

# RETAIN KANSAS

Retaining  
Employment  
and Talent After  
Injury/Illness  
Network

## Abstract

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**Project Title:** RETAINWORKS

**Geographic Area:** Butler County, Kansas

**Funding Awarded:** \$ 2,303,757

The Kansas Department of Commerce (KDC), in partnership with Workforce Alliance of South-Central Kansas (WA), the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), and Ascension Via Christi Hospital System (AVC), has been awarded nearly \$2,303,757 for a Phase I planning grant from the US Department of Labor.

The project design addresses the current disability culture in health care delivery systems, employment services systems and places of work by establishing a coordinated set of practices in each system to focus on the continual employment of individuals who suffer a potentially debilitating illness or injury.

The Health Care System partner, AVC, employs two fulltime Return to Work Navigators to coordinate health care service delivery among medical personnel within and outside of AVC. Additionally, the Navigator acts as the liaison between the health care system and the public workforce system. AVC also develops and delivers comprehensive SAW/RTW training for physicians, Nurse Practitioners and other medical personnel to prepare their staff to utilize holistic, coordinated care principles. Physicians and Nurse Practitioners participate in training encompassing the full range of occupational and other rehabilitative health best practices, pain management, patient expectations, documenting patient progress,

comprehensive follow-up and enhanced patient communication, among other topics. The purpose of the training is to establish the culture of health care delivery to include what happens to the patient after the initial health care service is delivered and how the medical system can make a positive impact on these real-world patient outcomes.

RETAINWORKS funds two professional staff in the local American Job Center. The Medical and Workforce Systems Coordinator assures the participant receives early information regarding workforce services and understands procedures and timelines for receiving those services. This staff person serves as a primary point of contact for participants and the health systems, identifies workers who access AJC services who have been injured or are ill to the extent employment is or may be diminished, describes program activities, expectations of participants, eligibility and assists with service enrollment. This professional also assists with reporting grant activities and outcomes.

The second position, located at the local workforce development AJC serves as a primary point of contact for employers, ensuring worksite accommodations, preparation for and/or understanding of medical restrictions and determining retraining needs, including perhaps On-the-Job training, for new duties. The Employment Coordinator also assists with reporting employee progress, grant activities and outcomes, and documenting workplace activities. The Employment Coordinator regularly documents and communicates participant progress to the Medical and Employment Systems Coordinator to track all interventions the participant receives. Finally, the Employment Coordinator trains employers on their accommodation responsibilities and community resources to assist with their obligations.

Based on supporting data, Kansas Department of Commerce and its partners have established the following RETAINWORKS Participant Inclusion Criteria

1. The participant must have a work disability. Work disability is defined as an injury, illness, or medical condition that has the potential to inhibit or prevent continued employment or labor force participation. Work disability exists when an employee is not able to perform their usual work as a result of a health problem

2. The work disability (i.e., illness, injury, or medical condition) must impact the participant's employment in one or more of the following ways:
  - a. Participant's ability to attend work
  - b. Participant's ability to perform work duties
  - c. Participant's work performance/productivity
3. The condition from Item 1 must be a new condition or an exacerbation of a chronic condition that falls into one or more of the following categories:
  - a. Musculoskeletal injuries
  - b. Mental health disorders
  - c. Chronic diseases such as Diabetes, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), or Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) – this list is not all-inclusive
  - d. Other newly diagnosed illnesses or injuries that affect the individual's employment
4. The condition from Item 1 may be acquired from or attributed to either on-the-job (occupational-related) or off-the-job (non-occupational-related) factors.
5. The participant must meet all of the following criteria:
  - a. Be between the ages of 18 and 65 years
  - b. Be currently employed or seeking employment
  - c. Either live or work in Butler County, Kansas
  - d. Have a valid social security number
  - e. Be legally authorized to work in the United States

Butler County and AVC provide a medical system large enough to provide a significant pool of patients but small enough to work through any problems or system breakdowns which occur. Further, its location to the state's largest city lends credibility to replication of the model in major metropolitan areas.

The Kansas RETAIN Leadership Team (RETAINWORKS) is excited about the opportunity to extend our Phase 1 Pilot period in order to refine methods of communication, outreach, recruitment, and enrollment thus expanding our knowledge, increasing our experience, and improving the overall quality of the project.

The RETAINWORKS original medical system partnership with Susan B. Allen Memorial Hospital ended after the initial 18-month planning and implementation period of performance, March 30, 2020. However, the opportunity presented by the additional 12-month extension has resulted in a new partnership with a much larger medical system, Ascension Via Christi, Inc.

Through this new partnership and extended Period of Performance, RETAINWORKS will increase the participation of referring medical providers, test the scalability of our pilot project, and ultimately increase enrollment. The target population will remain to be individuals living or working in Butler County, Kansas.