



Phase 1 Interim Summary – Kansas

The Phase 1 Interim Summaries were completed in January 2021.

RETAIN Kansas established effective cross-agency partnerships and designed a stay at work (SAW)/return to work (RTW) program that offers coordinated supports for injured or ill workers. This involves access to a Nurse Navigator who supports the recovery and rehabilitation process, a Workforce Coordinator who assists the employee and employer in setting work goals to promote successful RTW, and an Employment Coordinator who collaborates with the employee and employer to facilitate a successful transition back to work.


Program Description

Partners. RETAIN Kansas is led by the Kansas Department of Commerce. Their key partners are:

- Ascension Via Christi (health care partner)
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment
- KANSASWORKS State Board
- Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas

Target Population. The target population includes individuals with musculoskeletal injuries, mental health conditions, and chronic diseases such as diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or congestive heart failure. The project also supports individuals with other injuries and illnesses that affect employment. Injuries or illnesses can be work-related or non-work-related. At the start of the project, participants were required to live or work in Butler County, Kansas. Although this is the largest county by area in the state, Butler County is rural, with a relatively small population of less than 70,000 residents¹. In November 2020, Kansas expanded its target population to include individuals living or working in five additional counties: Cowley, Harper, Kingman, Sedgwick, and Sumner.

Service Coordination. The RETAIN Kansas program, referred to by the state as RETAINWORKS, offers a system of coordinated supports across workforce and health partners to help injured or ill workers SAW/RTW, utilizing a team-based approach. The Nurse Navigator serves as the participant's first contact and is responsible for connecting the participant with the Workforce Coordinator and the Employment Coordinator. Together, this team works with participants to discuss their SAW/RTW treatment plan, assess employment needs, advise on available workforce services, develop an individual employment plan, and provide short-term certification training, when appropriate. To further support RETAIN participants, the Nurse Navigators and Workforce



Kansas 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.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/butlercountykansas>

Coordinators engage in ongoing communication to discuss participant goals, progress, and challenges to provide the best SAW/RTW outcomes for RETAINWORKS participants.

Program Successes

Implementation and Participant Successes. Although recruitment efforts stalled because of COVID-19 and the transition to a new medical partner, RETAIN Kansas has a 71 percent enrollment rate (68 referrals, 48 enrolled) and nearly half of the participants returned to work. One example involves a mechanic who experienced an off-the-job knee injury that impacted his ability to work. Through the combined efforts of the Nurse Navigator and Workforce Coordinator, an RTW plan was developed that accounted for the participant's interests, medical restrictions, training, and accommodations. The participant is now back to work in a new occupation. Further, RETAIN Kansas is based in AVC's Departments of Occupational Medicine, and Orthopedics and Sports Medicine Services, which helps the program have potential statewide reach and access to health care providers and participants who could benefit from RETAIN.

Outreach and Program Milestones. RETAIN Kansas conducted a series of outreach activities (e.g., lunch and learns) to health care providers and employers to increase awareness of and encourage involvement with the program. As a result, the program successfully recruited and trained 27 health care providers, the majority of whom made referrals to the program. The team also adapted their approach to include virtual outreach and virtual services that allow for cross-agency, integrated service delivery to program participants. In addition, they attempted to increase public awareness of RETAIN by mailing an informational postcard to every household in Butler County. RETAINWORKS was also featured on a local news segment called "Working Wednesdays," highlighting the RETAIN program in Kansas and its impact on individuals. As a result, the RETAIN Kansas team began to raise awareness and establish a shared understanding among health care providers and employers about the importance of early intervention in ensuring support for injured or ill workers to SAW or RTW in a timely manner.

Program Challenges

Challenges. The team experienced challenges early on due to staff turnover in key positions. Another significant challenge occurred in December 2019 when, due to administrative changes, their original health care partner (Susan B. Allen Memorial Hospital) announced that they would be unable to participate in RETAIN beyond March 2020. A third challenge RETAIN Kansas faced was the small population (about 67 thousand people) it served in Butler County, which limited the total pool of eligible enrollees. These challenges, coupled with those related to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., statewide quarantines, health care providers and employers needing to shift their attention to COVID-19-related issues), slowed down program enrollment.

Strategies to Address Challenges. The RETAIN Kansas team took important steps to finish Phase 1 strong. First, the team filled key positions and is now operating with a full staff. Second, after an intensive search process, RETAIN Kansas identified Ascension Via Christi (AVC) as a new health care partner and formalized the partnership in June 2020. Third, the team expanded their recruitment efforts to serve injured or ill workers in five neighboring counties to increase enrollment. Finally, the two Nurse Navigators who worked with their former medical partner were able to maintain their employment with RETAIN as part of the AVC staff, which made the transition to a new partner easier.

Looking Ahead

The RETAIN Kansas team continues to refine their communication and outreach strategies to improve recruitment and enrollment efforts and to increase the number of health care providers who participate in

RETAIN. AVC is a compatible partner going forward because they serve a broader geographical area than the previous health care partner, offer a large network of occupational health providers, and have existing relationships with employers through their workers' compensation program. When AVC officially joined the team, their partnership helped increase recruitment opportunities in the short term, while also putting RETAIN Kansas in a better position to expand their recruitment network for Phase 2. The team is also considering new strategies to engage employers and further expand their referral sources. In addition, they are currently editing several short outreach videos which will be used in provider training, and outreach to local employers. Finally, in preparation for Phase 2, RETAIN Kansas is exploring new service delivery areas and medical and workforce partners.

RETAIN Kansas effectively recruits health care providers and employers to partner with their project through a series of lunch and learns. Through these and other strategies, they have received referrals from both medical providers and workforce partners.

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