



### SYNOPSIS

#### RETURN TO WORK COORDINATORS: TWO PATHWAYS FOR IMPROVED RETURN TO WORK OUTCOMES IN A WORKPLACE INTERVENTION

*Tyler Lane, Rebbecca Lilley, Sheilah Hogg-Johnson, Anthony LaMontagne, Malcolm Sim, & Peter Smith*

**Key words:** Return to work coordinators, return to work, return to work planning, workplace intervention, stress

**Purpose of your paper:** We evaluated the impact of RTW Coordinators on RTW outcomes via two pathways: good interactions and RTW plans. We found planning benefitted shorter-duration claims, while good interactions benefitted longer-duration claims.

**Synopsis:** Return to work (RTW) Coordinators are considered a key stakeholder in the RTW process. Using longitudinal survey responses from  $n = 632$  injured workers in Victoria, we evaluated Coordinator impact on RTW outcomes via two pathways: interpersonal interactions (indicated by injured worker perceptions of the stressfulness of their interactions with their Coordinator), and functional components of the role (whether the injured worker had a RTW plan).

Using a multivariable logistic regressions, we evaluated whether there were crude (unadjusted) and adjusted (accounting for both pathways, demographics, and confounders) associations between good Coordinator interactions/RTW plans and the odds of achieving sustained RTW (back at work for at least one month by the time of interview). We evaluated responses at both baseline (four months post-injury) and follow-up (10 months post-injury) surveys. Both good interactions and RTW plans had crude associations with better RTW outcomes. However, the associations changed in adjusted models: only RTW plans improved outcomes at baseline interview, while only good interactions improved outcomes at follow-up.

The findings suggest that shorter-duration claims benefit from Coordinator functional support (in the form of RTW plans) while longer-duration claims benefit from interpersonal support. This is in line with research on the factors determining claim length, which suggest that mainly injury related factors are important the first few weeks while psychosocial factors become important later on.

We suggest several ways this research could be used to make Coordinators more effective: consider interpersonal characteristics in the Coordinator selection process, add interpersonal skills to training, and improve monitoring to ensure employees provide the Coordinators and RTW plans that are required.