



Rehabilitation and Return to Work (RTW) or Volunteering Activities Guidelines

Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team
October 2023

For questions or comments about these guidelines, please contact hsw@redcross.org.nz

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 New Zealand Red Cross (NZRC) is committed to supporting our people to return to work (which includes volunteering activities) or remain at work safely after work-related and non-work-related injuries and illnesses. The purpose of these guidelines is to:
- Ensure that NZRC people are supported with their recovery from injury or illness while at work or undertaking NZRC activities
 - Set out NZRC’s approach to managing injured and ill people in the workplace, and during volunteering activities
 - Clarify the key responsibilities of injured/ill NZRC people and their people leaders, and others supporting the rehabilitation and RTW process.
 - Support compliance with the [Health and Safety at Work Act 2015](#) but ensuring people are able to perform work duties safely.

2. Scope

- 2.2 These guidelines apply to all NZRC employees, members, including those who volunteer their time (volunteers). NZRC’s RTW support covers work-related and non-work-related injuries and illnesses, including physical and psychological conditions (such as depression, anxiety). Support may be initiated as part of an early intervention approach to help someone remain at work safely, in addition to supporting people back to work after an absence.
- 2.3 These guidelines are applicable to people covered by an ACC claim, and those without a claim. All NZRC people leaders, including senior level management and Area Council members should be aware of these guidelines and promote awareness in their Areas and/or work areas. Note that for people with ACC claims, there may be requirements to participate in workplace rehabilitation under the [Accident Compensation Act 2001](#).

3. Principles

- 3.1 There’s strong evidence that recovery at work benefits your physical and mental wellbeing. The RTW process adopts the following principles:
- Recovery at work via a RTW plan is considered beneficial for you, your team and the wider organisation.
 - Appropriate medical advice is the foundation of a RTW plan and return to activity.
 - You will be involved in decision-making processes around your RTW. Your input is important and will be considered.
 - Both you and NZRC are responsible for the success of the RTW plan.
 - You are encouraged to seek external support (e.g. advocate, friends or whānau) if you feel it will be helpful during the process.
 - Your privacy will be respected and your medical information will only be used to support your return to work. NZRC will seek your express consent to share any medical or personal information.
 - Wherever possible, NZRC will take a “flexible by default” position when considering proposed alternative duties and hours.
 - Alternative employment or volunteering options will be considered if you cannot return to pre-injury/illness duties and/or hours.

4. Working with ACC

4.1 ACC's no-fault scheme covers everyone in New Zealand if you're injured in an accident. ACC does not usually cover illnesses or most mental health conditions. If your ACC claim is accepted, ACC can help pay for or subsidise a range of medical, health and treatment costs. You may still have to pay for part of your treatment costs, e.g. doctors fee, physiotherapy costs. NZRC does not cover these costs. ACC may also be able to support you with transport costs and home help in some circumstances.

4.2 ACC salary/wages payments – for NZRC employees

4.2.1 *Work-related injuries*

If your injury occurred at work and you have been certified unfit for work by your medical professional (via a medical certificate), NZRC will pay your first week off work at 80% of your normal NZRC salary/wages. ACC then starts paying 80% weekly compensation after the first week. More information is on the ACC website here.

4.2.2 *Non-work-related injuries*

If your injury occurred outside work, ACC's weekly compensation payments start one week after the first day you were certified unfit for work by your medical professional (DOFI - "Date Of First Incapacity"). This may be different from the date your injury occurred. Further information from ACC on when payments start is available in the [ACC Quick Guide to Weekly Compensation](#).

4.2.3 *Payments while returning to work*

If you are doing some productive work as a NZRC employee (i.e. reduced hours or alternative duties), NZRC will pay you for those hours and ACC will top up your pay to 100%. If you're unable to work, you can choose to use some of your available leave (usually sick leave) to top you up to 100% pay. Contact the Payroll team if you have any questions about payment options – payroll@redcross.org.nz.

5. Considerations for a RTW Plan (Employees)

5.1 For NZRC employees, a formal RTW plan is voluntary, but medical information is still required to ensure you are safe at work, even if there is not a formal plan in place. Note that for people with ACC claims, there may be requirements to participate in workplace rehabilitation under the [Accident Compensation Act 2001](#). The RTW plan may include the involvement of an Occupational Rehabilitation Provider (ORP). A list of **Roles and Responsibilities** is provided in Appendix 1. An overview of **The RTW or Volunteer Activity Process** can be found in Appendix 2. Key considerations for a RTW plan are set out below.

5.2 Who is involved?

RTW plans usually continue until you have returned to work and/or independence. Progress is monitored either by an occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP) or your usual medical professional (e.g. GP). If you disagree with the RTW plan, you can choose to seek a second opinion from another suitably experienced professional. If not funded by ACC, a second opinion will be at your own cost. People involved in the process are:

- You - the injured or ill person
- Your people leader
- Medical professional/s (e.g. GP, occupational rehabilitation provider, specialist)

- Other support people (e.g. whānau may communicate with NZRC on your behalf if you are physically/mentally unable to)
- The NZRC HSW team
- Your colleagues (where appropriate)

5.3 Considerations for a RTW Plan

A RTW Plan may be initiated when your injury or illness is likely to affect your ability to carry out normal work duties and/or hours for at least one month, based on your medical professional's assessment. A RTW plan will take into account the following factors:

- Your needs and goals for returning to work and everyday life (including home situation)
- Your normal working hours and duties, including physical requirements (e.g. regularly driving a car)
- Work-station set-up (may include review of home office if applicable)
- Diagnosis, anticipated recovery timeframe (if known) current physical capacity and symptoms
- Current restrictions on hours/duties
- Further medical assessments planned or recommended (e.g. ultrasound, MRI).
- Treatment, vocational and/or social rehabilitation services needed to help achieve RTW
- A plan for gradually increasing hours, days and work duties back to normal, including temporarily modified tasks
- An approximate date when you can reasonably expect to regain independence, e.g., return to usual work/volunteering hours and tasks, and normal social activities.

5.4 Determining Suitable Duties

People leaders should consider what alternative duties and/or reduced hours they can accommodate. This information is important to discuss at an early stage with the ORP or medical professional carrying out the assessment and developing the RTW plan. Alternative duties still need to be meaningful and productive. Think about:

- Tasks available within or outside the team, with/without training or upskilling
- Training that may be required -upskilling someone as part of alternative duties may have longer-term benefits for the team
- What technology requirements/access the person has, i.e. can they do alternative duties from home or would they still have to travel into work?
- Physical limitations, i.e. consider any limitations on the persons ability to do certain work tasks (e.g. driving, lifting or carrying)
- Where their knowledge and skills could be used in other ways, e.g. reviewing role-specific health, safety and wellbeing information, quality systems, internal processes and providing recommendations back to people leaders or internal specialists.
- Whether another person needs to be buddied up with them for a short period, e.g. accompanying a returning First Aid Instructor starting to deliver courses again
- Impacts on other team members, e.g. will being a buddy or providing training create an unacceptable workload on top of their usual duties?
- Workplace considerations, e.g. providing a temporary office parking space or moving their desk location to reduce the need to walk.

Alternative duties and support should be regularly reviewed during the RTW plan and adjusted as necessary, in consultation with the person, an ORP and (potentially) their medical professional.

5.5 Occupational Rehabilitation Providers

ACC may refer your injury to an occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP) to arrange a RTW assessment. The HSW team may also contact ACC to request an ORP assessment or refer you to an ORP directly with your consent. The HSW team will work with you to consider any specific needs you may have when selecting an ORP (such as cultural needs, nature of the condition). For employees with an accepted ACC claim, ORP services are covered by ACC. For injuries and illnesses not covered by ACC, the HSW team will consult with you to select a suitable ORP or medical professional to assess you and provide the RTW plan.

5.6 Additional medical information

NZRC may require additional information from your treating health/medical practitioner to ensure your health, safety and wellbeing at work. If additional information is needed, we will ask you to provide this. If we need to write to your treating health practitioner, we will request your written consent first.

6. Returning to Volunteering Activities

- 6.1 Volunteers don't need a formal RTW plan but will be supported by their people leader and/or volunteering activity lead to return to volunteering activities, based on medical advice and the availability of suitable duties. NZRC may ask a volunteer to provide information from their medical professional to confirm their capacity for volunteering hours and duties. Volunteers must keep NZRC informed of any changes to their health that could affect their ability to carry out NZRC activities safely.
- 6.2 If the volunteer is participating in a formal RTW plan with another employer (outside of NZRC), we will communicate with any other relevant people involved in that process, with consent, to support a return to volunteering activities as appropriate.

7. Mental health support

- 7.1 Physical and mental health is inter-related, and so physical injuries and illnesses may also have consequences for mental health (and vice-versa). You are encouraged to let your people leader know if you would like additional support so that this can be set up for you. People leaders should keep in regular contact with team members away from work and ensure they are aware of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and how to access it. EAP provides all Red Cross people with multiple sessions of free, independent and confidential support. Mental health support is also sometimes funded and available through ACC following an injury.

8. Inability to return to normal role

- 8.1 For employees, if you are unable to return to your pre-injury or illness hours or duties due to ongoing restrictions, and/or a RTW plan has not been successful, the People and Capability (P&C) team will provide advice and support to you and your people leaders to consider what long-term or permanent alternatives may be available. You will be consulted with, and your views taken into account before any decisions are made on changes to employment conditions.

Appendix 1: Roles and Responsibilities

Please note that roles and tasks may vary depending on each situation.

Injured or ill person

- a) Actively participate in your rehabilitation and RTW plan, or return to volunteering activities.
- b) Communicate proactively with your people leader, HSW team, and other involved parties regarding your progress and/or challenges (family/whānau may do this if you are unable to).
- c) Attend medical appointments and follow prescribed treatments.
- d) Provide up to date medical information to your people leader to inform and support your safe return to work (family/whānau may do this if you are unable to).
- e) Adhere to any restrictions or modifications as outlined in your RTW plan, e.g. reduced working hours, amended duties.

People leader/Volunteering activity lead

- a) Maintain regular communication with the injured/unwell person and keep good records/notes. Continue to keep them informed with important news from their workplace/team.
- b) Collaborate with the HSW team, ACC case manager (if applicable), ORP and other relevant parties to develop and implement a RTW plan or support them with a return to volunteering activities.
- c) Encourage person's cooperation and involvement in the RTW process.
- d) Monitor the person's progress and raise with the HSW team if adjustments to the RTW plan may be needed.
- e) Promptly seek the advice of the HSW team or P&C team if concerns arise.
- f) Ensure a safe and supportive work environment for the returning person.
- g) Maintain the person's privacy and do not share any personal information without their consent.
- h) Consider the impact of an RTW on other team members (e.g. temporarily picking up additional work) and ensure appropriate support is provided.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW) team

- a) Provide support and advice to Red Cross people, people leaders and P&C regarding the RTW process, including proactively contacting people leaders when becoming aware of an injury or illness.
- b) If needed, follow up with ACC to ensure ORP assessments take place in a timely manner.
- c) Arrange local ORP assessments for employees returning to work from injuries or illnesses not covered by ACC (volunteers considered on case-by-case basis).
- d) Assist in identifying and implementing necessary workplace accommodations for the person.
- e) Maintain oversight of all current employee RTW plans and progress towards completion, ensuring privacy is maintained.
- f) Update and close out completed records as needed.
- g) Regularly contact people leaders managing active RTW plans in their teams, checking progress.
- h) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of safety measures implemented as part of the RTW plan.
- i) Collaborate with P&C and managers to ensure that the RTW process aligns with NZRC's HSW policies and procedures.
- j) Promote a safety-first culture throughout the organization.

People and Capability (P&C)

- a) Ensure all employment-related obligations are met by employees and people leaders involved in RTW processes.
- b) Support employees and people leaders in long-term RTW situations where medical incapacity may be a factor.
- c) Advise employees and people leaders on permanent changes to an employee's work as a result of injury or illness, ensuring employment paperwork is completed.
- d) Coordinate with the HSW team to ensure RTW and medical information is saved securely on employee files.
- e) **(Payroll)** Ensure employees on RTW plans are paid in line with current working hours and ACC information.
- f) **(Payroll)** Advise HSW team when made aware of employee injuries or illnesses requiring significant time away from work.

Occupational Rehabilitation Provider (ORP) or medical professional (if involved)

- a) Assess the person's functional capacity, workplace (including home if applicable) and duties, and provide recommendations for suitable tasks and workplace accommodations.
- b) Work with the person, people leader and HSW teams to develop and implement a RTW plan.
- c) Monitor the person's progress and provide ongoing support and guidance throughout the RTW process.
- d) Communicate with all relevant parties to ensure a coordinated approach to the person's RTW.

Appendix 2: The RTW or Volunteer Activity Process



Appendix 3. Definitions

Term	Definition
Red Cross person	Any employee or member, including those who volunteer their time (volunteer)
Injury	Physical or mental pain/damage caused by a specific event and usually covered by ACC – whether or not this occurred while carrying out NZRC activities.
Illness	Physical or mental illness. May be short-term or long-term. Only covered by ACC in limited circumstances. In the context of this plan, NZRC may support RTW plans for people returning to work after major surgery (even if not related to an injury).
Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC)	New Zealand Government-funded provider of accident-related income and rehabilitation support.
Medical professional	Registered medical professional, e.g. physiotherapist, doctor (GP or specialist), occupational therapist (OT), counsellor, psychologist.
Occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP)	Registered medical or allied health professional with suitable knowledge to develop a RTW plan. Engaged by ACC or NZRC to assess injured/ill person.
Rehabilitation	Exercises and treatment plan recommended by medical professional to support recovery from injury or illness
Return to work (RTW) plan	A formal plan prepared by a medical/allied health professional for you and NZRC setting out hours and duties to be performed over a period of time, normally progressively leading back to your usual duties and/or hours