

TRANSITIONING WORKERS TO FULL EMPLOYMENT

In ‘Accessibility 2024’, the provincial government’s goal for BC is to have the highest labour participation rate for people with disabilities in Canada by 2024 (p.12); a laudable and supportable goal. However, there is a sub-set of individuals who receive disability supports that are not represented well in the government literature. These individuals are recovering from a long-term illness and are preparing to re-enter the labour market. To ensure their successful re-integration, they require flexibility in the Disability Assistance Program to help both the employer and employee accommodate the transition from a few hours a week to full-time.

Workers in this sub-group are not covered by insurance or their insurance had time-limits; and they are not WCB or ICBC related, and there is no union agreement in place. The challenge requiring time away from employment is usually a major illness or injury of some kind that, at some point, can either go into remission, or the individual is “getting better,” or is in some form able to return to work.

Return-to-work plans are recommended by human resource agencies and governments as the ideal tool to assist employees return to workplace. Part of recovering from a debilitating illness is considered beneficial for a worker’s mental and social well-being. Under ideal circumstances, a worker is covered by their employment insurance benefits, and the accommodations required are agreeable to all parties.¹ Unfortunately, not all employees on long-term leave are covered if their employers were not able to provide an insurance benefit, or the benefit is time-limited. Not all employers are able to accommodate if the accommodation requires “undue hardship.”²

Limited by lack of assistance, these individuals end up on disability assistance which provides them and any family members a set income per month, plus the ability to earn up to various amounts (determined by their family income, as it applies) per year, before a dollar for dollar “clawback” is triggered.

However, to successfully re-integrate into an employment situation, individuals may find the maximum allowable support to be a barrier as they gradually increase their employment hours, but are not experiencing the benefit. Further, the increase in employed hours paid may not be sufficient to replace the disability support, hindering the employee’s ability to leave the disability assistance program, particularly if that person has dependants.

The dollar-for-dollar clawback after allowable earnings is a major barrier to a successful return-to-work plan requiring recovering employees to effectively jump from as few as 2-4 hours weekly (especially if a skilled-worker earner more than minimum wage), to full-time in order to ensure sufficient income. If returning too soon, the employee can suffer a medical set back impacting their recovery and the workplace. What is required for these willing workers, is a flexible assistance schedule that allows for increasing hours and commensurate pay, and that extra time required to successfully integrate. A temporary transitional interim support of 50% clawback before full dollar to dollar recovery, as part of their plan and with the concurrence of their government case worker would be of great value to ease a skilled worker back to full employment.

A safe and timely return to work benefits the patient and his or her family by enhancing recovery and reducing disability. Through improvement of health outcomes, a safe and timely return to work also preserves a skilled and stable workforce for employers and society and reduces

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/values-ethics/diversity-equity/disability-management/fundamentals-return-to-work-plan.html>

² Canadian Human Rights Commission, <http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/eng/content/guide-managing-return-work>

demands on health and social services as well as on disability plans.” — “The Physician's Role in Helping Patients Return to Work After Illness or Injury,” Canadian Medical Association, 2010³

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

1. Consider introducing a transitional Disability Assistance step in their Annual Earnings Exemption table to accommodate a Return-to-Work plan to provide temporary assistance through re-integration to full employment.
2. The temporary transitional category would be a 50% recovery of incomes earned over the allowable income exemption, prior to full recovery of dollars earned and/or the employee moving off disability assistance
3. Further, this would only apply to those who are transitioning to full or near-full employment, and would not impact other benefits allowable through the transition period until removal off the Disability Assistance program

Submitted by the Surrey Board of Trade

Policy adopted by BC Chamber of Commerce members, May 2017

REFERENCES

Income Treatment & Exemptions

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/policies-for-government/bcea-policy-and-procedure-manual/eligibility/income-treatment-and-exemptions>

Annual Earnings Exemption

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/disability-assistance/on-disability-assistance/annual-earnings-exemption>

INCLUSION BC on BC Budget 2017

<http://www.inclusionbc.org/whats-new/bc-budget-2017>

BC Employment & Assistance Policy & Procedure Manual

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/policies-for-government/bcea-policy-and-procedure-manual>

Disability Assistance Rate Table

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/policies-for-government/bcea-policy-and-procedure-manual/bc-employment-and-assistance-rate-tables/disability-assistance-rate-table#a>

Return-to-Work Plan

<https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/values-ethics/diversity-equity/disability-management/fundamentals-return-to-work-plan.html>

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/values-ethics/diversity-equity/disability-management/fundamentals-return-to-work-plan.html>