

## Office of Disability Employment Policy

# Stay at Work/Return to Work

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## Injuries and Illnesses Can Make Workers Leave the Labor Force

Each year, millions of American workers experience an injury or illness that puts them at risk of leaving the workforce. Many injuries and illnesses are work-related; however, many also occur off-the-job. Tracking the number of off-the-job injuries and illnesses is challenging, but estimates suggest that there are many more off-the-job incidents requiring medical attention than work-related incidents.

When workers leave the labor force because of an illness or injury, it can have any number of negative impacts – for the workers, their families, their employers, and for the economy. Workers experience adverse effects on their health, family finances, and quality of life. Employers shoulder the direct and indirect costs that come with the loss of valuable employees. And all levels of government face reductions in the tax base, decreased economic activity, and hundreds of thousands of these workers go on to receive state or federal disability benefits.

## Effective Help Can Keep Injured Workers on the Job

However, many injured or ill workers could remain in their jobs or the workforce if they received timely, effective help. Early stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) strategies and programs succeed by returning injured workers to productivity as soon as medically possible during their recovery process. Since 2013, ODEP has invested resources to research this topic area, shine a spotlight on promising and successful strategies, and launch its largest ever demonstration project—RETAIN. Explore these past and current efforts on this section of the website, and contact us at [saw-rtw@dol.gov](mailto:saw-rtw@dol.gov) with questions or comments.

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**Office of Disability  
Employment Policy**

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