



RETAIN WA Phase 1 Abstract

The Washington Employment Security Department received a \$3,315,750 grant from the U.S. Department of Labor as part of Phase 1 of the Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network—RETAIN—Demonstration Project.

RETAIN WA Phase 1 builds on the foundation established by the highly successful practices of Centers of Occupational Health and Education (COHE) Program, which was developed by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) and identified as a model for the RETAIN grant. The COHE Alliance of Western Washington has a proven record of success in increasing employment retention and labor force participation and reducing long-term disability, including the need for federal disability benefits among individuals who acquire work disabilities. It is the largest COHE, spanning the length of state, and incorporating 90 different facilities and organizations and 937 practitioners trained and experienced in delivering COHE Best Practices.

Similarly, through two rounds of Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grants from the US Department of Labor, the Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) of King and Snohomish Counties have developed and demonstrated enhanced expertise and success in helping employers and workers with disabilities collaborate in recognizing, developing, accommodating and applying the talents of people who have disabilities to improving an employer's bottom line. RETAIN WA Phase 1 brings these two areas of strength together in a new partnership to expand COHE model best practices and evidence-based Stay-At-Work (SAW) and Return-to-Work (RTW) early interventions to workers who encounter significant injuries or illnesses while working or actively pursuing employment. Engaging the Pierce County WDC (Workforce Central) further expands the project's footprint in Washington State, and strengthens the partnership with the CHI Franciscan/COHE Alliance, by bringing in deep provider relations already in place in Pierce County.

RETAIN WA PURPOSE

The over-arching purpose of the RETAIN WA project has three key elements:

- Provide services to participants utilizing a team effort between a Care Coordinator and a Return to Work Coordinator - To provide a seamless, coordinated experience for participants that holistically assesses each person's unique situation and provides the appropriate intervention. Each participant will create a plan in concert with care coordinators and return to work coordinators that addresses their unique situation, to include goal setting and incremental progress toward returning to the workplace and retaining employment. Including both healthcare and employment goals gives the participant a more powerful approach to what might be overwhelming without team support.

- To provide employers support with talent retention and reasonable accommodation knowledge and implementation.
- To connect healthcare clinicians to the workforce development system, thereby enriching supports they can provide to participants.

TARGET POPULATION

The RETAIN WA Phase 1 Demonstration Project will provide a robust mix of rapid response, coordinated Evidence Based Early Interventions (EBEI) to individuals who have been injured or become ill outside of work and therefore are not eligible for worker compensation benefits. Through this project, participants will have access to interventions modeled after established COHE, RTW and SAW strategies that have proven to be so effective, and receive these services by a coordinated healthcare workforce team that will result in participants returning to work and avoiding the need to access the social security system.

This population matches Mathematica’s description of the characteristics most likely to lead to substantial public benefit from the provision of EBEI. This population also shares the common advantage that the RETAIN WA Phase 1 partners will have ready access to them through existing programs that are committed to cooperating with this project. While the partners are focused on building the capacity and developing the protocols necessary to initiate services, the programs that are in contact with the target population will already be providing them information about the project and the services it will be able to offer.

RETAIN WA program participants will be recruited primarily through two sources: 1) as customers of America’s Job Service Centers, known in Washington State as WorkSource Centers, located in Snohomish, King and Pierce counties, and 2) health care providers and clinics, particularly those focused around physical or occupational therapy.

SERVICES TO BE DELIVERED

CHI Franciscan: The RETAIN WA Phase 1 Demonstration Project will add two new Care Coordinators dedicated to this project and reimburse the COHE Alliance of Western Washington for the time its personnel commit to developing and implementing this project. It will also create a fee schedule modeled after L&I’s established COHE fee schedule. In this way the project will build the capacity that will allow CHI Franciscan to extend its services to the participant samples selected from the project’s target populations. This will enable the demonstration project to launch from the foundation of a large, well-established, successful network of providers who are already trained and experienced in COHE best practices and may be more likely to embrace RETAIN participation. Best practices include:

- Initiating a case for treatment
- Case conferencing with RETAIN Coordinators to address return to work strategies
- Collaborating on Reasonable Accommodations
- Assessing and documenting the patient’s Barriers to Return to Work (BRTW), and developing a plan to overcome the barriers in a RETAIN Care Plan.
- Minimizing opioid use.

- Provider and employer support and training.
- Patient education.

Return to Work/Stay at Work (RTW/SAW): The project will also fund two full-time Return to Work Coordinators (RTWs) and reimburse Workforce Snohomish, SeaKing and Workforce Central for the time their other personnel commit to developing and implementing this project. This will allow the project to replicate and expand upon L&I's SAW and RTW programs by integrating those services to employers and job seekers into Washington State's WorkSource Centers. Both WFS and SeaKing were highly successful partners in two rounds of DEI grants, through which they have developed expertise in serving workers with disabilities and their employers. The RTWs trained through those grants will be able to assist both employers' and workers' creative exploration of Reasonable Accommodation and light duty assignments to ease reintegration into work, and other problem-solving related to meeting the employers' and workers' needs. The grant will provide funding to allow the RTWs to include additional training, assistance with costs of reasonable accommodations and incentives to create light duty positions, as part of the toolkit they can offer. The RTWs will also be able to apply best practices learned from their experience with DEI, such as Integrated Resource Teams, and facilitated integration into Career Pathways Programs to the menu of coordinated, person-centered services provided under this demonstration project.

RETAIN WA PARTNERSHIP ROLES

The Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment, housed within the Washington State Employment Security Department, will provide statewide leadership, guidance and oversight, connecting RETAIN WA to other statewide initiatives and strategies on a systemic level.

CHI Franciscan/COHE Alliance will provide guidance on expanding best practices of the Centers of Health Education model to previously unserved populations and engage with healthcare clinicians to increase knowledge of RTW strategies. They will provide intake and care coordination services and program management for health care services on behalf of project participants.

Workforce Snohomish, Seattle King County Workforce Development Council and Workforce Central will provide local workforce system engagement through disability employment experts and employer engagement in the WorkSource Centers.

Pacific Associates will provide RTW coordination and disability employment expertise.

The Workforce Training and Education Board will provide coordination and support across multiple systems to connect the work to the wider community.