

Vocational Rehabilitation

Your guide to returning to work





Vocational Rehabilitation

Working together to help you return to work

If you're injured on the job, one of the best things you can do for your recovery is to return to work — as soon as it's safe to do so. Studies show that getting back on the job can facilitate your recovery, and benefit you not only physically, but emotionally and socially, as well.

What's more, returning to work is an important part of the rehabilitation process. Going back to your daily work and activities can help you recover more successfully, and reduce your chance of developing a long-term disability.

Sometimes an injury, occupational disease, or other factor can affect a worker's ability to return to a previous job. That's where vocational rehabilitation comes in. Our vocational rehabilitation consultants (voc rehab consultants) can help you safely transition back to the job you were doing, or to other, suitable work.

You won't do it alone. We're here to help. In the meantime, we've provided the following Q&A to give you an overview of our program and what it can do for you.

What is vocational rehabilitation?

Vocational rehabilitation is a process designed to help you return to suitable work, following your workplace injury — either with your existing employer or with a new employer. It's a collaborative process that requires the involvement and commitment of everyone involved.

Keep in mind that this is your journey. Your involvement is key. While we're here to assist you, your success is up to you. The more you participate, the better your chances of successfully recovering and returning to work.

“I owe much of my success to your hard work and great judgement as to rehabilitation and direction...To be honest, I was uncertain whether the program would work or provide me with a suitable income. Fortunately, it did.”

—former client, North Vancouver office

Who is eligible to receive vocational rehabilitation assistance?

Under the *Workers Compensation Act*, access to WorkSafeBC vocational rehabilitation services and benefits is discretionary; workers are not automatically eligible. A voc rehab consultant will decide if you are eligible by considering your individual circumstances, and, if so, the type and amount of assistance to provide. Some of the factors your voc rehab consultant will take into account are as follows:

- your injury, and how it affects your ability to return to work
- the wage rate set on your claim
- your motivation and commitment to going back to work
- the ability to transfer your current skills and education into another job

How does the process work?

Vocational rehabilitation is a collaborative process. Our voc rehab consultants will work with you and your employer to help you plan and coordinate your return to work.

Our first priority is to help you return to work with your existing employer, if at all possible. Your voc rehab consultant will work with you, your employer, your union, and others to help you accomplish this goal. If that's not possible, he or she will work closely with you to identify a suitable return-to-work goal for employment with a new employer; one that restores your wage rate — or comes as close as possible — to the rate established on your claim.

Keep in mind that this is a long-term goal. Depending on the circumstances, it may take several years to return to your targeted income level.

In the meantime, here are a few of the types of services that may be available to you during the process: vocational assessment and planning, vocational counselling, work assessment, work-site job modifications, assistance with your job search, and skills development. We will work with you to identify which services might be of benefit to you.



‘Every journey is unique’

As part of the vocational rehabilitation process, you can expect your voc rehab consultant to help you through a series of phases toward returning to work. Every journey is unique; yours will depend on your particular circumstances. Your voc rehab consultant will work with you to consider return-to-work options at each phase and determine the best option for you.

Keep in mind that you may not progress through all of the five phases listed, below. Your voc rehab consultant will consider your transferable skills, and decide what level of assistance is reasonable and necessary for your return to suitable work.

“I liked my voc rehab consultant’s demeanor and professionalism, and her interest in seeing me get back to work and make something of my ‘new life.’”

—former client, Surrey office

Phase 1

We make every effort to help you return to the same job with the same employer.

Phase 2

If you're unable to return to the same job, we'll work with you and your employer to modify your job or to help you identify other job opportunities within the same company.

Phase 3

If you can't return to the same company, we'll work with you to identify other suitable job options in the same or a related industry — options that make the most of your transferable skills.

Phase 4

If you're not able to return to suitable work in the same or a related industry, we'll work with you to identify options in other industries — options that take into account all your relevant work experience, as well as your transferable skills, aptitudes, and interests.

Phase 5

If you need additional skills in order to return to suitable work, we may cover the cost of training to help you develop those skills.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

How do I connect with a voc rehab consultant?

Your case manager can assist you. He or she may refer you to a voc rehab consultant for assistance, when our information suggests you will have difficulty returning to work, or, if your job is no longer available to you because of your injury. If you think you need help in returning to work, and would like to speak with a voc rehab consultant, contact your case manager to discuss a referral.

If you do not have a case manager, contact WorkSafeBC, and ask to speak directly with a voc rehab consultant.

What will my vocational rehabilitation plan look like?

Your voc rehab consultant will work with you to develop a vocational rehabilitation plan to help you return to work.

Your written plan will identify your return-to-work goals, taking into account your past work experience, functional abilities, prior education and training, skills, and interests. It will also outline the services and support you'll need to complete your plan and safely return to the workforce, and a timeframe for completing your plan.

Each plan is unique, as is the level of support you require. For some, the process is short and straightforward — for others, returning to work can take much longer, and require more comprehensive support.

Does that mean I can choose any type of career training I want?

Your preferences are taken into consideration as part of the planning process. However, not everyone requires training for a change of job or occupation following an injury. Your voc rehab consultant will consider what assistance is reasonable and necessary to help you to return to suitable work. In some cases, this means that your plan will be based on the skills and knowledge you already possess. In other instances, we may include training in your plan to help you develop new skills for returning to work.

What is the role of my voc rehab consultant? And what's my role?

Think of your voc rehab consultant as your partner. He or she will meet with you on a regular basis to help you to set a suitable return-to-work goal and develop your vocational rehabilitation plan. Your voc rehab consultant will also be there to support you while you are completing your plan and returning to work. But, you have a role to play, as well.

“They listen to your concerns, and treat you as a person — not just a number. They understand what you’re going through, and they try to make the transition as easy as possible.”

—former client, North Vancouver office

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

To ensure this process goes smoothly, please be prepared to do the following:

- Contact your employer as soon as possible after your injury or condition occurs, and stay in touch throughout your recovery.
- Meet with your voc rehab consultant.
- Immediately identify any circumstances that could affect your ability to participate in your vocational rehabilitation or the progress of your return to work.
- Stay in touch regularly by phone.
- Provide your voc rehab consultant with information about your work history, abilities, education, training, and any other information he or she asks for.
- Gather helpful information about your return-to-work options.
- Attend assessments and meetings.
- Participate actively in your plan and return to work.

“The vocational rehabilitation team were actually concerned about my well-being. They took steps to rehabilitate me in every way possible.”

—former client, Victoria office

What kinds of benefits am I eligible for?

While you participate in the vocational rehabilitation process, you may be eligible to receive vocational rehabilitation benefits that are equivalent to wage-loss benefits. However, as previously mentioned, keep in mind that these benefits are discretionary under the *Workers Compensation Act*. If you are eligible for benefits, you must actively participate in your vocational rehabilitation.

If I'm eligible for vocational rehabilitation benefits, how long will those benefits last?

Once you successfully return to work and/or complete your vocational rehabilitation plan, you'll no longer be eligible for vocational rehabilitation benefits. At that point, your vocational rehabilitation benefits will stop.

Keep in mind that if you do not actively participate in the process, or you refuse suitable employment available to you, your benefits may be suspended or discontinued.

I'm already receiving a long-term disability award under my claim. Will my vocational rehabilitation benefits be affected by that award?

Yes. If you're receiving a long-term disability award under your claim, that amount will be deducted from your vocational rehabilitation benefits.

What if I decide not to participate in vocational rehabilitation or return to work? Will that affect my pension assessment, if I'm eligible for one?

If you decide not to participate, your voc rehab consultant may still assess what type of work you would be able to do with the benefit of vocational rehabilitation assistance, and our Disability Awards department may use that information to assess the amount of your disability award.

What if I disagree with a decision on my vocational rehabilitation assistance?

If you disagree with a decision about your vocational rehabilitation, first, speak directly with your voc rehab consultant.

If you still disagree with the decision, you have the right to request a review by the Review Division. A request for review must be filed within 90 days from the date of this decision. You can find further information and instructions about the Review Division on our website at worksafebc.com.

What happens once I return to work?

Going back to work after a period of time away can be a challenge. Through the rehabilitation and return-to-work process, your voc rehab consultant will have been working closely with you to prepare you for this transition. Part of our role is to help you feel prepared and supported through your return to work. And, even though your involvement with us is completed, we are here to answer your questions during the initial transition period.

As you transition back to work, you'll have firsthand knowledge of the difficulties involved with recovering from an injury and returning to work.

By modelling a successful return to the workplace, and by looking out for your own health and safety in future, you can play a key role in helping to protect yourself and other workers in B.C. from being injured on the job.

“I just wanted to give you an update of what’s going on for me: I’m in school and loving it...I really appreciate what you’ve done. You were a big part of my personal growth and I thank you for that.”

—former client, Nanaimo office

A black and white photograph of a middle-aged man with short hair and a slight smile, wearing a plaid button-down shirt. He is standing in front of a building that appears to be a dairy farm, with a sign that says "Dairy" visible in the background. The image is used as a background for the text.

Need to find out more?

If you have further questions about vocational rehabilitation, go to the Vocational Rehabilitation section of worksafebc.com, or contact your voc rehab consultant directly.

You can also learn more about vocational rehabilitation decisions online through the Workers' Advisers Office, which provides workers, their dependants, and other stakeholders with independent advice and assistance on workers' compensation decisions. Visit www.labour.gov.bc.ca/wab/ for more information.