

### Implement an "Early Return to Work" Model

- What are we doing?
  - Repealing all current vocational rehabilitation statutes (39-71-1006, 1011, and 1014) and replacing with SAW/RTW strategies including:
    - Early intervention at the request of the employer, employee or physician with limited services to help make reasonable accommodations to allow the employee to continue to work while healing;
    - Support and assistance during recovery for the employee and employer to continue to explore return to work options;
    - Support and assistance for the employee in exploring other employment if it is unlikely that the employee will be able to return to the job or employer at the time of injury;
    - All vocational options (including retraining) must be explored prior to payment of permanent total disability benefits.
- Why are we doing this?
  - Research and current best practices indicate the best outcomes for the worker and the employer is early return to employment
- What is the impact for the worker?
  - If early return to work can be accomplished, there is less long term wage loss for the employee and their lives are disrupted less severely
- What is the cost impact for employers?
  - Intensive efforts to assist employees and employers in modifying positions and locating temporary work the employee can do at the beginning of a claim will increase costs, some of which will be offset by eliminating the need for continuous disability payments and the elimination of the vocational evaluation to determine which benefit is paid after maximum medical improvement (see #1 – efficient benefit delivery system changes).
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- Major Criticisms –
  - Skeptics believe this will increase rehabilitation costs without the added benefit of reducing long term disability costs;
  - Insurers believe this will not help small employers who have little flexibility to modify positions on a temporary or a permanent basis.