

RETAIN Program

BIPOC Employees: In-depth Interviews

February 2022



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Key findings

Key Findings

- Employees experience the provider-employer communications disconnect.
 - The return-to-work (RTW) case manager is seen as providing better communications for all parties.
- Most employees report no work accommodations.
 - If accommodations were offered, most would return to work before 100% healed.
 - Some employers disregard work limits or pressure employees to return to work.
 - Health concerns are mostly why employees are not willing to return early.
- Most employees are interested or very interested in returning to work as quickly as possible.

Key Findings

- A brief description of RETAIN resulted in a positive initial impression.
 - Employees think RETAIN provides a neutral advocate, needed support and help getting back to work.
 - This introduction generated many questions about the program.
- Employees see the need and benefits of a return-to-work (RTW) case manager
 - RTW case manager is seen as a communicator and paperwork processor.
 - Employees consider them to be their advocate and support.

Key Findings

- Concerns about sharing medical information with employers is based on personal privacy and potential employer misuse.
 - Approximately half of employees had concerns about sharing this information.
 - Concerned employees want to approve or know what is shared.
- RETAIN's temporary work opportunity generated qualified interest.
 - Employee questions mainly focused on the job details and pay.
 - Most employees see potential problems with employers learning of this job.
 - Employees want RETAIN to have a written agreement from employers regarding the employee's return to work.

Key Findings

- Social media and online sources are most often used for news.
- Employees most expect and want to learn of RETAIN from employers and healthcare providers
 - Expected media sources of information include social media, online, and television.
 - Community outreach is seen as best achieved through social media and work or healthcare-related locations.
 - Social service organizations and churches are the most frequently mentioned community organizations as expected sources of RETAIN information.

Background and methodology



Background and Goals

- The purpose of this research is to understand:
 - Employee perceptions and concerns in working with a provider-based RTW case manager.
 - Employee perspectives on the RETAIN program and likelihood of using it.
 - Employer involvement in the program and identifying concerns, if any.
 - Sources of information regarding worker's compensation and programs to support injured or ill employees.
- Research results will be used to:
 - Provide input for decisions regarding the state-wide rollout of the RETAIN program.

Background and Goals

- Online and phone interviews were conducted with BIPOC employees state-wide.
- 22 interviews were collected between January 10 and January 20, 2022.
- Qualitative research is directional and not considered statistically representative of sample populations due to the small sample size.

Employee experience with injury or illness



Some employer interactions are marred by poor provider information or lack of support

- Most of the employees interviewed had some injury or illness and about half of these were work-related.
 - All injured or ill employees shared medical information with their employer.
 - Most employees without experience with illness or injury report a doctor's note is required.
- Employees report some employers misunderstand or interpret the medical information incorrectly.
- Most, though not all, employers are supportive of injured or ill employees.
 - Employee-employer interactions are smoother when there is a worker's compensation claim or the employee takes a leave via the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Poor provider communication creates problems

- *They could have explained it better to my work because that was a little bit of a process.... I had the doctor send them some things and then I had to run interference between the two.*
- *It was a surprise to me to see the 6-hour daily limit. It wasn't confusion as much as I am not sure he [doctor] heard me.*
- *It was a little harder, because of the way it was phrased. ...It was the phrasing my provider put in the paperwork.*
- *My impression was they [employer] may not have understood fully that certain things were not allowed for me to do.*

Some employers disregard work limitations or exert pressure on employees to return to work

- *They would try to get me to do certain things so I had to reiterate there are limitations, things I cannot do at this point*
- *I felt I contracted COVID from my workplace. ...I got calls when can you come back. ...I couldn't think for myself, and you are asking me to come in to fill a shift. ... You want me to be in physical contact with clients that have compromised immune systems.*
- *I let my employer know my injury and they asked if I could come into work the next day, even though I told them about my limitations.*
- *But a lot of my time I was supposed to be healing was going back and forth with my job. They didn't understand that I needed to be away from all of that. I need my time to heal instead of babysitting them.*

Employees gave mixed reviews of employer support

Employer provided support

- *The communication was very open and easy. ...I don't know how it could have been better.*
- *They were very supportive. Very receptive to my taking time off and receptive to my coming back and some of the limitations I had when coming back.*
- *I wanted to do more, and they said no you can't. ...They gave me enough time and an extensive amount of information and what I qualified for.*
- *They were pretty supportive ... Maybe it comes down to my manager who was very sympathetic about it. He was not pressuring me to come back.*

No support from employer

- *They didn't check in with me. I just got through it on my own. ...But it would have been nice if they had called to see how things were going and progressing.*
- *I had individual co-worker support. Very little from the organization ...Just well wishes, basic human decency would have been nice. It came down to 'we can hire someone else if you won't'. It turns into 'we don't care'.*
- *I couldn't think for myself, and you are asking me to come in to fill a shift. No, I felt like a machine.*

Employers have a variety of reasons for not offering work accommodations

- Most employers did not offer work accommodations.
- Reasons for the lack of work accommodation include
 - The type of job can't be restructured or accommodated for the limitations.
 - The worker's compensation carrier required employee be 100% healed before returning.
 - Doctor required employee be 100% healed.

Most employers did not offer work accommodations

- *No, the insurance company wouldn't let me go back until I was 100% healed.*
- *No, the doctor wanted me fully healed before I went back.*
- *No, they never offered that at all.*
- *A little bit. I did a lot of the legwork in suggesting that, including the gradual return to work. I don't know if they weren't used to it or with all the limitations they were overwhelmed.*
- *There was no way to restructure her position.*
- *They did at first but when I got reinjured, that is when it got mixed up.*
- *Yes, I am doing a completely different job.*
- *Yes, light duty, what I could handle. I had my choice. A lot of tedious things.*

If accommodation were offered, most employees would return before 100% healed

- Interest in returning to work is motivated by financial concerns, need to be active or productive, and desire to be away from home.
 - *I would have gone back to work. Being away from work you are not getting full pay so going back would have made it a little less stressful.*
 - *I would have been OK with that. That would be an ideal situation.*
 - *I'm a worker, plus 'STD' [short term disability] isn't your full salary. So, I would have gone back if I could do something that didn't injure me or make it worse.*
 - *Probably right away if they were willing to work with me. Staying at home was not fun.*

I'm a worker, plus short term disability isn't your full salary. So, I would have gone back if I could do something that didn't injure me or make it worse.

Health concerns are a major reason for no interest in early return with accommodations

- *I didn't want to because I knew the type of pain I would be in and the type of medications I would be on. So, I didn't want to until I was 100%.*
- *I don't think I could have physically or mentally gone in. I don't think it would have been safe for my clients.*

Accommodations are often a mix of provider and employer input with some employee input

- Accommodations are often a mix of the doctor's restrictions and the employer's experience.
 - *I think it was a little of both. They used the doctor's order as it was phrased, but also how they needed it worked around.*
 - *A little of both, based on their experience. My doctor said point a to point b - no emphasis, nothing too detailed for my actual work. He (manager) took restrictions and what they have done in the past.*
- Approximately half of employees are involved in the decision.
 - *The case worker and manager talked to me about it.*
 - *No, this is what it says you can do.*

Early return to work is a positive experience for many employees

- *It is working out great. I am doing half of my prior work and getting the same salary. Light duty and same pay.*
- *I did light duty [which] meant I did a lot of office work, less on my feet. Things I normally wouldn't do as a nurse. It helped me understand what it takes to run a facility. I had a new appreciation of other departments.*
- *I think good because A) I need the money. If I'm missing work, I'm not getting paid for it. Down the road it might affect me. ...I think I may have come back prematurely, but it wasn't hard.*
- *I felt like I kind of had to. ...had to go back- mostly financial but I was getting multiple calls a week about clients too.*

Employees are nearly evenly split on potential for job loss after injury or illness

- Legal requirements and a good relationship with the employer reduces the concern about losing a job due to injury or illness.
 - *No, I was not. I was more concerned about paying for the surgery. I felt pretty secure the job was secure.*
 - *No. because I was legally given the time off and I had the time extended for me. I had paid into STD so I knew I would get paid and I wouldn't lose my job because of FMLA.*
 - *No, I don't believe I would. They would be open to working with you.*
 - *That's what I like about working at a small company. They really value their employees.*

Job loss concerns rise with job changes, seasonality, company size and employer pressure

- *Yes. I had been with the company for several years. My previous department eliminated my position, so I was new to the department.*
- *I was told a few times ‘you realize that if you weren’t trying so hard and we weren’t having these conversations, you probably would be gone by now’.*
- *Initially no, but as time went on, they were more and more persistent about me coming back sooner.*
- *I do road construction, seasonally. I missed the entire last 4 and half weeks so I was worried they were not going to call me back the next year.*
- *Our organization is really small, so if I had to take an extended leave of absence, I imagine they would need to replace my position at some point.*

Most employees want to return to work quickly

- When asked their interest in returning to work as quick as possible if injured or ill, most employees report they are interested or very interested.
 - Interest is driven by finances, liking their work and wanting to be active.
 - A quick return must not compromise their health.
- Some employees are neutral about a quick return. No one reported they are uninterested.
 - Neutral employees are more likely to focus on recovery and the nature of the injury or illness.

Interest in a quick return to work varied

Interested or very interested

- *The STD is very limited in what you get so you have to cut costs every way.*
- *Kind of depends on the extent of the illness or injury. I like working. I like having a purpose and structure.*
- *I like my job, my co-workers and the physicians I work for. But it also depends on how you have been treated at that job.*
- *I would be very interested to the extent I could do the job without pain and suffering. For me I enjoy my work, so I'm fortunate.*

Neutral about a quick return

- *It is twofold. There was the injury and then there was also the mental state that I was in from the work itself.*
- *It depends on the injury you have. Some people can't go back to work with their injuries. Others are 'I can go back with 2 or 3 weeks off' versus 6 or 12 weeks with FMLA.*
- *Just to make sure that I am at my best. I want to go back right away, but I struggle with setting boundaries for myself.*

I would be very interested to the extent I could do the job without pain and suffering. For me I enjoy my work, so I'm fortunate.

Initial perceptions of RETAIN



Employees have a positive initial impression of RETAIN

- The most common reasons for employee interest are coordination of doctor-employer communications, less stress and more support.
 - *It would smooth out the process. It was very difficult. I felt it was every other week I was changing the insurance person I was dealing with.*
 - *Probably help reduce some of the stress related to getting injured, while you have bills to pay. ... And coordinating between a lot of different people can be really time-consuming.*
 - *The employer looks at the employee to relay everything versus the doctor's office. Everything is put on the employee.*
 - *You would have a support system behind you. So you are not just out there all by yourself. ...A person would feel a little more comfortable taking the time to get better if they know they have this program behind them.*
 - *It seems a lot more employee-oriented rather than employer-oriented.*

Employees think RETAIN will give support, a neutral advocate and help getting back to work

- Program assistance is seen as including navigating the process, emotional support, ensuring a healthy return
 - *I think it would help get you back to work faster because it is one less thing you have to worry about. Instead of talking to doctors or filing paperwork, they are actually helping you recover.*
 - *Make sure the accommodation and additional support are being addressed. So that when they do return the return will be successful.*
 - *Having that one person be the voice for you, be the advocate for you - that is a big deal.*
 - *To me this would make things a little easier to help people get back on their feet. With this program I think more people will want to get back to work.*

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Perceptions of return-to-work case manager



A RTW case manager is seen as a communicator and paperwork processor

- Getting the doctor and employer 'on the same page' is crucial.
 - *They would work as the go between for the employer and physician to make sure everyone is on the same page to support the patient/employee.*
 - *Often there is such a disconnect between the employer, employee and the doctor's office. ...It would be better to hear directly from the doctor's office rather than the employee..., you can probably get better or more clarification.*
 - *If there is a case worker, a liaison for you, to provide that information back to your employer that would be a huge benefit.*
 - *This person is not employed by your employer, so they have no vested interest in forcing you back before you are ready. This person could work as a liaison because many medical things are confusing to the patient and employer.*

RTW case manager is also viewed as an employee advocate

- *I would have some anxiety telling my employer I can't do something that is part of my normal job. ...it would be helpful to have an advocate or third party explain to my employer.*
- *When you advocate for yourself, there is always someone out there saying you're lying, you're just faking your symptoms. The case manager can speak for them.*
- *Very helpful. One, I think a lot of us can't communicate what we are trying to say or what we mean...Having a professional mediate some of that would be very helpful.*
- *Great, especially if the employee doesn't know their rights and how to proceed and how to get back to work.*

This person is not employed by your employer, so they have no vested interest in forcing you back before you are ready. This person could work as a liaison because many medical things are confusing to the patient and employer.

Employee concerns with sharing medical information focus on privacy and use

- Employees are nearly evenly split on whether they have concerns around sharing medical information with employers.
- Privacy concerns and employer misinterpretation or resulting actions are the primary reasons for employee concerns.
- The relationship with the employer and amount of trust impact an employee's level of concern.

Some employees see existing safeguards as adequate

- Unconcerned employees rely on Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protections, see the employer's need to know and assume information will be restricted to the specific injury or illness.
 - *You are supposed to sign off on making sure that information is shared. I don't think it would be an issue at all.*
 - *I don't think I would have one because HIPPA would be involved and signing of releases.*
 - *I think it would benefit both parties with full transparency on an injury and plan to come back.*
 - *if we are all working together, I think that would tamper down the concern. If they are working for my benefit, I don't think there would be too much concern.*
 - *I don't think there should be a problem because it is directly involved with the injury or illness.*

Health privacy is a major concern for some employees

- Concerned employees focus on what is shared, with whom and potential misuse by employers. Mistrust of employers plays a role too.
 - *How personal a nature is the injury and who it is shared with. If you are talking about HR that is different than the actual manager or supervisor. That might be a little different because you never know with personal information how people process that.*
 - *I could see it being abused by some employers in some cases. ...If you have one person who won't ever be coming back to work, you might try to find ways to let them go.*
 - *...if we are looking at your medical abilities that affects your job it needs to be shared. Other medical issues that don't affect the duties or job performance, should be off limits.*
 - *I don't know if the injury is in your permanent employee file, would it affect your employment somewhere else? If they go back and check and see she had a workplace injury or whatever the situation, it could affect your future employment.*

Concerned employees want to know or approve what is shared with employers

- *I feel there's ways to get consent from the client about what he would like to share about his illness. So, he could list out the parts of his illness or injury he would like to share.*
- *I don't know if they clear with the employee here's what we are going to give to your employer. [employee says] that's fine. That would be good - a little cross check.*
- *I think the employee needs to know it is being shared and give their consent.*
- *I would prefer if I could OK the situation. If there had to be a discussion between RETAIN and the employer, I would want them to go through me first or have me in the meeting as well.*
- *How much do you share with the employer without violating the person's privacy? I'm guessing or I hope there would be a certain standard for that. Because with certain things an employer can turn discriminatory towards certain things.*

I would prefer if I could OK the situation. If there had to be a discussion between RETAIN and the employer, I would want them to go through me first or have me in the meeting as well.

Reactions to temporary job option



Employees are interested in learning more about the temporary job

- Most questions focused on the pay, insurance, benefits, location, and similarity to their current job and industry.
- Understanding how the temporary job salary fits into unemployment, wages from existing employer or worker's compensation payments is important.
- Some employees are concerned about retaining their current job.
- A few employees wonder, if they like the temporary job better, can they become a permanent employee and quit their existing job.
- Some employees asked about the potential for retraining or learning new skills and how RETAIN evaluates their ability to work and their skill set.
- Some employees have concerns the temporary job would be 'busy work' or a way for employers to get cheaper labor.

Concerns about RETAIN's temporary job mainly focused on the parameters of the job

- *What would this employer expect coming into the company or job? ...Are the expectations clear and concise and will there be leeway for this person coming in if something were to happen?*
- *Is it a job job? Is it a job that helps you return to work, with a focus on rehabilitation? Or are you going to be stuck somewhere doing busy work?*
- *I would be concerned about whether I had a choice of jobs or getting some education.*
- *How long that temporary assignment would be for and the rate of pay as well. I would be most concerned would my regular job be there when I finish my temporary assignment.*
- *That would be fabulous if they [employer] can't accommodate you. So, would they [RETAIN] sit down with you and see what you could do and then go from there?*
- *You don't want to have a situation where people feel they are being used or valued less. ...Is this a program where you are really trying to help us or are you trying to get cheaper labor?*

What will I be doing? The normal questions I would have about any job. What are the hours? Where is it at? How often do I get paid? What is the culture like? How many people work in the department?

Employee concerns are mixed if their employer learns about a temporary job through RETAIN

- Most employees see potential problems with employers.
- Employees are evenly split on whether their current employer would fire them.
- Employees would look to RETAIN to have written employer agreements or guarantees to avoid employee firing, replacement, reduced hours or pay, demotion or being forced out.

Reasons given for level of concern if employer knows of temporary job

No or minimal concern

- Good relationship with current employer.
- Employer looks out for employees.
- Employer views temporary job as keeping employees in a 'work routine' or providing new skills.
- Employer understands employee's financial needs and the lack of accommodation drives the temporary placement.
- Existing employment laws would prevent employer retaliation.

Strong concern

- Employer might not or be less inclined to keep their job open or reduce the length of time the job would be open to return.
- Employer retaliation including firing.
- Negative impact on the existing employee-employer relationship.
- Employer views all employees as replaceable.

Employee views of the potential employer response to a temporary job vary

- *My main concern is would I be able to get my former job back, once I was at full strength.*
- *If I'm the employer this person is still in the routine of working. So, the chances he will come back to me is greater.*
- *Because it is more like a betrayal. A stab in the back to employer. Not open communication with your employer. I think termination would happen.*
- *They would say 'you can work for another company, but you can't do your job?' Just knowing that you are working, I would be concerned. How might that color the perspective or opinion of me.*
- *They might question my loyalty or commitment to the company. So that would be very risky.*
- *That they might cut my hours or fire me. ...Or if they found out the rate of pay was less, they would try to pay me less.*
- *if you have been there so long and you have a good working relationship with your employer, I wouldn't be concerned at all.*

Most employees are very likely to contact or use RETAIN

- Employees **very** interested in RETAIN gave reasons such as:
 - *I know what it potentially could do. It also increases my options.*
 - *Because it is an extra service where I don't have to put in extra work myself.*
 - *Just thinking about my medical condition and if my employers weren't as great as they are. That would be something that I would need.*
 - *If I am injured and the program is what they say it is, it would definitely help me out so I could be successful.*
 - *A lot of people would use it because they struggle a lot with the communications part.*
- Employees interested in RETAIN gave reasons such as:
 - *A 4 maybe because it seems like a good program, but I want to know more about it.*
 - *I would probably reach out to them to see what is happening about it.*
 - *if I got really really sick and I thought it would be a while[or]..had an injury that would keep me bedridden for a long period of time I would reach out.*

Employee
questions,
perceived benefits,
additional services



Many employee questions focused on cost and who can participate in RETAIN

- **Cost:**

- Is it free to participating employees?
- Is it free to employers?
- How is it paid for?

- **Who participates:**

- Are all employers involved?
- Can an employer refuse to participate?
- Is it for any employee or focused on low income or other demographics?
- What are the guidelines and qualifications to participate?
- Is it state-wide or only in the metro?

Questions on details of RETAIN are plentiful

- What are the program time limits and restrictions, such as waiting periods or ability to access multiple times?
- What is the process and how long does it take to start?
- What are employees required to do in the program?
- How does it work with unions?
- If employer provides no accommodation, is the temporary job required?
- Can employees choose the type of temporary job?
- Is training or retraining available?
- What guarantees exist for retaining my prior job?
- Will temporary employers 'poach' employees, so employers won't participate?

Some questions are about communications, program background and track record

- **Communications:**

- Why haven't I heard of this program?
- How do employers and employees learn of the program?

- **Background, track record:**

- What organizations are involved?
- How did the program start?
- What is the legal background for it?
- What is the success rate for employees?

The overall benefit of RETAIN is the support to return to work

- *It gives you a chance to get back to work sooner and gradually ramp up your activity until you are able to or determine if you are able to hold a job.*
- *Security- job security. If it does come to point where jobs are difficult to find, people won't feel like they will lose their job.*
- *It helps get them back into the workforce at the same time taking into account their injuries.*
- *It helps your mind, your morale, your body just to be working. You don't feel like a bum, sitting at home all limped up.*
- *They get to keep employment, have that support and not have to navigate it by themselves.*

The RTW case manager is the most cited benefit of RETAIN

- RTW case worker is viewed as a valuable support and liaison for employees.
 - *You have got an advocate. You have someone looking out for your best interests to maintain your ability to work.*
 - *If things are not being handled properly by the employer, the case manager can give some insight into that.*
 - *Definitely the complete understanding of what the medical provider is actually saying to what the employer is basically nitpicking out of what the medical provider said.*
 - *It can be disheartening, and you have someone to talk to.*
 - *Comfort, reassurance that someone can help mediate between the job 'til you feel more cushioning about your job being safe.*
 - *It gives support, like somebody out there has my back.*

The temporary job is also cited as a benefit of RETAIN

- *To have the temporary job - that would be an extra bonus if they couldn't get accommodations.*
- *The temp job is tailored to get you back to your specific job. That would be a clear benefit.*
- *What I thought was great was if you can't go back to work and they are not offering you accommodations, hey we have another opportunity.*

Employee suggestions for additional recovery-focused benefits include:

- One contact/RTW case manager throughout their participation.
- Transportation or reimbursement for appointments or temporary work trips, if unable to drive.
- Mental health hotline for injured/ill employees.
- Assistive services or referral to resources for grocery shopping, metro mobility.
- Networking program for injured/ill employees to support each other.
- Access to assistive devices and over the counter drugs.

Employee suggestions for additional work-focused benefits include:

- Website, portal and Zoom calls to connect with RTW case manager.
- Health insurance or premium support while unable to work.
- Financial assistance or connections to other financial resources.
- Education on worker's compensation.
- Job search support.
- Skills assessment and retraining, if unable to return to their job.
- Exposure to different careers and different companies.

Desired information on RETAIN and communication sources



A description of RETAIN is the most desired information

- Employees want to learn the basics of RETAIN
- A clear description of RETAIN, its goals and who can use it tops the most important information.
 - *What the program really is.*
 - *Explain who is involved in the program, how it came about.*
 - *Something about the process, a flow chart, step 1, 2 etc. a guide for the process.*
 - *What the goals are. How long it takes. ...What is the ultimate outcome?*
 - *This service is available to all Minnesotans. ...for the entire state. Is it a free service or is there a cost associated with this? This is what will get people to use it. ...This is offered by state government.*

What does participation look like?

- Employees want to know the benefits and what is required of them.
 - *How it would benefit me. What are the benefits of participating?*
 - *That they are willing to work with people. Just because you are injured you don't have to work through your pain, there are opportunities out there.*
 - *Layout the guidelines of who can apply to this program.*
 - *All the guidelines and expectations of the injured worker.*
 - *That it is available to you whether it is a personal or work-related injury.*
 - *A straightforward approach- where you have someone to call, and they can tell you what they can do for you.*
 - *I would especially emphasize it can be for long term issues. If the length of time is flexible, say so.*

The RTW case manager and temporary job details are mentioned less often as important information

- The RTW case manager's role as liaison and how they help employees.
 - *... explain how you would advocate for them with their employer.*
 - *That they have a liaison to work with them. Making sure they are aware of any information being shared between doctor and their employer and they would be OK with that.*
 - *Is there a variety of caseworkers? Are you able to choose? Who is going to be the participating parties? Is there another team the case worker can reach out to?*
- Temporary job option and how it works.
 - *Even if employer can't find lighter duty, there would be an opportunity to work somewhere and fulfill your financial needs.*
 - *Clear information about requirements that would include hours necessary away from the job and hours that you could actually be earning.*
 - *What employers do they use for the temporary job? What is the driving distance?*

This service is available to all Minnesotans. ...for the entire state. Is it a free service or is there a cost associated with this? This is what will get people to use it. ...This is offered by state government.

Online sources are used most often for local news

- The Star Tribune leads online newspapers
 - Print newspapers are used by approximately half of employees.
- Apple News, Google News and CNN are the leading online/phone sources of news.
 - Employees also search the internet if they see or hear news of interest.
- Television is accessed mostly via a television.
 - Fox, CBS/WCCO and CNN are the most frequently mentioned sources.
- Social media most used for news are Facebook and Instagram.
- Family and friends are not heavily relied on for news.

Employees would most often expect to learn of RETAIN from their employer

- Employers are mentioned more often than any other source as a place to learn about RETAIN.
 - Healthcare providers, US mail, work-related organizations, cities/counties or community organizations are also expected sources of RETAIN information.
 - Social media, television and websites are media sources expected to provide information.
- Employers and healthcare providers are the places employees most want to learn about RETAIN.

Employees think the best community outreach is via social media, employers, and healthcare providers

- Employers and work-related locations and websites, such as CareerForce, and unemployment offices are viewed as good community outreach places.
- Healthcare, including rehabilitation providers or gyms are also mentioned sources.
- More targeted suggestions are grocery stores and events, such as the Minnesota State fair, sporting events, and community fairs.

Social service organizations and churches are the most frequently mentioned community sources

- Employees considered a wide array of organizations ranging from clinics to churches and social service locations such as food shelves.
- Churches are an expected source for approximately half of the employees. Though some employees don't think churches are a 'fit'.
- Gyms, YMCA and community centers are mentioned, along with healthcare and work-related locations.

Employee Communications Strategies & Message Map



Key Communications Strategies Based on Employee Research

Messaging:

- Ensure all employee-facing communications (including graphics) are employee-centric: written to directly address their needs, questions, concerns
- Project empathy – appeal to people’s emotions recognizing the stressful situation they are in and their many concerns and fears
- Close communications gaps – add more specifics in communications vehicles that address people’s questions; err on side of full transparency to build trust (see Appendix)

Key Communications Strategies Based on Employee Research (cont'd)

Messaging:

- Use graphics and audio/visual media to tell the story
 - Infographics, such as showing the different players and how they interact with each other
 - Process flows
 - Add informational video and/or slide presentation to website
- Use stories to bring the story to life
 - Real life case studies and testimonials/quotes
 - Example scenarios
- Ensure messages are culturally sensitive and available in multiple languages
- Clarity and simplicity of language is critical—follow Fleishman Kinkaid guidelines for 6th grade reading level

Key Communications Strategies Based on Employee Research (cont'd)

Media & Vehicles:

- Leverage local media outlets for earned media publicity/PSAs
 - Press releases/press kits
 - Have media-trained spokespeople at the ready
 - Provide Public Service Announcement content
 - Provide Feature Article content
 - Leverage timely topics such as Long Covid angle for newsworthiness, as well as statewide launch and successful pilot

Key Communications Strategies Based on Employee Research (cont'd)

Media & Vehicles:

- Provide messages in contextually relevant places, and for their communications vehicles/newsletters/online sites
 - Employer workplaces—#1 in importance
 - Health care providers—#2 in importance, including: ERs, urgent care, orthopedics clinics, rehabilitation services, occupational therapists, physical therapists, pain clinics, chiropractors, and clinic social workers
 - Cultural centers/gathering places/events, where Word of Mouth is key
 - Social services and work-related facilities (see Appendix)

Key Communications Strategies Based on Employee Research (cont'd)

Media & Vehicles:

- Multicultural/ethnic media (see attached list from MN Dept. of Health)
- Posts on relevant sites:
 - LinkedIn
 - Reddit, sub MN
 - Relevant State, DEED, partner organizations' Facebook and web sites (with links to RETAIN website)
 - Worker's Compensation page on MN.gov site
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for organic search results and Google AdWords paid search (pay per click advertising)—for relevant keyword/phrase searches, such as “work injuries”, “short term disability”, “worker’s comp”, etc.
- Public transportation paid advertising

Key Communications Strategies Based on Employee Research (cont'd)

Media & Vehicles:

- Utilize website as hub – main source of information, where people go when program appears in search results.
 - Add overview video, including testimonials and/or case studies
 - Add infographics:
 - Revise circular graphic to be employee-centric, large enough to read and more explanatory
 - Add process flow graphic
 - Make downloadable brochure more obvious
 - Expand FAQs

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Audience Profile

- Target demographics:
 - Age: 19-65; male & female residents of Minnesota, employed in Minnesota
 - Focus weighted to BIPOC, individuals with limited English proficiency and residents of Opportunity Zones in MN
 - Focus on those employed in industries especially prone to work-related injuries or to illness:
 - Manufacturing, health care, warehousing, construction, mining, etc.
- Psychographics:
 - Work is important to them, take pride in their work and enjoy being productive
 - Financially dependent on wages
 - Strong motivation to maintain their job and be in good standing with employer
 - Don't always feel they have an advocate when in the middle between employer and provider
 - Enjoy the social ties within workplace community

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

- Current Attitudes:

- “If I’m hurt or ill requiring me to be absent from my job for a period of time, I want help to not only get me on the road to recovery, but on the road to returning to work as quickly as possible.”
- “Injuries and health issues are complicated and confusing—it’s a challenge to navigate between my health care provider, my employer, my insurance and/or worker’s comp insurance.”
- “Health care providers aren’t always clear in their direction about restrictions and limitations for working. It is sometimes vague and general, and employers aren’t always able to understand how it translates to specific accommodations for employees.”
- “I want to stay in good stead with my employer. I’m worried I could lose my job and income if I get sick or injured. I don’t know how I would manage it.”

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

- Current attitudes about RETAIN:
 - There is currently no general awareness of the RETAIN program among employee populations
 - When provided a brief overview of the program, employees are positively inclined toward it, but are eager to learn about how it all works and have many questions.
- Core tension requiring a solution
 - Allay my fears and speed my return to work in the appropriate capacity at the appropriate time such that my recovery progresses as it should and I'm able to provide for myself financially.
- Core promise
 - You can rest assured—you have a personal advocate committed to getting you back to work, healthy and earning your wages as smoothly and quickly as possible

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Audience Desired State

Desired attitudes, beliefs, knowledge:

- “The RETAIN program has my best interests at heart. It will advocate for me and help me navigate through the complexities of dealing with my health issues and returning to work, whether to my existing job, a temporary or permanent reassignment within my company to accommodate my abilities, or through a temporary job with another employer. My assigned Case Manager will mediate on my behalf with my employer and care provider, keeping me informed and in the loop for decision-making.”
- “Since this is a program administered by the state of Minnesota and financed by the federal government, I trust that it will be advantageous for me. I understand that there is no cost to me or my employer to participate.”
- “I’m so relieved to have a program like this to support me. It helps ease my mind about fears I have about losing my job and income.”
- “The information/communications I received about the program made it very clear to me what’s expected of me, what the process is, and addressed my questions and concerns.”

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Audience Desired State

Desired actions to take after receiving the communications

- Take steps to learn more – through links and resources provided
- Contact the program to inquire about participating

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Positioning Statement:

- For Minnesotan employees who are ill or injured and not yet able to fully return to work, the State of Minnesota's RETAIN Program is the employee support resource that helps them return to work, incrementally as needed, in the right capacity and at the right time by providing a Case Manager to reassure employee and act as a liaison between the employee's employer and health care provider to advocate and help coordinate the steps required to accommodate the employee's needs and capacity for returning to work.

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Core Value to Communicate/Value Proposition

- The RETAIN program helps employees return to work as quickly as possible by dedicating a Case Manager to manage communications between employers and health care providers, easing employee worries and ensuring appropriate accommodations are made as the employee transitions back to work.

Single most important message

- Ease your struggle to get back to work faster by having an advocate who can help arrange for accommodations or alternate work assignments during recovery.

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Key Program Attributes/Features

- Return to Work Case Manager assigned and acts as liaison between employee, employer and care provider
- Seeks to define appropriate work accommodations, based on provider's direction, to allow employee to transition back to work
- Available to employees with either personal or work-related situations
- Helps coordinate with employers modified or alternate assignments within organization
- No cost to employee or employer
- If no acceptable accommodation is possible within place of employment, helps place employee in temporary position outside of company
- Administered by State of Minnesota; funded by federal government

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Benefits/Advantages to Employees [What's in it for them and why they should care]

- Helping employees stay active and safely return to work is known to speed healing and improve outcomes, reduces likelihood of long-term disability
- Return to Work Case Manager allows you to focus on your recovery by walking with you through health care provider directions and negotiations with your employer
- Ensures alignment between employee, employer and care provider
- Provides someone for employee to talk to, answer questions, work through issues
- Eases the administrative and logistical burdens on employee
- Provides peace of mind, relief and reassurance--reduces anxiety, frustration, confusion with a single point of contact committed to the employee's best interests
- Alleviates worries about job loss
- Facilitates faster return to income-producing work and financial stability
- Speeds return to activity, leading to healthier bodies and renewed mental/emotional health: improves self-esteem, self-respect and morale
- Offers alternative temp employment that employers would not otherwise have access to

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Reasons to believe: Proof Points, Quotes, Stats

- Successfully piloted in Southeast Minnesota (include relevant specifics)
- Case study: factory worker example, others?
- Success rates and outcomes data
- Collaboration between State of Minnesota: Dept. of Education & Economic Development, Dept. of Health, Dept. of Labor & Industry, Governor's Workforce Development Board; Mayo Clinic (and other health systems as added); HealthForce MN; Workforce Development

Call to Action [who/how/when to contact]

- Email worker@mnretain.com, or complete self-referral form on mnretain.com (Referral menu option). [will there be a phone number as well?]

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Tagline or headline examples

- We've got your back to get you back to work
- Don't worry, help is at hand
- As you're on the road to recovery, we pave the way back to work

Subheads examples

- Your advocate eases the process
- You've got options
- Rest assured, we'll help you get through this
- You don't have to go it alone
- Helping you avoid long-term disability
- Keeping you in the game
- From uncertainty to clarity

RETAIN Program Communications Message Map — for Employee Audience

Style/Tone/Manner considerations

- Understanding of employee concerns, compassionate, straightforward, trustworthy.

Creative considerations

- Follow existing State of Minnesota Brand Style Guide for logos, fonts, colors, imagery
- Use visuals to explain things — see key communications strategies above

Questions?

Thank You

Appendix: interviewee demographics



Demographics

Ethnicity	Number of interviewees	Injury/Illness in the last 2-3 years	Number of interviewees
African-American	13	Worker's Comp	6
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	Non-work Injury with 6 weeks/work restrictions	4
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish Origin	3	Illness with 6 weeks/ work restrictions	5
Asian	5	No illness or injury experience	7
Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0		

Demographics

Location	Number of interviewees	Industry	Number of interviewees
Metro	14	Office/Admin Support	7
Southeast	4	Manufacturing	1
Southwest	0	Transportation/Warehousing	3
West Central	3	Healthcare	8
Northeast	0	Retail	2
Northwest	1	Construction	1

Demographics

Age	Number of interviewees	Gender	Number of interviewees
20-29	5	Female	13
30-39	6	Male	9
40-49	5		
50-59	3		
60+	3		

Appendix: survey



Interview Guide

BIPOC employee Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Name _____
Interview date/time _____

Circle which Region: Metro Southeast Southwest Central
Northwest Northeast

Secondary questions noted with **. Skip as needed for time.

Introduction

Hello. My name is _____. Thank you for agreeing to discuss your experience working as an employee. Let me start by saying that your answers will be anonymous; you will not be connected with any direct quotes, so please feel free to be open and honest during this conversation.

I would like to record our conversation today, if that is OK with you. The purpose of the recording is to help me combine what I learn from you today with interviews I am having with other employees throughout the state of Minnesota. Now let's get started.

Prior experience

1. Have you ever been injured or ill, including COVID, that caused you not work for more than 4 weeks?
IF NO, SKIP TO QTN 10

2. IF YES: Were you injured on the job or was it a non-work-related injury?

3. Did the healthcare provider who treated your injury or illness give you limits of what you could or couldn't do at work until you were fully healed? Was that something you gave your employer?

4. How well did the provider explain these work limits to you? Did you understand what you could or couldn't do?

5. Tell me about the interactions you had with your employer when you were injured and during your time off work.

**PROBE: How did they support you during your time off? What could have been better?

6. Did your employer offer to limit or change your work duties so you could come back to work before you were fully healed?

IF NO TO QTN 6 ASK: If your employer had offered to limit or change your work duties, how interested would you have been in going back to work as soon as was medically safe (per doctor) but not 100% healed?

IF YES TO QTN 6 ASK : Did you go back then, before you were fully healed? How did that work out? Would you consider it a positive experience?

How could it have been better?*

Interview Guide

7. Do you think your employer used the limits given by your healthcare provider when making changes to your work duties? Or did your employer use other information to create changes to work duties?
8. Were you involved in the decision-making to create changes to your work duties?*

ASK EVERYONE with injury/ill experience

9. Were you concerned that you would lose your job because of your illness or injury? Why did you think that might happen?

SKIP TO RETAIN SECTION

FOR PEOPLE WHO haven't experienced illness or injury: ASK

10. What are your employer's policies about returning to work if you were to have a serious injury or illness?*
11. If you did have a long-term illness or injury, would you be concerned that you would lose your job? Why do you think that might happen?
12. Have you had co-workers, family members or friends that couldn't work because of an injury or illness lasting more than 4 weeks?

IF YES CONTINUE

IF NO SKIP TO RETAIN SECTION

13. What can you tell me about that experience?
14. Do you know, did their healthcare provider give them information on how the employer could change their work duties so they could get back to work?

15. Did their employer change or limit their work duties so they work before they were fully healed? Do you know if they went back early?*
16. From what you know, how did the whole experience work out for the worker? What do you think could have been managed better for the injured or ill worker?

RETAIN Description to read for phone interviews

The Minnesota Dept of Employment and Economic Development has a new program called RETAIN which stands for Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network. RETAIN's purpose is to help ill or injured workers get the care they need and get back to work as soon as medically possible after an injury or illness. This program was successfully tested in southeastern Minnesota from 2018 to 2020.

Share screen of RETAIN description slides for computer interviews

1. The RETAIN program includes a 'return to work' case manager who works with a worker's healthcare provider. They coordinate communication between the healthcare provider and the employer. They can also help coordinate changes to work duties for the employees. How do you think this would help injured or ill workers?
2. What concerns would you have with this case manager sharing information with the employer about the worker's injury or illness and their recovery plans?
3. If you were injured or ill, how interested would you be in getting back to work as quick as possible? (SCALE 1 to 5, 1= not at all, 5 = very interested) Why?

PROBE: Do you think other ill or injured workers would want to get back to work as quickly as possible?*

Interview Guide

5. If your employer doesn't offer a lighter workload or other adjustments to a worker's job, RETAIN can arrange for a temporary job so you could go back to work and earn some income. What questions or concerns do you have about this?
6. It would be up to the worker if they wanted to tell their employer about a temporary job RETAIN arranged for them. If your employer learned about the temporary job RETAIN arranged for you, how concerned would you be? What would concern you?

PROBE: any concern about losing your job because of this?*

6. Based on what little I have shared with you about the RETAIN program, what questions or concerns do you have about the RETAIN program?
7. Thinking about what would happen if you were injured or ill, what other features would you like the RETAIN program that would help you or other workers?
8. What do you think are the benefits to workers of this program?*
9. If you were to receive information about this program, what is the most important thing you would want communicated to you about it?
10. What else would you want to know about the program?*

11. Workers can contact RETAIN directly or by working with a Return to work case manager. If you were injured or ill, how likely would you be to contact RETAIN or use RETAIN? (SCALE 1 to 5, 1= not at all, 5 = very likely) Why do you say that?

Communications

1. Now I want to hear about the sources of information you use. Where do you go to learn today's news?
PROBE: printed or online newspaper? Which ones do you use most?
Online news from local TV channels? Which ones do you use most?
Social media? Which news-related sites or apps do you use most?
2. What other sources do you use? Do you rely on family and friends for your news?*
3. How would you expect to learn about the RETAIN program we talked about?
PROBE: news sources from above, websites, employers, community organizations, churches?
4. What do you think is the best way to get the word out about the RETAIN program to people in your community?
5. Which community organizations would you expect to provide information about a program like this?
6. Any other sources you would expect to learn about it from?

Interview Guide

7. Where would you most want to learn about the RETAIN program?

Why would that be a good source?*

Those are all my questions. Thanks for your time today. I appreciate it.



Appendix: Communications Gaps— Questions asked



Employees want to know these answers

- Step-by-step description of the process, including timing, for enrolling in the program and then the implementation/execution of the program (use visuals)
- How easy or difficult is it to enroll?
- More specifics about eligibility for the program—who this is available to, such as citizenship status, tenure at job, education level required, income level, age levels, full or part-time workers, types of jobs, industries, types of illnesses/injuries, etc. Exclusions, such as: pregnancy, more than 12 weeks out of work, not on long-term opioids
- What are the expectations and responsibilities of the employee in the program?
- Are all employers eligible? Do all employers participate, cooperate and embrace the program?
- Is employee included in the Case Manager's communications with employer and care provider? Are they able to consent to what is communicated in advance? Or are they otherwise informed about it?
- Are there other teams that the Case Manager reaches out to as needed? Who are they and what are their roles?
- The interface between the various participating partners and their respective roles (infographic preferred)
- Potential of training/retraining opportunities
- Possibility of outside temp work: degree of transparency with and approval by employer, how pay is affected, who pays?, level of employee involvement/choice (are there options to choose from? is it required to accept?), what organizations have temp opportunities, is training available?, how far away might it be?, transportation availability, how to assure employers their employees won't be "poached", assurance current employers won't eliminate their position
- How the program works with unions, health insurance, and worker's comp
- Do they lose their health benefits if not working enough hours?
- How long can they stay in the program? Can it be extended? Are they able to return to the program should another injury or illness occur?
- Better explanation of "self-referral" on website on employee page (not obvious that the "Referral" menu item is for them as well)
- Build on origin story—what was the impetus for this to get started? How is it funded?
- List of all the various services that might be provided as part of the program
- Outcomes, success rates among employees who participated

Appendix: Community/Area Communications Opportunities



Community Messaging Opportunities

- Social services and work-related facilities, including:
 - Federal/State/County/City offices (including unemployment, food stamps, Dept. of Health, Social Security, DEED, other dislocated worker and family services)
 - CareerForce
 - YMCAs and YWCAs
 - Food shelves
 - Community and recreation centers
 - Churches, synagogues, temples and mosques
 - Urban League, Lions, Rotary, Elks, Masons, Knights of Columbus, Shriners
 - Veteran's associations: VFWs, American Legions, VA Hospital
 - StairStep Foundation, United Way (include 211 service), CLUES, Wilder Foundation, Metro Mobility
 - Chambers of Commerce