

Meeting minutes: Rehabilitation Review Panel

Date: April 3, 2025

Minutes prepared by: Katrina Namad

Location: Hybrid – Isanti Room at the Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), 443 Lafayette Road N., St. Paul, MN, and via Webex

Members present

- Angie Andresen (remotely)
- Ashley Scully
- Carl Crimmins (chair)
- David Dubovich (remotely)
- Jane McEllistrem (remotely)
- Jessica Stimac, assistant commissioner
- Laura Hokeness
- Megan Schueller (remotely)
- Richard Hills (remotely)
- Russell Gelfman (vice-chair)

Members absent

- David Frary
- Paul Osterbauer
- Sarah Hunter
- Scott Parker
- Stacie Goodrich
- Steve Patton

DLI staff members present

- Alexis Johnson (remotely)
- April DelCastillo
- Bretta Hines
- Denise Holmes
- Ethan Landy
- Jeanne Vogel (remotely)
- Jordan Trumbo (remotely)
- Katrina Namad
- Lisa Wichterman
- Michelle Doheny
- Salina Tekle
- Silvia Casadey
- Sharon Benkufsky
- Tom Garza

Visitors present

- Danielle Hacker (remotely)
- Kaylene Kickhafer
- Tyler Trombley

Agenda items

1. **Call to order** – Chair Carl Crimmins called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. A roll call was taken and a quorum was met.
2. **Approval of Jan. 9, 2025, meeting minutes** – A motion to approve the meeting minutes was made by Ashley Scully and seconded by Laura Hokeness. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried.

3. Approval of April 3, 2025 agenda – A motion to approve the agenda was made by Russell Gelfman and seconded by Hokeness. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried.

4. DLI updates – DLI Assistant Commissioner Jessica Stimac

- The contract with Dr. Taiwo Lawal, DLI medical consultant, was extended through June 2026. Lawal began working with the agency in October 2024 after extensive efforts to secure a consultant. Notably, she is supporting rulemaking processes for both the Workers' Compensation Division (WCD) and Minnesota OSHA, including updates to treatment parameters related to low back conditions and blood lead level regulations.
- The Medical Services Review Board will meet from 4 to 6 p.m., Thursday, April 17. If you are interested in reviewing a working draft of rule updates regarding low back treatment parameters for therapeutic and diagnostic injections, please join.
- The Workers' Compensation Advisory Council (WCAC) unanimously voted to advance DLI's housekeeping proposals to the Legislature at the March 26 WCAC meeting. While this package is less extensive than previous ones, it is not necessarily the final version of the WCAC bill that will advance to the Legislature. A formal update about the legislative package recommended by WCAC will be provided at the next meeting.
- DLI continues to work with the University of Minnesota on the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) study. The data-gathering phase is now complete; data analysis and report drafting is proceeding. The final report is due Aug. 1, with plans to provide this body a comprehensive update once finalized.
- Draft housekeeping proposals discussed at recent WCAC meetings are available on the council's webpage under "Department of Labor and Industry proposals." The agenda for the April 9 WCAC meeting will be released tomorrow. The meeting, scheduled from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., can be attended remotely or in person at the department. Although no votes will take place, the agenda promises engaging discussions, including a bill from the Office of Administrative Hearings to rename itself the Court of Administrative Hearings.

5. Education – Denise Holmes, DLI Compliance, Records and Training

- At DLI in mid-February, there was an all-day orientation training sessions for qualified rehabilitation consultant (QRC) interns. It was a successful educational event and DLI received positive feedback from attendees.
- A joint online presentation by the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and Compliance, Records and Training (CRT) units was provided with the goal of raising awareness about what options WCD can offer to assist in resolution of unpaid rehabilitation bills. A training video will also be developed and posted online next month. An email communication will be sent to the vocational rehabilitation community when those resources become available.
- The CRT training team is also working on creating permanent partial disability training modules, as well as updating employer training materials.

6. Introductions – Lisa Wichterman, DLI ombudsman, and Sharon Benkufsky, DLI medical policy specialist

- Lisa Wichterman is the new DLI ombudsman. She has been with DLI for 17 years and assumed the role Jan. 28. She looks forward to collaborating with this committee and supporting injured workers, small businesses and QRCs as they navigate the workers' compensation system.

- Sharon Benkufsky serves as the DLI medical policy specialist. She has been with DLI for about two years and stepped into this role approximately six weeks ago.

7. Work Comp Campus updates – Michelle Doheny and Sylvia Casadey, DLI Business Technology Office

- Michelle Doheny provided updates from DLI’s Business Technology Office.
 - *Campus Connect*, a monthly newsletter, was recently launched. It covers Campus-specific updates, with targeted communication lists ensuring relevant notifications for stakeholders and users. It is a separate subscription from *COMPACT*, DLI’s quarterly workers’ compensation newsletter.
 - Usability studies were launched to enhance user experiences in Campus and identify challenges, frustrations and overall sentiment. These studies will eventually expand to external users. Collaboration with QRCs has informed system changes through workflow observations and feedback.
 - An enterprise architect and a data engineer were recently hired to optimize system structure and enhance data management and reporting, particularly for the data mart.
 - In 2024, 311 Campus-related items across 24 releases were completed, addressing system issues and implementing enhancements. The 2025 roadmap highlights three areas: user experience enhancements; data and reporting improvements; and infrastructure upgrades.
 - Priorities for user experience include access management for QRCs, benefits tab optimization and improvements funded by the technology modernization fund, such as enhanced navigation and tab differentiation.
 - Campus permission structures have undergone review, with plans to extend updates externally. The assessments feature, tied to the Special Compensation Fund, focuses on recurring user interface updates to address urgent issues. Data reporting resources are improving data setup and reporting capabilities. Infrastructure and upgrades are ongoing to ensure systems remain current, with legislative developments and external collaboration potentially influencing priorities.
- Sylvia Casadey provided a detailed overview of QRC access management. Previously, improvements to the change of employment process within the access management feature, streamlining QRC role transitions and Campus access adjustments were reviewed. The second deployment enhances the QRC change process further.
 - The R-3 forms (continuous assigned QRC, withdrawal of QRC and QRC change) will be displayed as three separate pages for a more user-friendly experience. A data link has also been added to simplify filing the QRC change form. Internal processes for DLI’s Vocational Rehabilitation unit are being improved to ensure seamless transitions for cases taken over from external QRCs.
 - The R-3 forms pages allow for enhanced navigation and styles to meet accessibility requirements. A direct link to the QRC change form removes the need for claim access requests, enabling QRCs to locate rehabilitation transactions (RTs) using search criteria and gain access upon form submission. The forms remain accessible in the “My Forms” and “Documents” tabs.
 - To ensure transparency, Campus updates will be communicated upon deployment with screenshots and instructions for the revised forms.
- Discussion ensued, including the following.
 - Injured workers can interact with Campus, though only a small user group (fewer than 80 registered) actively uses the platform. Raising awareness and streamlining registration via the help desk remains a focus. Injured workers are exempt from the legal requirement to create accounts due to

barriers such as limited internet access. Usability studies and outreach efforts are ongoing to enhance their experience.

- Facilitating injured workers' participation in Campus through QRCs and simplifying registration processes can improve engagement. Direct help desk support is recommended to address challenges and partnering with QRCs can enhance outreach effectiveness. Information packets and resources should include bilingual (English and Spanish) materials to increase accessibility.
- One-page resources summarizing Campus features could aid communication with injured workers. Including term definitions, claim walkthrough links and FAQs directly in Campus would further streamline access. A demonstration or training environment is planned to simplify navigation and improve usability.
- Help features, such as clickable field explanations and reference resources, are being discussed to reduce complexity. Mobile accessibility ensures Campus usability across devices and collaborative feedback about resource development is valuable for improving accessibility.
- Injured workers facing disputes or limited communication with attorneys can contact the help desk or ADR unit for assistance in understanding claim status.
- The help desk, ombudsman, ADR and dispute-resolution hotline are distinct resources. A flyer with contact information could simplify access for injured workers. The help desk staff handles inquiries effectively, resolving more than 50% of issues without referring to another unit.
- Rehabilitation rules remain unpublished in the *State Register* as Campus changes are prioritized. Publication is expected soon, with updates to follow.

8. Update regarding professional organization merger – Kaylene Kickhafer and Tyler Trombley, Minnesota Association of Rehabilitation Providers

- Kaylene Kickhafer, president of the Minnesota Association of Rehabilitation Providers (MARP) and a QRC since 1985, and Tyler Trombley, former Minnesota Association of Service Providers in Private Rehabilitation (MASPPR) president and current MARP board member, shared updates about MARP changes. Last year, MARP focused on improving rehabilitation services and, through discussions with MASPPR, both organizations merged under the MARP name Jan. 1. The merger unified efforts and fostered collaboration, benefiting the rehabilitation community.
- MARP aims to serve as a key resource for the Rehabilitation Review Panel and DLI, simplifying communication and supporting injured workers. The MARP Legislative Committee was rebranded, shifting it from reactive to proactive leadership. By addressing vocational rehabilitation issues, MARP seeks to drive progress and collaborate effectively with stakeholders.
- Initiatives include enhancing training for interns and licensed QRCs, focusing on vocational testing, labor market surveys and transferable skills analysis. These programs aim to address gaps for members with diverse backgrounds. Coordinating with the Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute (SVRI) and stakeholders, MARP plans to deliver impactful training for both interns and professionals.
- MARP now has 139 members, with growth resulting from both the merger and increased awareness of its value as a resource. Improvements to the website, board nominations and the coming spring conference further showcase its progress. Greta Borman will step in as president, while Kickhafer transitions to past president.
- Retraining plans for injured workers require DLI approval to ensure they return to comparable wage levels, but QRC professional development does not. Continuing education units for QRCs, offered

through programs such as SVRI, focus on private sector needs, ensuring consistent standards for areas such as transferable skills analysis while addressing training gaps.

- Discussion ensued, including the following.
 - A potential gap in committee discussions is tracking injured workers after case closure. Gathering such data could offer valuable insights but poses challenges in resources, privacy and standardization. Collaboration with DLI could help address this issue, as understanding post-case outcomes remains crucial.
 - Data about settlements should ideally come from external sources. Final settlements close rehabilitation by worker choice and follow-ups by QRCs would be voluntary. While studying post-settlement outcomes is valuable, statutory safeguards already exist and efforts to restrict settlement options raise complex legal and contractual issues. These challenges highlight the need for balanced, careful consideration.
 - The data needed is unlikely to come from DLI, so committees must assess its importance and the resources required. Without additional data, progress is limited, because DLI's jurisdiction ends after case closure. Efforts like outreach or surveys could help, but providers would need to lead these initiatives and standardize processes.
 - Developing a standardized survey for 100 past clients could provide insights, but must comply with professional conduct rules. Challenges include sample size, data comparability and ensuring injured workers voluntarily participate. Collaboration with WCAC may be required for statutory changes, but complex legal and logistical issues persist.
 - Clients often mention their attorneys advise against contacting QRCs post-settlement. QRCs advocate for provisions such as resumes and job placement in settlements, but this represents a cultural rather than statutory shift. Achieving progress on settlement issues requires navigating the advisory council, balancing competing interests and adhering to statutory frameworks. Despite challenges, the MARP board plays a key role in addressing these matters.
 - The recommended training – vocational testing, labor market surveys and transferable skills analysis – are primarily targeted at QRC interns, but are open to all, including QRCs and vendors. The main focus is on QRCs with medical training backgrounds who lack formal vocational rehabilitation coursework, such as nurses without training from programs such as Mankato, St. Cloud or Stout. Those with vocational rehabilitation degrees might join as a refresher, but the goal is to address gaps in vocational training.

9. Future agenda items – chair Crimmins and panel

- The PTSD report will be provided at the October meeting. The report is due Aug. 1; having the report on the agenda in October would allow for a more meaningful and comprehensive update to the panel.
- For a legislative and rulemaking update, we hope to have the rehabilitation registration rules finalized. We will also have more information about the WCAC bill.
- A review of any federal changes affecting the state's workers' compensation system was suggested. DLI noted that while federal policies have impacted other agencies, DLI's WCD is funded by assessments on workers' compensation payers versus federal dollars, so is relatively insulated. Potential impacts on undocumented workers remain an outstanding question. Overall, the system's structure minimizes federal influence, but we will monitor for any relevant changes and provide updates accordingly.

10. Next in-person meeting – 1 p.m., Thursday, July 10

Adjournment

- A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Gelfman and seconded by Hokeness. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried. Adjourned at 2:34 p.m.