

Frequently asked questions for employees

What is Work Connections?

Work Connections was developed by the University of Michigan to assist and support employees and departments when employees experience an illness or injury, during the subsequent recovery, and through successful return to work. We work with other available programs and services to ensure that employees and supervisors have convenient and centralized access to a wide variety of resources and support. Among other things, the Work Connections team coordinates the services of health care providers and other professionals to promote recovery as well as to ensure appropriate return-to-work support is in place.

How does Work Connections work?

Work Connections acts as a liaison with other programs and services at the University to ensure that you, your patient, and the supervisor have convenient and centralized access to a wide variety of resources. These resources include everything from coordinating the services of nurses, vocational rehabilitation counselors, therapists, and other professionals interested in your patient's recovery to providing return-to-work support such as job analysis and ergonomic consultations.

Is there a cost to use Work Connections?

There is no cost to the employee or his or her department to use the services offered by Work Connections.

What happens during my time off for recovery?

Work Connections staff will assist and support you and you in the following ways during your recovery period:

- Contact you on a regular basis and act as a central clearinghouse for information
- Communicate with treating physicians and define options for treatment, facilitate care and identify what we can do to assist you during recovery
- Provide ongoing status reports to your department regarding your expected absence and duration of disability
- Respond to your questions or assist with identifying the appropriate resources or content experts to respond to your questions about benefits, employment status, salary, and other issues that may arise
- Explore options for assistance from other University resources
- Provide appropriate updates to your department and the physician as needed
- Answer questions and provide health resources information to you, if needed

What about my paycheck or other benefits?

Work Connections is responsible for administration of Workers' Compensation benefits and can answer any questions you may have about these benefits. Your claims representative will also act as a liaison to help you understand other benefits to which you may be entitled and coordinate communication with the appropriate offices.

What is Workers' Compensation?

Workers' Compensation provides for benefits conforming to state law, which may include wage replacement, medical, and rehabilitation benefits to employees who are injured or become ill as a result of a job-related injury (including death), or disease related to work.

What about confidentiality of health information? Could WorkConnections ever share medical information with my supervisor against my wishes?

Your health information belongs to you and Work Connections guards it appropriately. This means that your medical information is kept secure, private, and out of public view. Medical information is never sent to your home department. Maintaining appropriate confidentiality is a fundamental principle of the program. Health information will be released only in the following circumstances:

- With written authorization from you
- When a strict need to know is established (e.g., for health/safety reasons, or to make employment status decisions)
- To comply with the requirements of the Workers' Disability Compensation Act

Why does WorkConnections request an Authorization to Release Patient Information Form?

Work Connections services are designed to help you manage your disability and safe return to work. Authorizing Work Connections to obtain your medical information enables us to meet certain University requirements in order to expedite payment of your sick time or other disability benefits. In addition, developing a relationship with your treatment team and obtaining complete medical information is critical to coordinating an effective plan to help you.

Who is responsible for providing necessary medical documentation to justify my absence?

As an employee, you are responsible for providing sufficient medical documentation to support absence due to disability. Work Connections provides assistance by identifying what medical documentation is needed. As a courtesy, with authorization from you, Work Connections will request it from providers on your behalf. If a treatment provider is non-cooperative, Work Connections will notify you that our efforts to obtain medical documentation on your behalf have been unsuccessful.

Am I required to authorize the release of my medical information?

No, but providing authorization allows Work Connections to assist you in obtaining all information necessary for your department to authorize the payment of sick time and determine your ability to work.

Can the Authorization to Release Patient Information Form be revoked?

Yes. Authorization may be revoked in writing at any time.

Can I divulge confidential health information?

You may voluntarily choose, at any time, to discuss a medical situation with your supervisor or co-workers. This is a personal choice and is not required. In many cases, though, sharing this information may lead to a great deal of support and encouragement.

What is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996?

HIPAA is a federal law developed to improve the portability of health care coverage for people who lose or change employment, promote administrative simplification through the use of electronic transactions, and ensure the security and privacy of personal health information.

Under HIPAA regulations, can a doctor or treating facility send medical documentation without written authorization?

- For work-related illness and injuries, medical documentation can be provided pursuant to the Workers' Disability Compensation Act. It's best, however, to sign the Authorization to Release Patient Information Form, since medical conditions may overlap and the absence of complete medical information could result in a delay of services.
- For non-work-related illnesses and injuries, the Authorization to Release Patient Information Form is required.

What if I do not agree with the plan or actions of WorkConnections?

Our primary objective is to provide assistance and support to you and facilitate your safe return to work. If there is a disagreement, discuss your concerns with your Case Manager or the Work Connections supervisor. We will work with you to understand your concerns and find a solution.

What happens when I'm ready to return to work?

Work Connections' objective is to facilitate a safe and lasting return to work. Our staff will work with you, your supervisor, and your physician to:

- Help evaluate essential functions of the job and anticipate needs for accommodations, if required
- Develop and discuss a return-to-work plan with you, your supervisor, and your physician
- Maintain regular contact with you to coordinate your return-to-work plan
- Follow up on medical progress and assist with any medical issues after you return to work

What is a return-to-work plan?

A return-to-work plan is developed—with assistance from Work Connections—by you, your supervisor and your treatment team. Among other things, it includes information about any physical restrictions such as lifting or sitting for protracted periods of time along with a target date on which you'll be fully recovered and able to assume your regular duties.