

Occupational Injury Service (OIS)

Worker OIS Guide

STAY in the
GAME

WCB

Workers'
Compensation
Board

Alberta

Occupational Injury Service

Same-day access to treatment helps recovery

By: Jacqueline Varga

THE DAY—a snowy morning in December—started out like any other for Jarrett Roberts, a service representative with GFS (Gordon Food Services) in Edmonton.

At about the half way point through his deliveries, Jarrett was unloading a skid of food from the side door of his truck when he slipped and fell backwards, hitting his head and left shoulder on the ground. As if that wasn't bad enough, the box then fell on top of him. "The pain felt like I got shot in the shoulder," he says. The first thing he did was to call Carlos Pereira, Gordon Food Services' health and safety coordinator, who promptly picked him up and took him to the hospital.

Jarrett suffered a separated shoulder which put him in a sling for five and a half weeks. After he received emergency medical care, Carlos suggested he attend an occupational injury service (OIS) clinic for an assessment and evaluation, and to set up a return-to-work plan.

Since GFS signed up for WCB's OIS program they haven't looked back. That's because workers who use an OIS clinic get fast-tracked through the treatment and rehabilitation process, receiving same-day access to a physician, earlier access to diagnostic tests such as MRI's, as well as expedited surgery if needed.

Jarrett received a physiotherapy rehabilitation plan at the OIS clinic and attributes the specialized care he was given for his quick recovery.

"The OIS clinic gives you the resources you need to get back to work. I got good advice, and the pulley system they gave me for my home exercises really worked."

After receiving clearance from the OIS clinic, Jarrett returned to GFS doing modified duties, but after only nine weeks, returned to his previous position as a service representative.

Statistics show, that on average, workers who attend an OIS clinic return to work and modified duties sooner. Carlos Pereira's experience with the program certainly supports the statistics—he has noticed a definite reduction in the amount of time his injured employees have been off the job.

"Since we have signed up for OIS, our recovery rates have improved significantly."

And neither can GFS employees, who reap the benefits of the OIS program.

Carlos Pereira (left), health and safety co-ordinator, implemented OIS at GFS's Edmonton facility. Service representative Jarrett Roberts (right) has benefitted from the program.



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Our vision, ***Albertans working – a safe, healthy and strong Alberta***, is about reducing the impact a work related injury or illness has on you, your family, and your employer.

Occupational Injury Services (OIS) is a service designed to help you return to a full and productive life as quickly and safely as possible after an injury. OIS achieves this by:

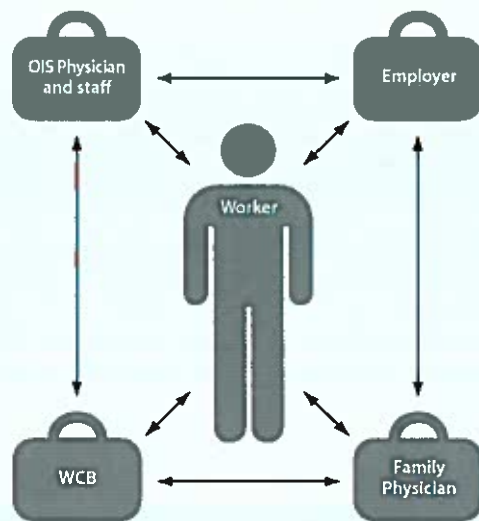
- ***Offering quick access*** to a facility staffed by physicians and other health care professionals experienced in the assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of injured workers.
- ***Providing clinical staff*** that are familiar with your work environment and modified work opportunities.
- ***Fast tracking diagnostic and treatment services*** by referring directly to WCB authorized health care providers.
- ***Coordinating assessment and treatment communication*** between you, your employer, WCB and your family physician.
- ***Coordinating safe, sustainable return to work*** via development of modified work care plans.
- ***Educating*** you and your employer on injury prevention, injury management and return-to-work planning.
- ***Delivering high levels of customer service*** with positive outcomes.

What is Occupational Injury Service (OIS)?

OIS: getting the right medical care at the right time with the right results – safe, sustainable return to work.

Goal:

Facilitate safe, sustainable return to work for people who have suffered a work related injury by fostering communication between you, your employer, your health care provider and WCB.



What is an OIS clinic?

A medical clinic that's been granted OIS status by the Workers' Compensation Board - Alberta. They applied for and met all the quality requirements to deliver OIS. They are staffed with physicians, nurses and other rehabilitation staff with a background in occupational medicine and disability management. It's a clinic specifically for people who are hurt at work.

Advantages:

- You are provided with a choice of medical provider.
- You have more control over the management of your injury.
- You will get to see a physician within an average of 30 minutes (barring any emergencies in the clinic).
- You have access to an expert return-to-work coach—medical professionals trained to understand and deal with workplace injuries.
- Faster access to other services you may need, like x-rays, MRI's, etc.
- OIS keeps everyone in the loop and avoids delays in communication, ensuring you, your employer and physician are on the same page about your injury recovery.
- OIS promotes earlier, safe and sustainable return to work through a focus on modified work.
- Your injury is less likely to threaten job security or interrupt your wages.

Proven satisfaction with the service (injured workers, unions, employers). OIS has been available since 2004. Over 4,600 employer sites across the province have chosen to use OIS and have reported high levels of satisfaction with the service.

Guiding principles

Focus on timely, safe, sustainable return to work.

The sooner you safely return to work, the less impact on your work and home life.

Expedited medical/rehabilitation interventions.

The sooner you receive medical attention and rehabilitation treatment (if needed) after an injury, the sooner you can start on the road to recovery and return to work. Delays in seeking treatment for your injury can delay your recovery process.

The best rehabilitation approach for most sprains and strains is staying active.

The sooner you get moving, the sooner you will feel better. Even when you feel pain, you can still safely participate in activities.

Modified work is one of the best forms of rehabilitation.

What is modified work?

Temporary modified work includes any changes to regular job duties, as a result of an injury. This includes changes in:

- tasks or functions
- workload (e.g. hours or schedules)
- environment or work area
- equipment

It can also include:

- work normally performed by others
- work specifically designated as a modified work program

Why perform modified work?

- recover sooner
- decrease your time away from work
- increase your independence
- continue to contribute to your organization's success

What does modified work need to be?

- *achievable* - given your injury, you must be able to physically do it
- *safe* - modified work should not endanger your recovery or safety or the safety of others
- *constructive* - modified work should contribute to your skill development and your return to full duties
- *productive* - your duties should be meaningful to the organization

Early development of return-to-work plans that involve you, your employer, and your treatment team (OIS physician, etc.) ensures that you get the right service at the right time to promote safe, sustainable return to work.

If you are injured:

If you sustain an injury that you believe is work related, you can choose to go to an OIS clinic for treatment.

- Your employer will arrange transportation to an OIS clinic, or hospital if you are severely injured. (e.g. severe bleeding, trouble breathing).
- Please remember, the OIS program is designed specifically for the assessment and treatment of work related injuries. If during an OIS assessment the physician determines that you have other non work related conditions (e.g. a heart condition), you will be advised to make an appointment with your own family physician.

Notify

- Report the injury to the staff person designated by your employer (e.g. supervisor, staff nurse).
- That person will contact the OIS clinic to confirm that your injury does not require immediate emergency care. They will notify the OIS clinic that you are coming.

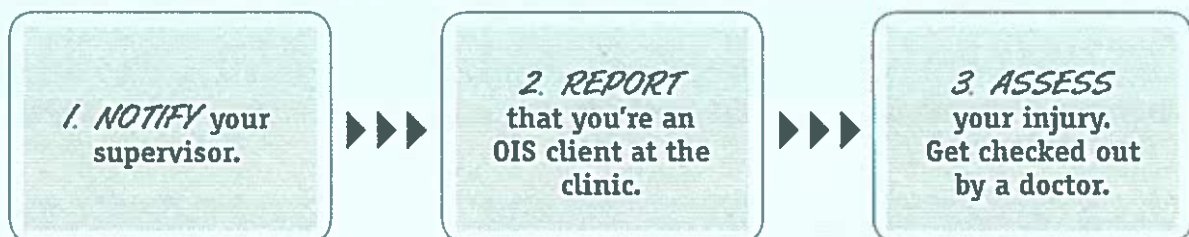
- When you arrive at the OIS clinic, report to the front reception area and inform them that you are **“an OIS client from Employer X”**.
- You will be fast tracked to be seen by the OIS physician within 30 minutes of your arrival (barring any emergency cases at the clinic) on average.
- A Workers’ Report of Accident (CO60) will be given to you to complete while you are waiting if you have not already done so. This report is required by WCB to process all claims. The OIS reception staff will fax the form to WCB for you and return the form to you. The sooner you complete this form, the sooner your claim will be processed.

Assessment

You will be seen by an OIS physician at the clinic who will assess your injury. The OIS physician will:

- ask you to describe how you were injured
- conduct an exam of your injury
- talk to you about any medical treatment you may require (e.g. x-ray, medications)

Report



- talk to you about any rehabilitation you may require (e.g. physical therapy, chiropractic, etc.)
- discuss the need for follow-up visit
- talk to you about the safest way to get you back to work
- answer any questions you may have

Have a case conference to develop a return-to-work plan

The OIS physician/staff member will meet with you and your employer representative privately (in person, if they accompanied you, or via phone) to talk about the best way to help you return to work safely.

They will talk about:

- duties that are safe for you to perform at work and tasks you should not perform—the OIS physician will document your physical capabilities in a document called a Work Readiness Report
- modified work options
- how best to manage your injury and progress back to full duties
- any support that you may require at work

They will **not** talk about:

- your injury diagnosis
- your medical history or any other personal information

The three of you will talk about and agree on a plan that will best support your safe return to work and resolve your injury.

Implement return-to-work plan

- You will be instructed to return to work as soon as it is medically safe to do so. Your expected return-to-work date will be detailed in your return-to-work plan. This will keep you as an active member of your workplace while your injury heals.
- Work with your employer to implement the return-to-work plan (e.g. modified duties, etc.).
- Implement any other recommended treatments (e.g. stretches at work, home exercise program, attending physical therapy or chiropractic services).
- Attend all follow-up visits until your injury resolves.



Roles, rights and responsibilities

YOUR role and responsibilities

Your role:

Actively participate in and manage your injury recovery and return-to-work process.

Your rights:

- Choose your treating physician for your work related injury—OIS is a **voluntary option**.
- Actively participate in your injury management and return-to-work process.
- Be treated with respect and dignity.
- Be informed of all matters relevant to your return to work.
- Be provided with modified work that is safe, suitable, meaningful and productive, and refuse it if this is not provided.
- Expect that your personal health information will be kept confidential.

Your responsibilities:

- Report your injury or illness immediately to your supervisor. Identify at that time if you would like to visit an OIS clinic for your injury.
- Report the injury or illness to WCB by completing the Workers' Report of Injury (CO60). Your OIS provider will have copies of the report for you.
- Attend the OIS clinic as soon as possible after your injury.
- Identify that you are an OIS client when you arrive at the clinic.
- Actively participate in your assessment. The more information you give the OIS physician about how you were injured, the better your recovery plan.
- Actively participate in the development of your return-to-work plan during the post assessment conference. This is your chance to develop a plan that works for you.
- Participate in the recommended treatment/rehabilitation plan. Take charge of your recovery process and the outcome.
- Maintain regular contact with your return-to-work team (your employer, your OIS physician, and your WCB adjudicator or case manager). If they don't know you are having problems, they cannot help you.
- Decide who you will utilize for follow-up support—your OIS physician or your family physician and notify both parties.

YOUR EMPLOYER'S *role and responsibilities*

Role:

Actively support your return-to-work process as a member of your return-to-work team.

Responsibilities:

- Have appropriate modified work.
- Educate all employees about OIS, and inform employees that it is a voluntary option for you if you have a work related injury.
- Contact the OIS clinic in advance to advise them that you are on your way.
- Provide your transportation to the clinic.
- Complete WCB reports within 72 hours.
- Participate in the OIS assessment case conference to identify modified work opportunities for you and the best way to support your recovery.
- Accommodate the OIS within their disability management program (e.g. support the return-to-work plan).

YOUR OIS PROVIDER'S *role and responsibilities*

Role:

Provide expert medical care and development of your return-to-work plan.

Responsibilities:

- Maintain quality staff with occupational medicine and disability management backgrounds.
- Maintain knowledge of WCB processes.
- Provide an orientation to your employer about the OIS process when they first sign up.
- Assist your employer in implementing the OIS process at your worksite.
- Conduct a worksite visit and gather job information when your employer first signs up.
- Maintain knowledge of your worksite through frequent communication or additional worksite visits.
- Answer incoming calls from your employer immediately.
- Assist you and your employer to complete WCB reports of accident to expedite claim entitlement.
- Target to see you within 30 minutes (on average) of your arrival at the OIS clinic (barring any emergency cases at the clinic).
- Conduct a complete assessment of your injury.
- Educate you and your employer about injury prevention, injury management and return-to-work strategies.
- Expedite any diagnostic tests that you may require.
- Request any referrals to other rehabilitation services that you may require.
- Develop an individualized return-to-work plan with you and your employer.
- Complete all OIS reports in a timely manner.
- Facilitate the return-to-work plan case conference.
- Provide follow-up visits and support as needed.

WCB'S role and responsibilities

Role:

Support development and implementation of the return-to-work plan.

Responsibilities:

- Identify and designate new OIS facilities.
- Provide training to all OIS physicians and staff regarding WCB processes.
- Provide quality assurance on all OIS clinics. WCB ensures clinics are meeting their contracted expectations and responds to service concerns from stakeholders.
- Process and manage all claims submitted.
- Actively support the return-to-work plan by coordinating all needed rehabilitation services.

Frequently asked questions

Q: What is different about OIS versus the family physician route?

A: The table below outlines some of the major differences between the two options.

	Family Physician	OIS
Background	General medicine	General medicine + occupational medicine
WCB knowledge	Limited	High – received specialized training
Knowledge of your worksite	Limited to none	Has background from worksite visit
Access time	Must call for appointment – days to weeks	30 minutes (on average)
WCB report completion	No expectation – may take days	Same day
Additional report outlining modified work opportunities	No	Yes – Work Readiness Report
Development of return-to-work plan	May talk about return to work	Yes
Participate in return-to-work conference with you	No	Yes
Expedite diagnostics	No – will go into regular public queue	Yes
Provision of follow-up support to employer	No	Yes

Q: Do I have to go to the OIS physician?

A: No. OIS attendance is a voluntary option for injured workers.

Q: Why would I go see an OIS physician instead of seeing my family physician?

A: OIS physicians specialize in treating work related injuries. Your family physician specializes in your general health. OIS physicians have experience treating work related injuries, and can get you the services you need quickly, benefiting your recovery and return-to-work outcome.

Q: Who does the OIS physician work for – are they “company physicians”?

A: OIS physicians are not employed by your employer or WCB. They work for private companies who have a contract with WCB to provide OIS services. As Alberta physicians, their practice is guided by the Alberta Medical Association.

Q: Isn't it better that I just go home and rest after an injury rather than doing modified work?

A: No. In general, staying active and working is better for your recovery process because you will retain the skills you had pre-injury and not become deconditioned. The OIS focus is about getting you back to work as safely as possible. Your OIS physician may suggest that you not work for a period

of time due to the nature of the injury. However, once that is cleared, getting back to work as soon as possible will only aid you on your road to recovery. Your modified work program will be developed to ensure you are not doing any duties that are unsafe for you to do (e.g. avoid lifting for a few weeks if you have a shoulder injury).

Q: Can I follow-up with my own family physician?

A: Yes. However, please see only **one physician** for your work related injury. If you do choose to attend an OIS clinic for your initial assessment and then decide to see your family physician afterward, we would ask that you inform both the OIS clinic and your family physician.

Q: Can I transfer to OIS if I see my family physician first?

A: No. OIS was set up to be the first medical service after an injury occurs. Under these circumstances, the OIS physician can set up a care plan that will best support your recovery and return to work. You therefore need to make a choice after you sustain an injury as to who you want to treat your work related injury – OIS or your family physician.

Q: Can I start physical therapy on my own?

A: Yes, however please ensure the physical therapy clinic is a WCB approved provider. Visit www.wcb.ab.ca for a list of approved providers. The physical therapist can perform an assessment and first treatment immediately but then must wait to hear back from WCB as to whether your claim has been accepted. Once accepted, WCB will advise the clinic regarding approval for treatment.

If you have been seen at an OIS clinic, your OIS physician will tell you if you require physical therapy to support injury recovery. Tell the physical therapist that you are coming to them for a work related injury and share your return-to-work plan so they can tailor their therapy to support your plan.

Q: Can my supervisor change my modified duties?

A: No. Modifications to your return-to-work plan should only be directed from your OIS physician with your consultation.

Q: If I feel that my injury is better, can I follow up with the OIS physician sooner than my follow-up appointment?

A: Yes. Contact your OIS provider and request an earlier appointment date.

Q: What if my supervisor feels that my work modifications are not appropriate?

A. Your supervisor or other employer representative should have participated in the return-to-work conference. Your employer may have some valid comments about the modified work (e.g. it might impact other workers). The return-to-work conference is meant to be a brainstorming session on how to support your return to work. Take this opportunity to work with your employer and the OIS physician to develop a plan that works for all of you. If your employer feels that the modified duties are not appropriate after the return-to-work conference, suggest that you contact the OIS physician for a follow-up call to discuss the return-to-work plan.

Q: How soon will I get paid by WCB?

A: You should receive your first wage loss benefit cheque from WCB within 14 days of WCB registering your claim.

Q: What if my employer does not provide me with the recommended modified duties?

A: Contact WCB if your injury is work related and your employer is unable or unwilling to accommodate your duties.

Q: What about my confidential health information?

A: OIS physicians and staff are obligated to comply with all privacy legislation. The focus of the return-to-work conference and any communication (e.g. work readiness report) with your employer is about how your employer can support your return to work only. No personal medical information will be discussed. You will be present at the case conference and will receive a copy of the Work Readiness Report so you will be aware of what has been communicated.

Resources

Additional OIS resources are available at www.wcb.ab.ca

How to reach us

If you need more information or have questions about the OIS service, please contact WCB's Health Care Services department and ask to speak to the OIS contract manager.

In Edmonton: 780-498-3219

WCB toll free number: 1-866-WCB-WCB1 (922-9221)

Email: hcs@wcb.ab.ca



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