

Return to work

This section presents return to work measures compiled from data published in the *2003–04 Australia and New Zealand Return To Work Monitor* (RTW Monitor), which reports on return to work outcomes and injured workers' perceptions of the return to work process. Data for the RTW Monitor are drawn from a survey conducted by Campbell Research and Consulting on behalf of the Heads of Workers' Compensation Authorities. The survey includes injured workers who have been paid 10 days or more compensation. The sample selected for all RTW Monitor surveys consisted of injured workers who had:

- submitted a claim seven to eight months before the date of the survey or seven to nine months for Tasmania and the Australian Government, due to their small population sizes. For Seacare, due to their even smaller size, the entire population of claimants were invited to be interviewed over four rounds in August, November, February and May.
- 10 days or more compensation paid, inclusive of any excess; and
- not been included in another workers' compensation survey in the previous 12 months.

The figures reported in this section for Comcare include the Australian Capital Territory Public Service. From this year, the Australian Capital Territory Private Sector no longer participate in this survey, however the Northern Territory have participated this year for the first time since 1999–2000. Western Australia does not currently participate in this survey.

The indicators reported in this section include:

- durable and non-durable return to work;
- partial and full return to work; and
- the use of return to work plans.

The Australian average for each year is calculated using the jurisdictions that participated in the survey for that year.

The full RTW Monitor can be viewed at www.hwca.org.au.

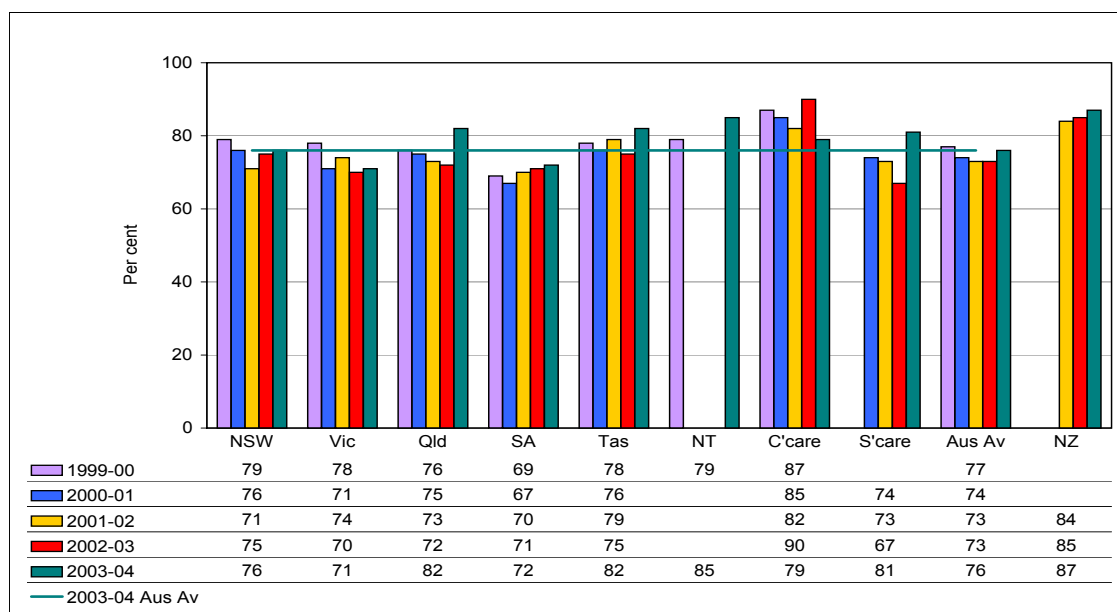
Return to work outcomes

Table 20 shows that the Australian average return to work rate increased from 83% in 2002–03 to 86% in 2003–04. The return to work rate is the sum of durable and non-durable return to work. Durable return to work refers to injured workers who had returned to work either fully or partially and were in a paid job at the time of the survey. Non-durable return to work is where the injured worker has returned to work since lodging a claim for compensation but is not working at the time of interview.

The increase in the Australian return to work rate was due to an increase in the durable return to work rate. Four out of seven jurisdictions recorded increases in their return to work rate. The New Zealand rate has remained at 91% for the three years they have participated in this survey.

Figure 33 shows that the 2003–04 Australian average for durable return to work was 76%. This was up from 73% in 2002–03, but still lower than the rate in 1999–2000. New Zealand (87%) and the Northern Territory (85%) have the highest durable return to work rates of the jurisdictions who participate in this survey, while South Australia (72%) and Victoria (71%) have the lowest. Seacare and Queensland recorded large increases in the durable return to work rate over the past year, while Comcare experienced the largest decrease.

Figure 33 Total durable return to work rate



The Australian durable return to work rate of 76% was made up of 59% of workers recording a full return to work, and 18% of workers returning to work on a partial basis. Full return to work means returning to a level of paid employment equivalent to that at the time of injury. It is not the same as full-time return to work, since the injured worker may have been working on a part-time basis at the time of injury. Therefore, full return to work for a person working on a part-time basis will mean returning to the part-time hours they worked at the time of injury.

The Australian average for non-durable return to work has remained at 10%. However, there was considerable variation at the jurisdictional level with two jurisdictions recording increases, while all others recorded falls.

Table 20 The RTW rate, both Durable (Full and Partial) and Non-durable, 1999–2000 to 2003–04*

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	Tas	NT	C'care	S'care	Aus Av	NZ
1999–2000										
RTW Rate	87	85	87	82	90	88	94	n/a	86	n/a
Durable	79	78	76	69	78	79	87	n/a	77	n/a
<i>Full</i>	59	62	62	49	56	62	61	n/a	59	n/a
<i>Partial</i>	19	15	15	17	21	19	27	n/a	17	n/a
Non-durable	8	7	11	13	12	9	7	n/a	9	n/a
2000–01										
RTW Rate	86	81	84	79	90	n/a	93	79	84	n/a
Durable	76	71	75	67	76	n/a	85	74	74	n/a
<i>Full</i>	61	60	60	49	58	n/a	69	60	60	n/a
<i>Partial</i>	16	13	15	17	16	n/a	20	14	15	n/a
Non-durable	10	10	9	12	14	n/a	8	5	10	n/a
2001–02										
RTW Rate	82	83	82	82	90	n/a	89	87	83	91
Durable	71	74	73	70	79	n/a	82	73	73	84
<i>Full</i>	56	54	57	52	65	n/a	58	67	56	71
<i>Partial</i>	15	21	15	18	13	n/a	26	8	17	14
Non-durable	11	9	9	12	11	n/a	7	14	10	7
2002–03										
RTW Rate	83	82	82	82	87	n/a	95	77	83	91
Durable	75	70	72	71	75	n/a	90	67	73	85
<i>Full</i>	60	54	58	47	60	n/a	65	59	58	72
<i>Partial</i>	17	19	13	23	15	n/a	23	8	17	13
Non-durable	8	12	10	11	12	n/a	5	10	10	6
2003–04										
RTW Rate	87	82	88	82	91	88	90	86	86	91
Durable	76	71	82	72	82	85	79	81	76	87
<i>Full</i>	59	57	64	49	63	65	59	63	59	69
<i>Partial</i>	18	15	18	21	18	23	23	21	18	17
Non-durable	11	11	6	10	9	3	11	5	10	4

*Note that the sum of both full and partial durable RTW should equal the Total durable RTW rate. This is not always the case in the above table due to rounding.

Partial return to work

Table 21 shows the percentage of employees who had a partial return to work upon first resuming work and the percentage of employees working on a partial basis at the time of interview, which is generally around 7–8 months after the accident or claim was lodged.

In Australia, 23% of workers resumed work on a partial basis following a work-related injury. This rate is unchanged from the previous year. In New Zealand the partial return to work rate remained at 16%.

Over the past five years, South Australia has consistently had more injured workers return to work on a partial basis than any other jurisdiction. However, this has not contributed to an overall higher return to work rate. The percentage of injured workers returning to work on a partial basis for Comcare dropped from 28% in 2002–03 to 23% in 2003–04. This is the first time in the years reported that the rate for Comcare has not been above the Australian average. Comcare still reported partial return to work rates above the Australian average at the time of interview.

The Australian average for the percentage of workers continuing to work on a partial basis by the time of interview was 5% in 2003–04. This figure has remained steady since 2000–01. As expected, this is significantly down from the 23% who had a partial return to work when they first returned to work. South Australia (11%) and Comcare (9%) continue to record partial return to work rates at time of interview substantially higher than the Australian average.

Table 21 Partial RTW upon resumption of work and at time of interview

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	Tas	NT	C'care	S'care	Aus Av	NZ
Partial RTW upon resumption of work (%)										
1999-00	16	26	18	33	30	19	33	n/a	20	n/a
2000-01	22	20	20	30	30	n/a	31	2	22	n/a
2001-02	23	25	26	35	29	n/a	35	5	25	3
2002-03	20	26	21	38	28	n/a	28	4	23	16
2003-04	19	28	23	35	29	20	23	3	23	16
Partial RTW at interview (%)										
1999-00	5	4	2	8	6	4	12	n/a	4	n/a
2000-01	4	4	2	8	3	n/a	8	0	4	n/a
2001-02	4	8	3	9	4	n/a	15	2	5	2
2002-03	4	9	2	13	5	n/a	8	0	5	1
2003-04	6	3	3	11	6	3	9	4	5	3

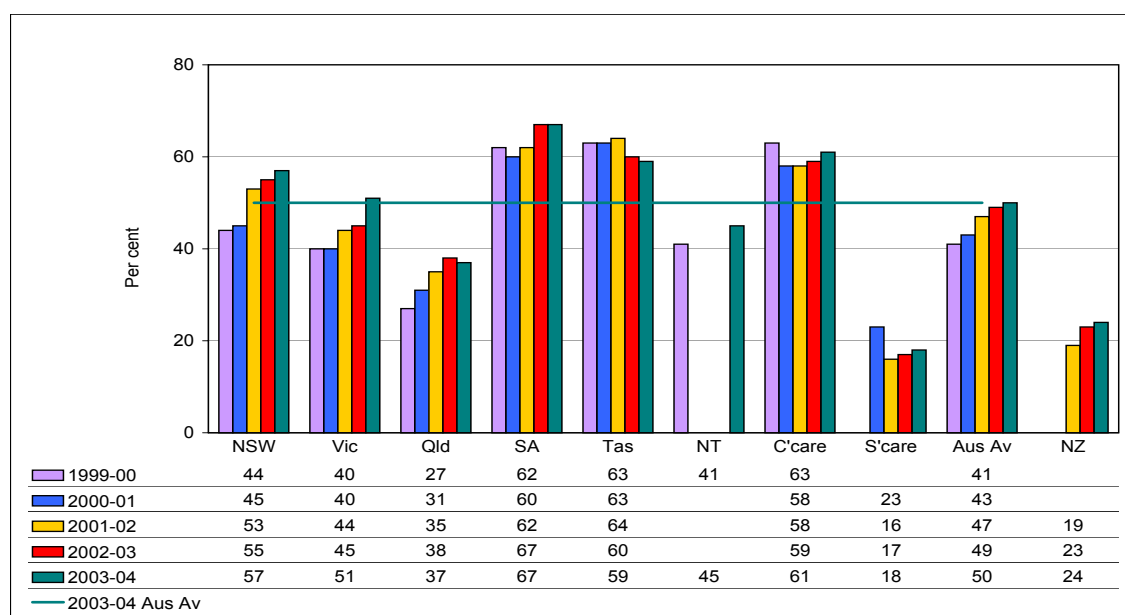
It should be noted that the data presented in the above table are based on cases where income is supplemented only by workers' compensation payments at the time of interview, while the data in Table 20 are based on cases where income is supplemented by any source at the time of interview. As a result, data presented for partial return to work at time of interview differ in the above table.

Return to work plans

Figure 34 shows that the proportion of all injured workers who had a return to work plan varies greatly between jurisdictions. The trend for Australia has been steadily increasing over the past five years to be 50% of all those surveyed. South Australia currently has the highest proportion of injured workers with a return to work plan at 67%, followed by Comcare at 61%. Interestingly these jurisdictions also reported higher partial return to work rates, indicating that having a return to work plan in place may be associated with returning to work on a partial basis. In New Zealand, the proportion with a return to work plan increased slightly to 24%.

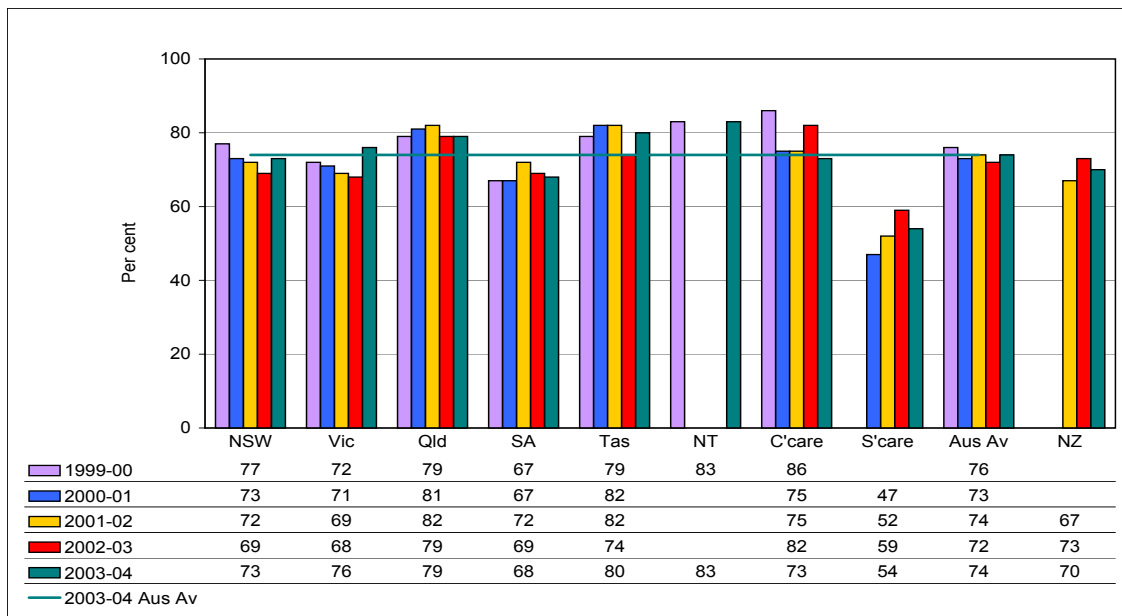
While most jurisdictions reported an increase in the proportion of injured workers with a return to work plan, this has not translated into higher rates of return to work. Over the five year period, Queensland recorded the highest percentage increase in the use of plans. However, in 2003–04 their return to work rate has returned to a level similar to that recorded in 1999–2000, after three years of falling return to work rates.

Figure 34 Proportion of injured workers with a return to work plan



Despite the increasing use of return to work plans, the data contained in Figure 35 do not indicate improvement in the proportion of injured workers who find them helpful. In 2003–04, in Australia, 74% of injured workers with a return to work plan reported that the plan was helpful. This rate has remained relatively steady over the past four years. Most jurisdictions recorded slight rises or similar results to last year. 70% of New Zealand's injured workers with a return to work plan in 2003–04 reported it was helpful.

Figure 35 Proportion claiming return to work plan was helpful



While South Australia recorded the highest proportion of injured workers using return to work plans, it had one of the lowest proportions of injured workers finding them helpful. South Australia also recorded one of the lowest return to work rates of all Australian jurisdictions. Conversely, Queensland had a low proportion of injured workers with a return to work plan, but a high proportion of workers finding these plans helpful. Queensland also had one of the highest return to work rates of all the Australian jurisdictions. Therefore, these data indicate that the use of return to work plans may not affect an injured worker’s rate of returning to work but that injured workers find them helpful.

Explanatory notes for part C

The survey is conducted in November and May each year. The 2003–04 sample consisted of 2687 injured workers who had made a workers' compensation claim. The aggregate survey monitors the return to work outcomes and processes.

Sample size by jurisdiction 2003–04

Jurisdiction	Total Sample Size
New South Wales	600
Victoria	601
Queensland	300
South Australia	384
Tasmania	382
Northern Territory	120
Comcare	244
Seacare	56
TOTAL	2 687
New Zealand	595

Sampling Error

The following paragraphs are taken from the 2003–04 Australia and New Zealand Return to Work Monitor prepared by Campbell Research and Consulting.

As only a sample of all eligible injured workers are surveyed, the statistics produced have sampling error associated with them. That is, estimates from the survey may differ from the numbers that would have been produced if all eligible injured workers had been surveyed. The statistical estimate of sampling error is the standard error.

The standard error provides a basis for measuring the precision to which the sample estimate can estimate the population value. There is about a 5% chance that the true value lies outside a range of two standard errors either side of the sample estimate. Such a range defines a 95% confidence interval (CI) for that estimate.

Survey estimates of 50% and 80% at 95% confidence interval

Sample size	Survey estimate of 50%			Survey estimate of 80%		
	Confidence interval	Lower band	Upper band	Confidence interval	Lower band	Upper band
2687	+/- 1.9%	48.1%	51.9%	+/- 1.5%	78.5%	81.5%

Interpretation of Seacare Authority Results

Seacare Authority injured workers face unique problems in attempting to return to work which need to be considered when interpreting Seacare results. To facilitate graduated return to work for an injured seafarer, a supernumerary position on a ship needs to be found and there are few supernumerary positions available. Also, it can be difficult to include shore-based duties as part of a graduated return to work, as many seafarers live in different locations to their employers' offices.

Injured seafarers have to be passed as medically fit under fitness-for-duties regulations to resume full pre-injury duties. The injury time for seafarers may also be extended by the fact that ships are away from port for four to six weeks, meaning that injured workers may not be able to resume work immediately after they are deemed fit to do so. These factors can result in injured workers waiting additional time to return to work.

Definitions

The following definitions are used in the RTW Monitor:

Return to work rate

The rate of surveyed workers who have returned to work, whether durable (full or partial) or non-durable, at the time of interview.

Durable return to work

An injured worker who returned to work and was still working at the time of the survey, seven to nine months after their claim. Durable return to work is measured by the injured worker reporting their work status, sources of income and compensation status.

Full return to work

An injured worker who returns to work on their formal level of paid employment and is not receiving workers' compensation payments.

Partial return to work

An injured worker who returns to work, or is working at the time of interview, while still receiving workers' compensation payments for lost income.

Non durable return to work

Non-durable return to work refers to workers who returned to work for a period of time but were not deriving income from employment at the time of the interview.

Return to work plan

In some jurisdictions this is called a rehabilitation plan. This is a formal structured plan designed to enhance the achievement of a durable return to work within the limitation of the injured workers' functional capacity.