



Phase 1 Interim Summary – Connecticut

The Phase 1 Interim Summaries were completed in January 2021.

RETAIN Connecticut developed a program that trains health care providers on stay at work (SAW) and return to work (RTW) best practices to support workers with musculoskeletal (MSK) disorders in reaching their SAW/RTW goals. These health care providers work with RETAIN Connecticut workforce partners to assess, coordinate, and support workers' needs, including discussing possible accommodations or modifications, conducting worksite evaluation, retraining, and offering placement services as needed.

Program Description

Partners. The Connecticut Department of Labor leads the RETAIN Connecticut program. Their key partners are:

- Capital Workforce Partners
- Department of Aging and Disability Services, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
- The Hartford (until July 2020), an insurance company
- UConn Health

Target Population. RETAIN Connecticut recruits workers ages 18–65 who are employed or self-employed in the Greater Hartford Region, seen by a trained RETAIN Connecticut provider for a work or non-work-related MSK disorder, and are at risk for not returning to work.

Service Coordination. Originally, RETAIN Connecticut provided services to participants through RTW Coordinators at The Hartford and Capital Workforce Partners. The Hartford held early RTW conversations with the employee, health care provider, and employer to discuss possible accommodations or modifications. Participants still out of work more than 30 days after enrolling into RETAIN received an offer to connect one-on-one with a RTW Coordinator based at Capital Workforce Partners for more intensive services, which included face-to-face communication with the employer and a worksite evaluation. However, in July 2020, RETAIN Connecticut revised their approach to divide activities between trained RETAIN Connecticut health care providers and RETAIN Connecticut Work Navigators (renamed RTW Coordinators) from UConn Health, Capital Workforce Partners, and the Department of Aging and Disability Services. Currently, the team at UConn Health receives enrollment information from health care providers and coordinates with the Work Navigator team to provide SAW/RTW services to injured workers. In the case of workers who will no longer be able to perform their pre-injury job, the Work Navigator team identifies retraining and placement services in the public workforce system.

RETAIN CONNECTICUT

Connecticut 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. RETAIN Connecticut launched the 2.0 version of their program on September 1, 2020. Their ability to relaunch their program in such a short time demonstrates the strength of the infrastructure and partnerships that RETAIN Connecticut developed throughout Phase 1. When redesigning their program, all the partners worked together to review their processes and discuss the strategies that would support the success of their redesigned program. This included building strong relationships not only with the health care providers but also their front office staff to support their ability to provide RETAIN services. RETAIN Connecticut also reviewed their internal processes to improve coordination within the program, revise program materials, and discuss the types of services available to RETAIN participants. The work of the Connecticut team resulted in 12 new RETAIN participants within the first month of the relaunched program.

Outreach and Program Milestones. One of RETAIN Connecticut's successes has been its outreach and training of health care providers. RETAIN Connecticut mailed outreach letters to a range of providers, including hospitals, private practices, and solo practitioners in the Greater Hartford Region, inviting them to sign up for the RETAIN training. This formal training program describes the link between employment and health and highlights early intervention RTW best practices that support injured and ill workers returning to work in a medically safe way, with the goal of incorporating these practices into standard care. Once they complete the training, health care providers are officially certified as RETAIN Connecticut providers. To date, RETAIN Connecticut has trained 90 providers through 15 sessions, including 2 remote training sessions.

Program Challenges

Challenges. RETAIN Connecticut's primary challenge was convincing potential recruits to return the required baseline surveys and signed consent forms. When the program launched, The Hartford identified participants in its workers' compensation claims database. If a worker remained out of work after one week, they mailed a recruitment packet with the forms and surveys and requested that the potential participants return them by mail to UConn Health. However, RETAIN Connecticut received very few materials back by mail, and some materials they did receive were missing key pieces of information.

Strategies to Address Challenges. To improve survey responses, RETAIN Connecticut developed an online version of the survey in REDCap, which also includes an electronic signature that will be managed by UConn Health. In July 2020, RETAIN Connecticut decided to redesign their program so that the team could use a more hands-on approach and an expanded set of eligibility criteria beyond work-related injuries. This redesign leverages the strength of their growing network of RETAIN-trained health care providers to enroll and serve eligible participants. It allows health care providers to evaluate and recommend patients for the program and facilitates faster hand-offs to RETAIN Work Navigators for more proactive outreach to participants. The RETAIN Connecticut team took time to review and revise their program materials and develop plans to provide resources to health care providers and employers.

Looking Ahead

The RETAIN Connecticut team continues to improve their program processes, including identifying areas for improvement in supporting health care office staff and provider recruitment of participants, engagement with health care providers, and service delivery. The team is incorporating Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) which will include subject matter expert-led learning communities to providers to share cases, solutions, hold discussions with each other, and provide additional supports to health care providers in serving RETAIN participants and supporting SAW/RTW. Finally, the team is developing plans to engage employers about RETAIN and SAW/RTW best practices.

As a result of RETAIN, the Connecticut team engaged health care providers with training and supports needed to address SAW/RTW outcomes with their patients. The shared understanding between RETAIN Connecticut, health care providers, and workforce partners about the importance of early coordination and support of the health and employment needs of injured workers is an important step toward improving workers' ability to remain in the labor force.

RETAIN Connecticut established a process for engaging, training, and maintaining relationships with RETAIN health care providers that includes action steps to support RTW and incentives for providing RETAIN services. This gives health care providers the strategies and information they need to support injured workers' RTW.

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