



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

## Phase 1 Interim Summary – Washington

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

**RETAIN Washington** provides continuous coaching and career guidance to injured or ill workers to support their stay at work (SAW) or return to work (RTW) goals through an innovative collaboration between workforce and health care systems. Strong quality improvement processes ensure that the project’s activities are responsive to the community’s health needs.

### Program Description

**Partners.** The Washington Employment Security Department leads the RETAIN Washington program. Their key partners are:

- CHI Franciscan—home of the Center of Occupational Health and Education Alliance of Western Washington
- Pacific Associates
- Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County
- Workforce Snohomish
- WorkSource Washington

**Target Population.** Eligible participants must reside in King, Pierce, or Snohomish counties and have experienced an off-the-job injury or illness that impacts their ability to work. They must be at least 18 years old and have not applied for Social Security disability benefits.

**Service Coordination.** Participant referrals come from multiple sources. RTW Coordinators within the King and Snohomish counties workforce centers recruit eligible workers and also engage employers and social services agencies that work with individuals facing work displacement. CHI Franciscan-based Care Coordinators complement the RTW Coordinators and conduct targeted outreach to patients in the CHI system who meet the eligibility requirements. Participants receive support and assistance from both RTW and Care Coordinators, who focus on employment services and health care services, respectively. By leveraging the strengths of both systems in a purposeful and coordinated manner, participants benefit from a personalized Workforce Recovery Care Plan, which identifies concrete steps for the worker to SAW or RTW as soon as medically possible.

### Program Successes

**Implementation and Participant Successes.** RETAIN Washington delivers a holistic approach to SAW/RTW. Participants receive support from both RTW Coordinators and Care Coordinators who put into practice the program’s unique multistakeholder approach to helping people SAW/RTW following illness or injury. Care Coordinators provide continuous behavioral health coaching while RTW Coordinators focus on career guidance. This unique approach acknowledges that multiple factors impact RTW outcomes.

**RETAIN  
WASHINGTON**

*Washington 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.*

**Outreach and Program Milestones.** Essential to a multistakeholder approach for service coordination is the need for communication among staff and continuous quality improvement measures to enhance service provision. The RETAIN Washington leadership team meets weekly to gauge progress toward program goals, address budgetary issues, and conduct continuous quality improvement. The leadership team also convenes a cross-partner meeting to discuss all aspects of the program. By listening to RETAIN Washington staff from all partner organizations, the leadership team can ultimately serve participants using the multistakeholder approach they designed. As part of its continuous quality improvement structure, the RETAIN Washington leadership team actively listens to project staff to understand barriers to program implementation.

## Program Challenges

**Challenges.** Health care provider and employer engagement have been more difficult than originally anticipated. Without robust engagement from these key stakeholders, participant referrals and enrollment numbers suffered. RETAIN Washington has also experienced challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic. All WorkSource centers closed in the early days of the pandemic. To continue services to existing participants, all service coordination had to be reformatted to a completely virtual environment. Integral RETAIN staff located at CHI Franciscan were furloughed to part-time. Because of this upheaval, the flow of eligible participants slowed, and outreach to employers and providers was also halted.

**Strategies to Address Challenges.** RETAIN Washington is currently conducting focused outreach to health care providers and clinics—particularly those focused on physical and occupational therapy—in targeted counties in an effort to further increase participant enrollment. To that end, the program team established a workgroup to create training materials to recruit health care providers and employers into the program. One outcome of this workgroup was a live webinar for local employers focused on pandemic preparedness in the workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act. In addition, RETAIN Washington established a best practices fee plan with providers and employers that encourages them to recruit employees/patients that they feel are good candidates for the program.

## Looking Ahead

Participant enrollment is a key focus for the remaining months of Phase 1 and into Phase 2. The RETAIN Washington team is focused on outreach to employers and health care providers to increase the number of referrals to the program. The team developed marketing and training materials for health care providers and employers. Furthermore, RETAIN Washington is developing an employer and provider network tracker to incorporate enrollment and demographics of providers and businesses and to track invoicing and participant referrals to RETAIN Washington. The tracker also helps identify commonalities of the participating employers and providers. These data will in turn help focus and refine future outreach efforts.

As a result of RETAIN Washington, systems for collaboration between health care providers and WorkSource centers are becoming operationalized; thus, procedures and processes are being established that can be expanded statewide to increase the likelihood of successful SAW/RTW outcomes for workers who are ill or injured.

*RETAIN Washington Care Coordinators and RTW Coordinators provide continuous behavioral health coaching and career guidance, such as résumé development, accommodation support, and/or training needs for advancement, to help participants achieve their health and career goals.*  
[www.retainwa.org](http://www.retainwa.org)