

# Vocational rehabilitation results show system stability

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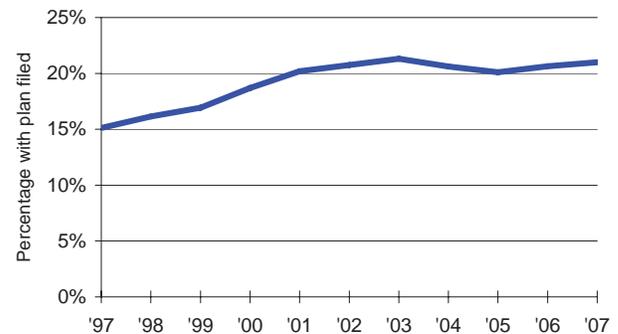
Vocational rehabilitation services are provided to injured workers who need help in returning to work because of their injuries and whose employers are unable to offer them suitable employment. Measures of vocational rehabilitation service utilization, costs and outcomes are included in the annual *Minnesota Workers' Compensation System Report*. This article presents some highlights from the vocational rehabilitation chapter in the coming 2007 report. A complete presentation and discussion of the vocational rehabilitation measures through 2006 is available in the report currently on the Web at [www.doli.state.mn.us/pdf/wcfact06.pdf](http://www.doli.state.mn.us/pdf/wcfact06.pdf).

Except for Figure 6, these statistics relate to the year of the injury, with estimates of the values for the most-recent years. These estimates are developed numbers based on analysis of the historical changes in the values of the measures. For example, using the most recent data for the average cost of vocational rehabilitation services for workers injured in 2007 and the pattern of growth in average vocational rehabilitation costs for workers injured in previous years, it is possible to estimate the average cost for all vocational rehabilitation services provided to all workers injured in 2007. All the figures are based on data provided by forms filed with the Department of Labor and Industry. Continuing annual data analysis will further refine these injury year estimates.

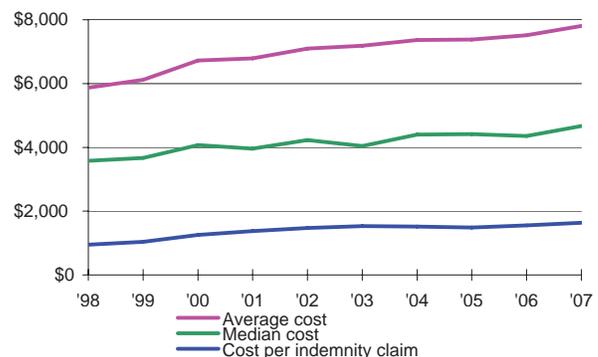
## Major findings

- Participation in vocational rehabilitation has remained fairly constant at between 20 percent and 21 percent of indemnity claims since 2001. A projected 5,240 workers injured in 2007 will receive vocational rehabilitation services (Figure 1).
- The estimated average cost of vocational rehabilitation services for each participant was \$7,800 among workers injured in 2007, 4 percent higher than in 2006, after adjusting for average wage growth. The total cost of vocational rehabilitation services for workers injured in 2007, \$41 million, was about 2.5 percent of the workers' compensation system cost (Figure 2).
- The average time from injury to the start of vocational rehabilitation services was 6.7 months for workers injured in 2007. This was a decrease of 4 percent from injury-year 2006 and a decrease of 23 percent from injury-year 1998. For injury-year 2007, half of the injured

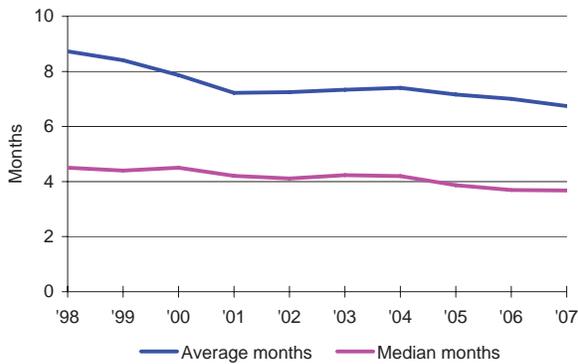
**Figure 1**  
Percentage of paid indemnity claims with a VR plan filed, injury-years 1997-2007



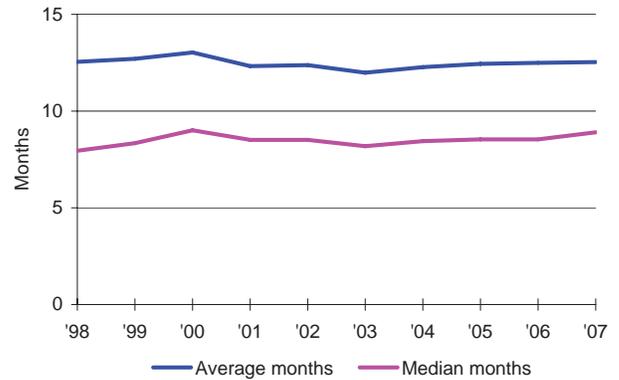
**Figure 2**  
VR service costs, adjusted for wage growth, injury-years 1998-2007



**Figure 3**  
Time from injury to start of VR services, injury-years 1998-2007



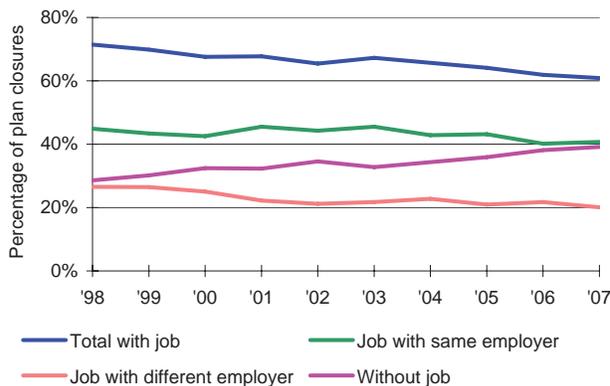
**Figure 4**  
VR service duration, injury-years 1998-2007



workers receiving vocational rehabilitation started receiving services within 3.7 months of the date of injury (Figure 3).

- Average vocational rehabilitation service duration has been slowly increasing since 2003. The average vocational rehabilitation service duration among workers injured in 2007 is estimated to be 12.5 months and the median service duration is estimated at 8.9 months. Among workers injured in 2003, the average vocational rehabilitation service duration is estimated at 12.0 months, with a median of 8.2 months (Figure 4).
- The percentage of vocational rehabilitation participants with a job at plan closure decreased from 71 percent for workers injured in 1998 to 61 percent for workers injured in 2007. There were decreases among the percentage of workers returning to the same employer and the percentage of workers finding work with a different employer (Figure 5).
- The average vocational rehabilitation participant returning to work received a wage about the same as their pre-injury wage, but this varied widely among individuals. About one quarter of the injured workers returning to work following vocational rehabilitation had weekly wages less than 80 percent the level of their pre-injury wages (Figure 6). The distribution of the percentage of post-vocational-rehabilitation wages to pre-injury wages has changed little since 2004.

**Figure 5**  
Return-to-work status: same vs. different employer, injury-years 1998-2007 [1]



**Figure 6**  
Ratio of return-to-work wage to pre-injury wage for participants returning to work, plan-closure year 2007

