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## Vocational Rehabilitation

**U**nder the Michigan Workers' Disability Compensation Act, injured workers are entitled to assistance in returning to work. Section 319 of the Act provides that a worker has a right to vocational rehabilitation benefits.

Vocational rehabilitation can include a variety of things. It might mean that your employer makes a minor change in your job situation so that you can return to work in spite of some continuing problem. It might mean that an outside rehabilitation counselor will work with the employer to aid in a return to work for you at the same job or a similar job with the same employer. If it is not possible for you to return to work with your former employer, the rehabilitation counselor may help you to find suitable new employment or obtain further training.

### Is vocational rehabilitation important?

Vocational rehabilitation is very important. A return to work should be the ultimate goal of everyone concerned with workers' compensation. The employee is certainly better off to be back on the job and earning a wage, and the employer is better off to have a day's work in return for payments to an injured employee rather than to pay workers' compensation benefits. All of the research about rehabilitation suggests two things. One, rehabilitation efforts are most likely to be successful if they are begun early; and two, the most likely avenue of successful rehabilitation is a return to work with the same employer.

### Who is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services?

You are eligible if you have a work-related injury or illness which prevents you from returning to work with your employer and you are currently receiving workers' compensation benefits.

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## How can you get this assistance?

When vocational rehabilitation is needed, the employer or insurance carrier is encouraged to voluntarily provide such services. You may have to request rehabilitation and the Workers' Compensation Agency may order a rehabilitation evaluation, if necessary.

It is suggested that you contact your employer or insurance company to discuss the possibility of a return to work or a vocational rehabilitation program. If you have difficulty getting help, phone or write the Workers' Compensation Agency. A rehabilitation consultant will assist you.

### What services are included?

Vocational rehabilitation services are individually tailored to meet your specific needs. You and your rehabilitation counselor will work together to decide what is best for you. Rehabilitation may include one or more of the following:

- ✔ *Counseling* — Guidance in selecting the job suitable for you, instruction in job-search techniques, help in adjusting to your disability.
  - ✔ *Vocational Assessment* — Evaluation of your skills, aptitudes, interests, and physical abilities to help you decide on an appropriate occupation.
  - ✔ *On-the-job Training* — Assistance in arranging the period of training for a particular vocation under the guidance of a cooperating employer willing to hire you after your training period.
  - ✔ *Short-term Retraining* — A worker is entitled to 52 weeks of training for a new trade or skill in a public or private school or training facility. In special cases, the bureau may order an additional 52 weeks of training. Costs of tuition, fees, books, and supplies are paid directly by the employer or insurance carrier.
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- ✔ *Job Placement Assistance* — Assistance in matching your particular capabilities and job requirements with a suitable employer and work situation.
- ✔ *Costs of Transportation and Other Expenses* — Reimbursement of transportation costs for travel to doctor appointments or rehabilitation. If you have special needs — appliances, car hand controls, tools, uniforms, etc. — they may also be supplied as part of your rehabilitation program.

### What if the job I am retrained for pays less?

In the event you return to work at a job which pays less than you were earning at the time of your injury and you are still unable to work at your previous job, you are entitled to partial compensation benefits. The insurance carrier or the bureau can help you to determine the amount of payments you should receive.

### Must a worker take part in vocational rehabilitation?

In certain circumstances if the company offers vocational rehabilitation services and the worker refuses to cooperate, wage loss benefits may be reduced or suspended following a hearing.

### How are vocational rehabilitation disputes resolved?

If the parties cannot agree on a rehabilitation program or the choice of provider, any one of the parties or the bureau may request a vocational rehabilitation hearing before a bureau hearing officer. The hearing officer will conduct a mediation hearing on the issues involved and render a written decision. If any party disagrees with a decision, they may appeal the decision to the Workers' Compensation Board of Magistrates.

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