



LARGE EMPLOYER STUDY

Early Identification and Targeted Intervention Yields Significant WC Claims Savings

**50%
Reduction
in Claims
Cost**

Early Intervention

Combo of early identification and targeted intervention yields significant results

Albertson's Safeway company anticipates up to a 50 percent reduction in total claims costs due to early identification and intervention with injured workers at risk of delayed recoveries. New figures released in a recent data analysis study clearly demonstrate the value of identifying and addressing high risk claims—furthering the evidence of the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in the workers' compensation system.

Denise Gillen-Algire, Albertson's Risk Initiatives Director, unveiled the substantial savings and "statistically significant better claims outcomes" from a trial program that incorporated cognitive behavioral therapy to prevent chronic pain, poly-pharmacy dependency and needless disability among injured workers.

The company partnered with Ascensus to screen injured workers and provide targeted minimal intervention treatment for those at high risk of delayed recoveries. Specifically, the Ascensus Early Intervention Pain Questionnaire (EIPQ), with a 98% accuracy record, was used to identify the risk levels of injured workers, while the Ascensus - Pain Program provided cognitive behavioral therapy to those deemed at high risk.

The Breakthrough Program

Safeway employs 290,000 union and non-union workers at more than 3,000 locations in 41 jurisdictions. With factors such as mental health, co-morbidities and increasing severity driving up workers' compensation medical costs, the company undertook a pilot program in 2013.

Injured workers with low back pain at the company's Northern California facilities were the initial focus of the early intervention program. Southern California worksites were included the following year, and the program was rolled out nationwide in 2015.

A sports medicine approach, early intervention and immediate care are the hallmarks of the program. Skill acquisition, improved function and return-to-work are the goals for the injured workers, especially those deemed at high risk of delayed recoveries.

Inexpensive Identification and Intervention Process

Central to the quick, easy, and accurate identification of high-risk claims is a clinical risk management screening questionnaire administered by the Nurse Triage team. Claims are screened at just two weeks post-injury.

The pain screening questionnaire requires the injured worker is to rate (on a scale of 1 – 10) a series of 21 questions such as:

- ‘How would you rate the pain you have had during the past week,’
- ‘In your view, how large is the risk that your current pain may become permanent?’
- ‘An increase in pain is an indication that I should stop what I’m doing until the pain decreases.’

Those with high scores are flagged as high risk for delayed recoveries and are provided an option to participate in CBT.

The treating CBT behavioral health psychologist from Ascellus, nurse case manager, claims examiner, medical director and others hold team conference sessions to support the CBT plan for the injured worker. They discuss the injured worker’s progress and any apparent problems. They seek to minimize or discontinue the over-utilization of medications and focus is on a timely, coordinated return-to-work.

More than 11,000 screenings were completed since the pilot’s inception. Of those, 12 percent scored “high” for delayed recovery risk. Approximately half the at-risk injured workers opted-in to the Ascellus - Pain Program. Those who participated had an average of just 6 CBT sessions.

The Stellar and Significant Results of Two Studies

A financial study of the costs associated with the 1,822 pain questionnaires administered between 2013 and 2015 in California shows the significant correlation between the Early Intervention Pain Questionnaire scores and costs associated with delayed recovery.

Note that the responders in the “Very high risk” category cost (on average) 20 times more than responders in the “Low risk” category.

Questionnaire Risk Category	Number of people in group	Total Average Cost (Medical and Indemnity)
Low Risk	1,031	\$2,683
Low-Moderate	307	\$15,302
Moderate	145	\$28,585
High	192	\$36,765
Very High	148	\$55,589

Albertson’s further sought to test the effectiveness of the Ascellus - Pain Program intervention during that same period. Three comparison groups of injured workers who scored high on the pain screening questionnaires were created, with the following results:

STATUS OF HIGH RISK RESPONDERS	Number of people in group	Average Total Paid
NOT REFERRED FOR COPE PROGRAM	82	\$73,488
REFERRED BUT NO PARTICIPATION	82	\$44,356
REFERRED AND PARTICIPATED	78	\$36,629

As Denise said, “These are encouraging and exciting results to date. Employees return to work and claims are settled reasonably in approximately 50 percent of cases.” She also said that because of the results they are seeing, primary treating physicians are beginning to refer high-risk injured workers for CBT earlier in the claim process.

Minimal Intervention Yields Max Result

Stress and anxiety are widespread in the workforce. More workers are absent from work due to stress and anxiety than physical illness or injury combined, with the economic burden between 3 and 4 percent of the gross national product.

When workers with behavioral and emotional risk factors become injured, they are more likely than their coworkers to have delayed recoveries. The consequences of delayed recoveries are severe — not only in terms of poor outcomes for the workers, but for the company’s bottom line. An estimated 10 percent of claims consume 80 percent or more of workers’ compensation medical and indemnity resources. And 50 percent of those are avoidable with minimal intervention.

Identifying and using cognitive behavioral therapy for injured workers at risk for delayed recoveries can have a tremendous impact on improving outcomes for all involved in a workers’ compensation claim.



Behavioral Health Built to Connect

Ascellus is the leading behavioral health provider focused on helping injured workers restore their physical and emotional wellbeing.

