

# Vocational rehabilitation results show system stability

By Brian Zaidman and David Berry, Policy Development, Research and Statistics

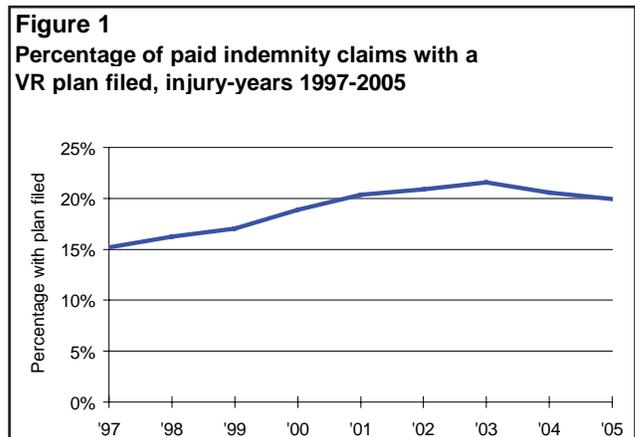
Vocational rehabilitation (VR) services are provided to injured workers who need help in returning to work because of their injuries and whose employers are unable to offer them suitable employment. Measures of vocational rehabilitation service utilization, costs and outcomes are included in the Department of Labor and Industry's (DLI) annual *Minnesota Workers' Compensation System Report*. This article presents some highlights from the vocational rehabilitation chapter in the soon-to-be-released 2005 report, which will be available on the DLI Web site at [www.doli.state.mn.us/pubwkcp.html](http://www.doli.state.mn.us/pubwkcp.html).



Unlike previous reports about Minnesota's vocational rehabilitation outcomes, which reported statistics relating to year of plan closure, most of the statistics now relate to year of injury. 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 2005 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 2005. All the figures are based on data provided by forms filed with the Department of Labor and Industry (DLI). Continuing annual data analysis will further refine these injury year estimates.

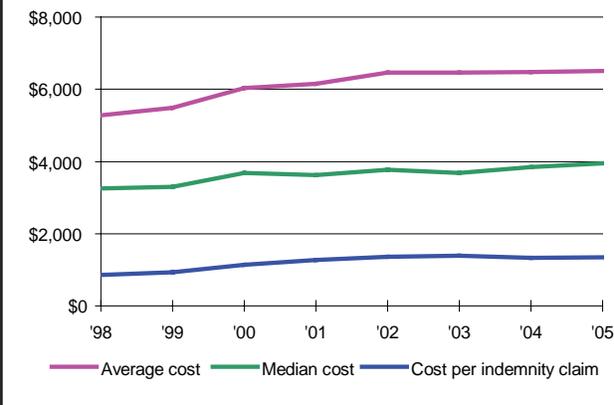
## Major findings

- Participation in vocational rehabilitation rose from 15 percent of paid indemnity claimants in 1997 to 22 percent for 2003, but fell back to 20 percent in 2005. A projected 5,370 workers injured in 2005 will receive VR services. (Figure 1)
- As expected, workers with more time on temporary total disability benefits (TTD) were more likely to receive vocational rehabilitation services. For workers injured between 2001 and 2004, 64 percent of the injured workers with three to six months of TTD benefits received vocational rehabilitation services, compared to 92 percent vocational rehabilitation use among workers with more than 12 months of TTD benefits.
- The average cost of VR services per participant was \$6,500 among workers injured in 2005, essentially unchanged from 2004 and 23 percent higher than in 1998, after adjusting for average wage growth. The total cost of VR services for workers injured in 2005, \$35 million, was about 2.2 percent of workers' compensation system cost. (Figure 2, next page)
- The average time from injury to the start of VR services was 7.1 months for workers injured in 2005. This was a decrease of 17 percent from injury-year 1998. For injury-year 2005, half of the

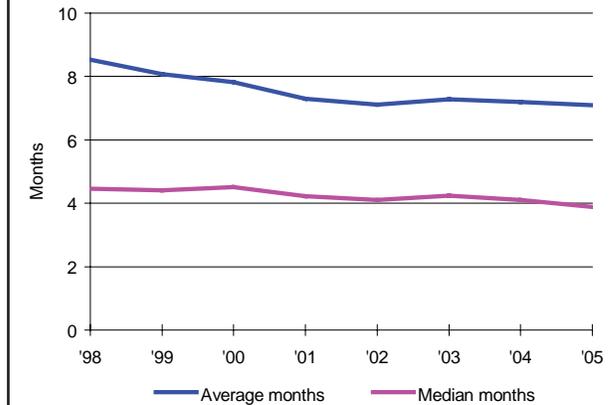


Results continued ...

**Figure 2**  
VR services costs, adjusted for wage growth, injury-years 1998-2005



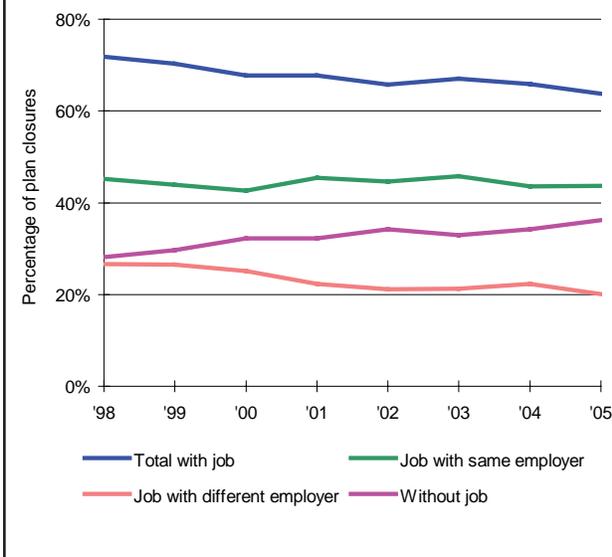
**Figure 3**  
Time from injury to start of VR services, injury-years 1998-2005



injured workers receiving vocational rehabilitation started receiving services within four months of injury. (Figure 3)

- Average VR service duration changed very little for workers injured during the 2002 to 2005 period. The average VR service duration among workers injured in 2005 is estimated to be 12.6 months; the median service duration is estimated at 8.2 months.
- The percentage of VR participants with a job at plan closure decreased from 72 percent for workers injured in 1998 to 64 percent for workers injured in 2005. This was primarily attributable to a decrease in the percentage of workers finding work with a different employer. (Figure 4)
- The average VR 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 VR had weekly wages less than 80 percent the level of their pre-injury wages. (Figure 5)

**Figure 4**  
Return-to-work status, injury-years 1998-2005



**Figure 5**  
Ratio of return-to-work wage to pre-injury wage for participants returning to work, plan-closure-year 2005

