

# 60 Summits: Montana Workgroup Recommendations, Strategies, and Action Plans

All of the workgroups thought the individual ACOEM recommendations that they had been assigned were worthwhile and should become common practice. Therefore, all of the groups developed action plans to begin implementing them. The details of their plans, derived from their workgroup report forms and the recorded transcript of their oral reports, appear in Appendix D.

Commonalities among the plans soon became apparent as the work groups gave their oral reports during the Summit. The major themes of the action plans were:

1. Throughout the State of Montana, people should implement the recommendations laid out in the ACOEM work disability prevention guideline.

Each of the workgroups reported that they want to implement the recommendations they had been assigned. Many workgroups remarked that implementing ACOEM's recommendations would reduce lost days from work and preserve the employment and income of injured workers. They also identified the link to helping Montana remain economically competitive and keeping medical costs down. Although there were a few individuals who voiced disagreement about specific wording in a few phrases, the general consensus in favor of adopting a work disability prevention model was very strong.

2. Ongoing multi-stakeholder engagement will best support system change.

Workgroups identified a desire to continue to work together to implement their recommendations and to monitor/measure their success. The need for legislative change was a more predominant theme throughout the Montana workshops compared to other states' events.

3. Get the word out to support this culture change and achieve buy-in.

Nearly all of the workgroups mentioned that it would be important to share the main ideas and recommendations from the ACOEM work disability prevention guideline as well as the results of the Montana workshops at the 2008 Governor's Conference on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Safety & Health. Some of the workgroups said they wanted to have their proposed action plans discussed at the Conference.

Similar to groups in other states' Summits, several of the Montana workgroups said that it was critically important to share simple messages about the work disability prevention model with as many audiences as possible using a variety of communication channels. The phrase social marketing was used to describe these efforts. They recommended a public relations (PR) campaign, talking points, changing how people think, helping develop a positive mind-set, and obtaining buy-in. The communication channels they plan to employ ranged from 1:1 conversations to presentations, brochures, and public service announcements.

Workgroups also recognized that culture change begins at home in their own departments at work and organizations. Participants were committed to sharing the message internally.

4. All stakeholders who deal with workplace injuries – especially workers, employers, and healthcare providers – need basic information, background concepts, and skills.

Education and training is a common theme among virtually all the Montana workgroups. They want to ensure that all stakeholder groups are given the basic information, background information, and skills they require as described in the ACOEM work disability prevention guideline. Several groups recommended measuring the results of the training such as a reduction in lost time days. One group came up with the idea of an education task force. Examples included:

- Mailing copies of the ACOEM work disability prevention guideline to all stakeholders;
- Workplace training; and
- Formal educational conferences.

5. Increased consistency is required and can be achieved through standardization and the use of protocols and templates.

Another common theme throughout the Montana action plans was the need for more consistency achieved through standardization of processes and forms. Many action plans recommended creating templates and tools to increase the consistency of information communicated and to standardize the management and critical steps in the SAW/RTW process. Examples included:

- A one page electronic form with secure access by the employer, employee, provider, and insurer;
- A one page paper form that can be used to convey the necessary SAW/RTW information to all parties;
- Assessment forms to elicit any barriers to return to work; and
- Checklists and protocols to assure completeness and guide the process.

6. Better / easier / faster communication and two-way information exchange among stakeholders with a problem-solving approach is critical.

Several groups recommended finding ways to make sure that people get the situation-specific data or information they need at the time they need it in order to make decisions. This generally involves transferring information from one stakeholder group to another. In addition to the electronic form mentioned above, workgroups stressed the importance of how information is communicated such as:

- Stressing work abilities instead of focusing on restrictions;
- Ensuring employers communicate to employees and physicians that temporary work adjustments are possible;
- Creating pamphlets to be given to injured workers at the time of injury; and
- Providing workers with information about advocacy phone lines.

7. People need guidance, not just information, and they need it just in time.

Attendees discussed the reality that most Montanans work for small employers or in workplaces with low numbers of employees – and thus have little familiarity with workers' compensation or managing health-related workplace issues. The importance of providing education and assistance to the key parties at the time of injury became apparent. Ideas for providing guidance include:

- The idea of creating a helpline for workers. Washington's Project Help was mentioned as a program to study to determine if it would work for Montana;
- The idea of an Employee Bill of Rights and Responsibilities that would be an educational tool;
- A Workers' Comp Bill of Rights and Responsibilities that would cover all stakeholders' rights and responsibilities; and
- Giving brochures at the time of injury as a way to set expectations that employees have a role to play in their own recovery, that needless time off can be harmful and work can be part of therapy, and that recovery on the job is the expected norm rather than the exception.