

ASSA 2024 RECOGNITION AWARDS		
CATEGORY	:	Continuous Improvement Recognition Award
ORGANIZATION	:	Employees' Compensation Commission (Philippines)
CONTACT PERSON	:	Atty. Kaima Via Velasquez Executive Director
NAME OF PROJECT	:	Return-to-Work Assistance Program (RTWAP)
OBJECTIVE AND NATURE OF PROJECT	:	<p>The Return-to-Work Assistance Program or RTWAP of the Employees' Compensation Commission (ECC) is an interdisciplinary approach to rehabilitation support that aims to facilitate persons with temporary or permanent work-related disabilities' recovery and safe and timely return to employment.</p> <p>On top of the provision of Employees' Compensation (EC) benefits, ECC, through the RTWAP, aims to return persons with work-related disabilities (PWRDs) to the economic mainstream through a tailored return-to-work plan to keep them productive at work and capable of earning a full income as soon as medically practicable.</p> <p>In doing so, RTWAP also seeks to benefit companies and employers with sustained work productivity by diminishing costs associated with recruitment and training of new employees.</p>
WHY IT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED	:	<p>Throughout its 49 years in service, ECC has strived for continuous improvement by creating prompt and responsive policies and programs relevant to work-related sickness and injuries.</p> <p>One of which is the <i>Katulong at Gabay sa Manggagawang May Kapansanan</i> or KaGabay (which translates to "guide or partner") Program which addresses the needs of PWRDs through physical restoration and the provision of assistive devices, skills training, and livelihood assistance, among others.</p>

	<p>With the launching of the RTWAP in February 2023, ECC further reinforces the KaGabay Program by committing to facilitate not only the recovery but also the safe and timely return to employment of persons with work-related disabilities.</p> <p>The RTWAP is an interdisciplinary approach to rehabilitation, services, and support that goes beyond typical medical care. It is also about disability management, the main essence of which is to reintegrate the PWRDs into the economic mainstream as empowered and productive individuals – a testament to ECC’s resolve to continuously raise the value and level of its services with the stakeholders in mind.</p> <p>For PWRDs, the concept ensures that prior to RTWAP, the pre-return-to-work medical or surgical evaluations and treatment, rehabilitation, psychological support, and the provision of assistive devices have been completed so as not to compromise the workers’ health and safety.</p> <p>For employers and companies, in the process of implementing the return-to-work plan, ECC aims to address the root cause of the problem by advocating for healthful and safe working conditions.</p>
<p>SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT</p>	<p>The RTWAP stemmed from the need to incorporate job retention and return-to-work program for PWRDs in the wider efforts to ensure continual workforce development in the Philippines.</p> <p>A 2017 study by the Department of Labor and Employment - Institute for Labor Studies titled “A Study on Job Retention and Re-employment of Persons with Work-Related Disabilities in the Philippines” cited the lack of work transition training, psychological counseling for the mental health needs of PWRDs, and insufficient coordination between the PWRD, physician, employer, and the government as some of the areas needing improvement in this regard.</p> <p>The need to address these concerns is further emphasized by the number of occupational accidents reported across all industries in the Philippines: a total of 37,513 in 2019 alone as per the results of the Integrated Survey on Labor and Employment.</p> <p>In response to these, ECC laid down the work to institutionalize a return-to-work program in the Philippines by building on the model and best practices of countries which demonstrated success in the area,</p>

	<p>starting with the capacity building of its personnel in 2022. At present, ECC has four Certified Disability Management Professionals who underwent training and certification in Putrajaya, Malaysia who serve as disability case managers for the RTWAP.</p> <p>ECC piloted the RTWAP in Region IV-A on February 28, 2023. The manufacturing industry, a sector with the highest occurrence of work-related injuries, is predominant in said region, hence the reason for piloting the program in that area.</p> <p>The RTWAP follows an interdisciplinary and consensus-based approach that involves the worker and case assessment; functional capacity evaluation; development and implementation of a return-to-work plan – tailored to the employee by a disability case manager from ECC, the employer, rehabilitation doctor, physical therapist, and the employee himself – up to its implementation and evaluation.</p> <p>Ideally, the goal is to be able to return the PWRD to the same job under the same employer. If not possible, the goal may be adjusted to adopt the return-to-work hierarchy as follows: similar job, same employer; different job, same employer; same job - different employer; similar job, different employer; different job - different employer; and livelihood or self-employment.</p> <p>Since piloting the program in Region IV-A in 2023, ECC has successfully returned eight PWRDs to employment. Seven of which were returned to the same job under the same employer while one was returned to a different job under the same employer. ECC had also launched the program in Region VI in July 2024. As an agency committed to raising the bar for workers' welfare, ECC will build on the learnings from the two pilot regions as it also projects to roll out the RTWAP nationwide in the future.</p> <p>In line with the RTWAP, ECC is also set to establish the country's first rehabilitation center for PWRDs in Tanay, Rizal, Philippines, to cater for the PWRD's medical rehabilitation, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, work hardening, industrial rehabilitation, prosthetic and orthotics, vocational rehabilitation, reskilling, upskilling, and livelihood, among others.</p>
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