data system used track participant activity and to refine and improve the ways the Resource Navigators track participant progress.*  
<https://www.californiaretain.org/>