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DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AND BUSINESS SERVICES
WORKERS' COMPENSATION DIVISION
OREGON ADMINISTRATIVE RULES
CHAPTER 436, DIVISION 120

VOCATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO INJURED WORKERS

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436-120-0005 Definitions

Except where the context requires otherwise, the construction of these rules is governed by the definitions given in the Workers' Compensation Law and as follows:

(1) "Administrative approval" means approval of the director.

(2) "Cost-of-living matrix" is a chart issued annually by the director which establishes conversion factors used to adjust for changes in the cost-of-living rate. These factors are based on the percentage increase or decrease in the maximum temporary total disability rate from the date of injury to the date of calculation.

(3) "Division" refers to the Workers' Compensation Division of the Department of Consumer and Business Services.

(4) "Employer at injury" means an employer in whose employ the worker sustained the compensable injury, or occupational disease.

(5) "Insurer" means the State Accident Insurance Fund, an insurer authorized under ORS chapter 731 to transact workers' compensation insurance in Oregon, or a self-insured employer. A vocational assistance provider acting as the insurer's delegate may provide notices and warnings required by OAR 436-120.

(6) "Permanent job" means a job which at the time of hire was, or is currently expected to continue indefinitely. A permanent job may be year-round or seasonal.

(7) "Regular employment" means the employment the worker held at the time of the injury or at the time of the claim for aggravation, whichever gave rise to the potential eligibility for vocational assistance; or, for a worker not employed at the time of aggravation, the employment the worker held on the last day of work prior to the aggravation claim. If the basis for potential eligibility is a reopening to process a newly accepted condition, "regular employment" is the employment the worker held at the time of the injury; when the condition arose after claim closure, "regular employment" is determined as if it were an aggravation claim.

(8) "Substantial handicap to employment" means the worker, because of the injury or aggravation, lacks the necessary physical capacities, knowledge, skills and abilities to be employed in suitable employment. "Knowledge," "skills," and "abilities" have meanings as follows:

(a) "Knowledge" means an organized body of factual or procedural information derived from the worker's education, training and experience.

(b) "Skills" means the demonstrated mental and physical proficiency to apply knowledge.

(c) "Abilities" means the mental and physical capability to apply the worker's knowledge and skills.

(9) "Suitable employment" or "suitable job" means employment or a job:

(a) For which the worker has the necessary physical capacities, knowledge, skills and abilities;

(b) Located where the worker customarily worked, or within reasonable commuting distance of the worker's residence. A reasonable commuting distance is no more than 50 miles one-way modified by other factors including, but not limited to:

(A) Wage of the job. A low wage may justify a shorter commute;

(B) The pre-injury commute;

(C) The worker's physical capacities, if they restrict the worker's ability to sit or drive for 50 miles;

(D) Commuting practices of other workers who live in the same geographic area; and

(E) The distance from the worker's residence to the nearest cities or towns which offer employment opportunities;

(c) Which pays or would average on a year-round basis a suitable wage as defined in section (10) of this rule; and

(d) Which is permanent. Temporary work is suitable if the worker's job at injury was temporary; and the worker has transferable skills to earn, on a year-round basis, a suitable wage as defined in section (10) of this rule.

(10) "Suitable wage" means:

(a) For the purpose of determining eligibility for vocational assistance, a wage at least 80 percent of the adjusted weekly wage.

(b) For the purpose of providing and/or ending vocational assistance, a wage as close as possible to 100 percent of the adjusted weekly wage. This wage may be considered suitable if less than 80 percent of the adjusted weekly wage, if the wage is as close as possible to the adjusted weekly wage.

(11) "Transferable skills" means the knowledge and skills demonstrated in past training or employment which make a worker employable in suitable new employment. More general characteristics such as aptitudes or interests do not, by themselves, constitute transferable skills.

(12) "Vocational assistance" means any of the services, goods, allowances and temporary disability compensation under these rules to assist an eligible worker return to work. This does

not include activities for determining a worker's eligibility for vocational assistance.

(13) "Vocational assistance provider" means an insurer or other public or private organization, authorized under these rules to provide vocational assistance to injured workers.

(14) "Reasonable cause" includes, but is not limited to, personal or family illness or medical condition, death in the worker's family, pregnancy of the worker, financial hardship, or circumstances beyond the reasonable control of the worker, that justify failure to provide information or to participate in activities related to vocational assistance.

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436-120-0007 Establishing the Adjusted Weekly Wage to Determine Suitable Wage

To determine a suitable wage as defined in OAR 436-120-0005(12)(a) and (b), the insurer shall first establish the adjusted weekly wage as described in this rule. The insurer must calculate the "adjusted weekly wage" whenever determining or redetermining a worker's eligibility.

(1) For the purposes of this rule, the following definitions apply:

(a) "Adjusted weekly wage" is the wage currently paid as calculated under this rule.

(b) "Cost-of-living adjustments" or "collective bargaining adjustments" are increases or decreases in the wages of all workers performing the same or similar jobs for a specific employer. These adjustments are not variations in wages based on skills, merit, seniority, length of employment, or number of hours worked.

(c) "Earned income" means gross wages, salary, tips, commissions, incentive pay, bonuses and the reasonable value of other consideration (housing, utilities, food, etc.) received from an employer for services performed. Earned income also means gross earnings from self-employment after deductions of business expenses excluding depreciation. Earned income does

not include fringe benefits such as medical, life or disability insurance, employer contributions to pension plans, or reimbursement of the worker's employment expenses such as mileage or equipment rental. **Where the worker held more than one job at the time of injury or aggravation, earned income includes wages from all jobs held at the time of injury or aggravation.**

(d) "Job at aggravation" means the job or jobs the worker held on the date of the aggravation claim; or, for a worker not employed at time of aggravation, the last job or concurrent jobs held prior to the aggravation. Volunteer work does not constitute a job for purposes of this subsection.

(e) "Job at injury" is the job on which the worker originally sustained the compensable injury.

(f) "Permanent, year-round employment" is a job with no projected end date or a job which had no projected end date at time of hire; and on which the worker worked or was scheduled or projected to work in 48 or more calendar weeks a year. Paid leave shall be counted as work time. Permanent year-round employment includes trial service. It does not include employment with an annual salary set by contract or self-employment.

(g) "Trial service" is employment designed to lead automatically to permanent, year-round employment subject only to the employee's satisfactory performance during the trial service period.

(2) The insurer shall determine the nature of the job at injury or the job or jobs at aggravation by contacting the employer or employers to verify the worker's employment status. All figures used in determining a weekly wage by this method shall be supported by verifiable documentation such as the worker's state or federal tax returns, payroll records, or reports of earnings or unemployment insurance payments from the Employment Department. The insurer shall calculate the worker's adjusted weekly wage as described by this rule.

(3) When the job at injury or the job at aggravation was temporary or seasonal, [and the worker received unemployment insurance payments during the 52 weeks prior to injury or aggravation,] calculate the **worker's average** weekly wage as follows, then convert to the adjusted weekly wage as described in section [(7)] **(6)** of this rule:

(a) **Where the worker's regular employment is the job at injury and the worker did not receive unemployment insurance during the 52 weeks prior to the injury, the average wage is the same as the wage upon which temporary disability is based.** [Combine the worker's earned income and unemployment insurance payments from the 52 weeks prior to the injury or aggravation. Divide the total by 52; or]

(b) **Where the worker's regular employment is the job or jobs at aggravation and the worker did not receive unemployment insurance during the 52 weeks prior to the aggravation, the average wage is determined using the methods for determining the worker's average weekly wage described in OAR 436-060.** [Upon written verification of medical incapacity from a licensed physician that the worker was medically unable to work for any period during the 52 weeks prior to the injury or aggravation, calculate the weekly wage by dividing the worker's earned income and unemployment insurance payments for the 52 weeks by the number of

weeks the worker was medically able to work. Any weeks worked and income earned from modified light duty at reduced wages shall also be excluded from these calculations.]

(c) When the worker received unemployment insurance payments during the 52 weeks prior to the date of the injury or aggravation, the average weekly wage is determined using the methods for determining the worker's average weekly wage described in OAR 436-060, except that the amount of unemployment insurance is added to the total earned income, and the number of weeks during which the worker received unemployment insurance payments is included in calculating the number of weeks of actual employment when the worker was employed less than 52 weeks.

(4) When the job at injury was other than as described in section (3) of this rule, use the weekly wage upon which temporary total disability was based, and then convert the weekly wage to the adjusted weekly wage as described in section [(7)] **(6)** of this rule.

(5) When the job at aggravation was other than as described in section (3) of this rule, calculate the worker's weekly wage using the methods described for determining temporary total disability in ORS 436-060, and then convert to the adjusted weekly wage as described in section [(7)] **(6)** of this rule.

(6) [When the worker held two or more jobs at aggravation, calculate the weekly wage for each job as described in section (5) and for all jobs as described in section (3). The worker's weekly wage shall be the higher of the calculations. Then convert the weekly wage to the adjusted weekly wage as described in section (7) of this rule.

(7)] Adjusted weekly wage: After arriving at the weekly wage pursuant to this rule, establish the adjusted weekly wage by determining the percentage increase or decrease from the date of injury or aggravation, or last day worked prior to aggravation, to the date of calculation, as follows:

(a) Contact the employer at injury or aggravation regarding any cost-of-living or collective bargaining adjustments for workers performing the same job. When the worker held two or more jobs at aggravation, contact the employer for whom the worker worked the most hours. Adjust the worker's weekly wage by any percentage increase or decrease;

(b) If the employer at injury or aggravation is no longer in business and the worker's job was covered by a union contract, contact the applicable union for any cost-of-living or collective bargaining adjustments. Adjust the worker's weekly wage by the percentage increase or decrease; or

(c) If the employer at injury or aggravation is no longer in business or does not currently employ workers in the same job category, adjust the worker's weekly wage by the appropriate factor from the cost-of-living matrix.

Stat. Auth.: ORS 656.340(9), ORS 656.726(3)
Stat. Impltd.: ORS 656.340(5) and (6)
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436-120-0008 Administrative Review and Contested Cases

(1) **Administrative review of vocational assistance matters**: Under ORS 656.283(2) and 656.340(4), a worker wanting review of any vocational assistance matter must apply to the director for administrative review. Also, under ORS 656.340(11) and OAR 436-120-0320(9) when the worker and insurer are unable to agree on a vocational assistance provider, the insurer shall apply to the director for administrative review. Because effective vocational assistance is best realized in a nonadversarial environment, the first objective of the administrative review is to bring the parties to resolution through alternative dispute resolution procedures, including mediation conferences, whenever possible and appropriate. When a dispute is not resolved through mutual agreement or dismissal, the director shall close the record and issue a Director's Review and Order as described in subsections (f) and (g). A worker need not be represented to request or to participate in the administrative review process, which is as follows:

(a) The worker's request for review must be mailed or otherwise communicated to the department no later than the 60th day after the date the worker received written notice of the insurer's action; or, if the worker was represented at the time of the notice, within 60 days of the date the worker's representative received actual notice. Issues raised by the worker where written notice was not provided may be reviewed at the director's discretion.

(b) The worker, insurer, employer at injury, and vocational assistance provider shall supply needed information, attend conferences and meetings, and participate in the administrative review process as required by the director. Upon the director's request, any party to the dispute shall provide available information within 14 days of the request. The insurer shall promptly schedule, pay for, and submit to the director any medical or vocational tests, consultations, or reports required by the director. The worker, insurer, employer at injury, or vocational assistance provider shall simultaneously send copies to the other parties to the dispute when sending material to the director. If necessary, the director will assist an unrepresented worker in sending copies to the appropriate parties. Failure to comply with this subsection may result in the following:

(A) If the worker fails to comply without [good] **reasonable** cause, the director may dismiss the administrative review as described in subsection (d); or, the director may decide the issue on the basis of available information.

(B) If the insurer, vocational assistance provider, or employer at injury fails to comply without [good] **reasonable** cause, the director may decide the issue on the basis of available information.

(c) At the director's discretion, the director may issue an order of deferral to temporarily suspend administrative review. The order of deferral will specify the conditions under which the review will be resumed.

(d) The director may issue an order of dismissal under appropriate conditions.

(e) The director shall issue a letter of agreement when the parties resolve a dispute within

the scope of these rules. The agreement will become final on the 10th day after the letter of agreement is issued unless the agreement specifies otherwise. Once the agreement becomes final, the director may reconsider approval of the agreement upon the director's own motion or upon a motion by a party. The director may revise the agreement or reinstate the review only under one or more of the following conditions:

(A) One or both parties fail to honor the agreement;

(B) The agreement was based on misrepresentation; or

(C) Implementation of the agreement is not feasible because of unforeseen circumstances.

(f) After the parties have had the opportunity to present evidence, and any meetings or conferences deemed necessary by the director have been held, the director shall issue a final order, including the notice of record contents. The parties will have 60 days from the issuance of the order to request a contested case hearing before the director.

(g) The director may on the director's own motion reconsider or withdraw any order that has not become final by operation of law. A party also may request reconsideration of an administrative order upon an allegation of error, omission, misapplication of law, incomplete record, or the discovery of new material evidence which could not reasonably have been discovered and produced during the review. The director may grant or deny a request for reconsideration at the director's sole discretion. A request for reconsideration must be mailed before the administrative order becomes final, or if appealed, before the contested case order is issued.

(h) During any reconsideration of the administrative review order, the parties may submit new material evidence consistent with this subsection and may respond to such evidence submitted by others.

(i) Any party requesting reconsideration or responding to a reconsideration request shall simultaneously notify all other interested parties of their contentions and provide them with copies of all additional information presented.

(j) A request for reconsideration does not stay the 60-day time period within which the parties must request a contested case hearing.

(2) **Contested cases regarding the director's administrative review**: Under ORS 656.283, orders issued under subsection (1)(g) of this rule and dismissals issued under subsection (1)(d) of this rule may be appealed to the director for a contested case hearing as follows:

(a) The party must send the request for hearing in writing to the administrator of the Workers' Compensation Division and shall simultaneously send a copy of the request to the other party(ies). The request must specify the grounds upon which the order is contested.

(b) The party must mail the request to the division within 60 days of the date of the order.

(c) The division will conduct the hearing in accordance with the rules governing contested case hearings in OAR 436-001.

(3) **Contested cases regarding jurisdiction or reimbursement of costs:** Under ORS 183.310 through 183.550 and ORS 656.704(2), a worker may appeal an order of dismissal based on lack of jurisdiction under subsection (1)(d) of this rule; or, under ORS 183.310 through 183.550 and ORS 656.704(2), an insurer may appeal department denial of reimbursement for vocational assistance costs under OAR 436-120-0730 as follows:

(a) The party must send the request for hearing to the administrator of the Workers' Compensation Division. The party must also simultaneously send a copy of the request to the other party(ies). The request must specify the grounds upon which the denial is contested.

(b) The party must mail the request to the division no later than the 30th day after the party received the dismissal or written denial.

(c) The division will conduct the hearing in accordance with the rules governing contested case hearings in OAR 436-001.

(4) **Contested case hearings of civil penalties**: Under ORS 656.740 an insurer or an employer may appeal a proposed order or proposed assessment of civil penalty pursuant to ORS 656.745 and OAR 436-120-0900 as follows:

(a) The insurer or employer must send the request for hearing in writing to the administrator of the Workers' Compensation Division. The request must specify the grounds upon which the proposed order or assessment is contested.

(b) The party must mail the request to the division no later than the 60th day after the insurer or employer received notice of the proposed order or assessment.

(c) The division shall forward the request and other pertinent information to the Hearings Division of the Workers' Compensation Board.

(d) The Hearings Division shall conduct the hearing in accordance with ORS 656.740 and ORS Chapter 183.

(5) **Contested case hearings of sanctions and denials of certification or authorization by the director**: Under ORS 183.310 through 183.550, an insurer sanctioned pursuant to ORS 656.447 and OAR 436-120-0900(4), a vocational assistance provider or certified individual sanctioned pursuant to ORS 656.340(9)(b) and OAR 436-120-0915, a vocational assistance provider denied authorization pursuant to ORS 656.340(9)(a) and OAR 436-120-0800, or an individual denied certification pursuant to ORS 656.340(9)(a) and OAR 436-120-0810 may

appeal as follows:

(a) The party must send the request for administrative review in writing to the administrator of the Workers' Compensation Division. The request must specify the grounds upon which the action is contested.

(b) The party must mail the request to the division no later than the 60th day after the party received notification of the action, unless the director determines there was good cause for delay or that substantial injustice may otherwise result.

(c) The division will conduct the hearing in accordance with the rules governing contested case hearings in OAR 436-001.

Stat. Auth.: ORS 656.704(2), 656.726(4)
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436-120-0350 Ineligibility and End of Eligibility for Vocational Assistance

A worker is ineligible or the worker's eligibility ends when any of the following conditions apply:

(1) The worker does not or no longer meets the eligibility requirements as defined in OAR 436-120-0320. The insurer must have obtained new information which did not exist or which the insurer could not have discovered with reasonable effort at the time the insurer determined eligibility.

(2) The worker is determined not to have permanent disability after a finding of eligibility.

(3) The worker's lack of suitable employment is not due to the limitations caused by the injury or which existed before the injury.

(4) The worker has been employed at least for 60 days in suitable employment after the injury or aggravation and any necessary worksite modification is in place.

(5) The worker, prior to beginning an authorized return-to-work plan, refused an offer of suitable employment, or left suitable employment after the injury or aggravation for a reason unrelated to the limitations due to the compensable injury. If the employer-at-injury offers

employment to a non-medically stationary worker, the offer must be made in accordance with OAR 436-060.

(6) The worker, prior to beginning an authorized return-to-work plan, refused or failed to make a reasonable effort in available light-duty work intended to result in suitable employment. Prior to finding the worker ineligible or ending eligibility, the insurer shall document the existence of one or more suitable jobs which would have been available for the worker upon successful completion of the light-duty work. If the employer-at-injury offers such employment to a non-medically stationary worker, the offer must be made in accordance with OAR 436-060.

(7) The worker, after completing an authorized training plan, refused an offer of suitable employment.

(8) The worker has declined or has become unavailable for vocational assistance **for reasonable cause**. If the insurer does not [consider the reason] **believe the worker had reasonable cause** [for declining services or unavailability to be for good cause], the insurer shall warn the worker prior to finding the worker ineligible or ending the worker's eligibility under this section. [Good cause shall include, but is not limited to, medically documented worker illness, the documented serious illness or death of an immediate family member.]

(9) The worker has failed, after written warning, to participate in the vocational assistance process, or to provide relevant information. No written warning is required if the worker refuses a suitable training site after the vocational counselor and worker have agreed in writing upon a return-to-work goal.

(10) The worker has failed, after written warning, to comply with the return-to-work plan. No written warning is required if the worker stops attending training without [good] **reasonable** cause, or without notifying the vocational counselor or the insurer.

(11) The worker's lack of suitable employment cannot be resolved by providing vocational assistance. This includes circumstances in which the worker cannot benefit from, or participate in, vocational assistance because of medical conditions unrelated to the injury.

(12) The worker has misrepresented a matter material to evaluating eligibility or providing vocational assistance.

(13) The worker has refused, after written warning, to return property provided by the insurer or reimburse the insurer after the insurer has notified the worker of the repossession; or the worker has misused funds provided for the purchase of property or services. No vocational assistance shall be provided under the current or subsequent openings of the claim until the worker has returned the property or reimbursed the funds.

(14) The worker physically abused any party to the vocational process, or after written warning, has continued to sexually harass or threaten to physically abuse any party to the vocational process. This section does not apply if such behavior is the result of a documented medical or mental condition. In such a situation, eligibility should be ended under section (11) of

this rule.

(15) The worker has entered into a claim disposition agreement (CDA) which disposes of vocational assistance eligibility. The parties may agree in writing to suspend vocational services pending approval by the Workers' Compensation Board (Board). The insurer shall end eligibility when the Board approves the CDA. No notice regarding the end of eligibility is required.

(16) The worker has received maximum direct employment services and is not entitled to other categories of vocational assistance.

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436-120-0360 Redetermining Eligibility for Vocational Assistance

If a worker was previously found ineligible or the worker's eligibility ended for any of the reasons specified below, upon notification of a change of circumstances the insurer shall redetermine eligibility. The insurer shall complete the eligibility evaluation within 35 days of one of the following:

(1) The worker, for [good] **reasonable** cause, declined or was not available for vocational assistance, or the barrier causing the worker's lack of suitable employment could not be resolved by providing vocational assistance, and those circumstances have changed. The insurer may require the worker to provide documentation the barrier no longer exists, including medical or psychological reports relating to noncompensable conditions.

(2) The worker was not available in Oregon, and the worker becomes available. The worker must request redetermination within six months of the worker's receipt of the insurer's notice.

(3) The worker's claim was denied, and the claim is later accepted and all appeals exhausted.

(4) The worker was not awarded permanent disability and the worker is later awarded permanent disability.

(5) The worker was not authorized to work in the United States, and the worker is now authorized to work in the United States. The time limit set in this section applies to any worker found ineligible or whose eligibility ended because the worker was not authorized to work in the

United States regardless of the date the notice of ineligibility or end of eligibility was issued. Within six months of the date of the worker's receipt of the insurer's notice of ineligibility or end of eligibility, the worker must:

(a) Request redetermination; and

(b) Submit evidence to the insurer that the worker has applied for authorization to work in the United States and is awaiting a decision by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The worker shall promptly provide the insurer with a copy of any decision by the INS. The insurer shall redetermine eligibility upon receipt of documentation of the worker's authorization to work in the United States.

(6) The worker was unavailable for vocational assistance due to short-term incarceration for a matter unrelated to the worker's claim and is now available. Within six months of the date of the worker's receipt of the insurer's notice of ineligibility or end of eligibility, the worker must:

(a) Request redetermination; and

(b) Submit evidence to the insurer that the worker is now available to participate in vocational assistance.

(7) Prior to claim closure a worker's limitations due to the injury became more restrictive.

(8) Prior to claim closure the insurer accepts a new condition which was not considered in the original determination of the worker's eligibility.

(9) The worker returned to work prior to the worker becoming medically stationary, and the physician later rescinds the release.

(10) The worker returned to work prior to becoming medically stationary, and the worker requests a redetermination within 60 days of the mailing date of the Notice of Closure or Determination Order.

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436-120-0430 Direct Employment

(1) The insurer shall provide an eligible worker with four months of direct employment services dating from the date the insurer approves a direct employment plan or the completion date of an authorized training plan. Direct employment services include, but are not limited to,

the following:

(a) Vocational evaluation, if needed.

(b) Employment counseling.

(c) Job search skills instruction, which teaches workers how to write resumes, research the job market, locate suitable new employment, complete employment applications, interview for employment, and develop other skills related to looking for suitable new employment.

(d) Job development, which assists the worker to contact appropriate prospective employers, and with related return-to-work activities.

(e) Job analysis.

(2) The insurer shall provide return-to-work follow-up for at least 60 days after the worker becomes employed to ensure the work is suitable and to provide any necessary assistance which enables the worker to continue the employment.

(3) Direct employment services are available for more than four months if the worker was unable to participate for [good] **reasonable** cause.

Stat. Auth.: ORS 656.340(9), 656.726(4)
Stat. Impltd.: ORS 656.340(7)
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