

# Out of State/Out of Country Referral Hub

## Frequently Asked Questions



**Note:** This reference material is intended for use by vocational firm owners, managers, and other staff tasked with assigning referrals to counselors.

### **1. What requirements must a firm meet to receive out-of-state/out-of-country (OOS/C) referrals?**

There are no additional credentials or requirements for firms to receive OOS/C referrals. However, there are expectations that assigned counselors have an understanding of the complexities associated with OOS/C claims. Firms should review the **OOS/C Guidance**, updated **QA Plan**, and understand the changes to MARFS, Chapter 30 (detailed in #15), that take effect July 1.

### **2. Is the OOS/C referral hub a service location or a branch?**

The OOS/C referral hub is essentially a service location. It is designated as service location "0" with a branch ID unique to each firm. Unique branch IDs have been emailed directly to firms.

### **3. How does a vocational firm notify L&I that they want to receive OOS/C referrals?**

Email the names and provider numbers for each counselor you wish to assign to the OOS/C hub to **Private Sector Rehabilitation Services (PSRS)**.

### **4. How many counselors can I attach to the OOS/C hub?**

Firms may attach as many counselors as they like. The hub is not considered part of a counselor's (up to) three contiguous service locations.

### **5. When will the OOS/C hub go live?**

The hub goes live on May 1. To begin receiving OOS/C referrals, firms need to have counselors attached to the hub. By attaching counselors to the OOS/C hub, the firm agrees to accept OOS and OOC referrals.

### **6. Can the firm select to *only* receive out-of-state referrals?**

No. Each firm will have only one OOS/C hub where both OOS and OOC referrals are assigned. Therefore, if you accept out-of-state, you also agree to accept out-of-country referrals.

### **7. Can the firm choose specific states or countries where VRCs are assigned and available for work?**

No. When a firm agrees to accept OOS/C referrals, they agree to provide services in any state or country.

### **8. Can a firm close physical branch offices located outside of the state?**

Yes. L&I will be deactivating existing OOS branches in its system by August, after existing referrals are transferred to the new OOS/C referral hub. The firm may decide to maintain its physical "brick and mortar" locations outside of the state, but OOS/C referrals will only be assigned to the firm's OOS/C hub.

## 9. What is the percentage of OOS/C referrals in our system?

This is a fluid number, but there are about 900 open OOS/C referrals. OOS/C referrals account for less than 6% of all referrals in the system. New OOS/C referrals are rare. The most common scenario for working with an OOS/C worker is when the worker relocates after vocational services have started.

## 10. What is a vocational provider's responsibility when a worker relocates in the middle of a referral?

Contact the claim manager (CM) as soon as possible to report that the worker is relocating. Assist the worker in notifying L&I, in writing, of their change of address using the **Change of Address Form** (F242-388-000).

Contact the vocational services specialist (VSS) to move the referral to the firm's OOS/C hub. If the firm **is** actively accepting new OOS/C referrals, the firm will be expected to retain the referral. However, the VSS will need to close the existing referral and re-refer it to the firm's OOS/C hub.

If the firm **is not** accepting new OOS/C referrals, the VSS and the firm will discuss the benefits of continuity versus the benefits of re-assigning the worker to a firm with VRCs attached to the hub.

If the firm decides to keep the referral, they should anticipate keeping the referral through all phases of vocational services. The VSS will still need to close the existing referrals and re-refer it back to the firm. To ensure the firm does not receive new OOS/C referrals, the counselor will be attached to the hub to enable the referral assignment, but will be detached from the hub after the assignment is made. The referral will stay connected to the hub, but the counselor will not.

The **Quality Assurance Plan** outlines expectations for retaining or returning OOS/C referrals in the referral distribution section.

## 11. What will happen to my existing OOS/C referrals if I decide to not accept new OOS/C referrals?

After the hub is implemented on May 1, 2024, L&I will begin transferring existing referrals to each firm's OOS/C hub. Existing referrals will remain with the firm, regardless of whether they are accepting new OOS/C referrals or not.

For firms not accepting new referrals, the counselor will be attached to the hub to enable the referral assignment, but will be detached from the hub after the assignment is made. This will prevent the firm from receiving new referrals.

## 12. Are "border cities" considered out-of-state?

Border cities are defined by their specific zip codes in Idaho and Oregon. Border cities are considered in-state referrals and not attached to the OOS/C hub. The first three numbers of border city zip codes are:

- Idaho: 835, 838
- Oregon: 970, 971, 972, 978

## 13. Can interns work OOS/C referrals?

Yes. Interns can work with OOS/C workers the same as they do with in-state workers.

#### **14. Will there be specific policies for OOS/C VRCs?**

The same WACs and RCWs that apply to in-state services apply to OOS/C services. However, there are some new billing policies, effective July 1, in MARFS that require prior authorization and limits for reimbursements often associated with OOS/C travel.

#### **15. What are the July 1 changes to MARFS, Chapter 30?**

VSS pre-authorization will be required for a vocational provider's air travel and lodging expenses. L&I will reimburse airfare and hotel costs up to the per diem rates calculated by the **U.S. General Services Administration**.

#### **16. Are providers expected to provide in-person services to OOS/C workers?**

In-person engagement remains the gold standard, but counselors are encouraged to weigh the costs associated with travel against the expected benefits to the worker. When practical, counselors should utilize telephone and virtual platforms to meet with workers, employers, and medical providers.

#### **17. What will L&I pay when a counselor travels OOS/C to meet with a worker?**

If an in-person meeting with an OOS/C worker is necessary, L&I will pay up to the **U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) travel rates** for airfare, hotel, and mileage.

#### **18. How does a vocational counselor determine if in-person meetings are necessary?**

The following services should have priority for in-person meetings, when possible:

- Job analyses
- Plan development rights and responsibilities
- Initial meetings with the worker

However, goals associated with in-person meetings can generally be accomplished by phone, a virtual platform, or by another counselor in the worker's location. Providers should explore all options before planning travel involving hotel and airfare.

#### **19. What prior authorization is needed for OOS/C travel reimbursement through L&I?**

Bills for airfare and hotel expenses will NOT be paid unless prior authorization has been obtained by a vocational services specialist.

If an in-person meeting with an OOS/C worker is necessary, the counselor must submit an EVOC with the following information:

- What are the objectives for the in-person meeting?
- Why is a remote meeting not an option for the worker?
- Have you explored the option of utilizing a different counselor located near the worker?
- What is the estimated date range for your meeting with the worker? The meeting must be at least 14 days from the date of the request.

A VSS will review the justification and claim details and contact the counselor with questions. If the benefits to the worker and employer, school, or medical provider outweigh the expenses associated with traveling, the VSS may approve the travel up to the amounts allowed by the **U.S. GSA** for airfare and hotel.

Decisions about travel reimbursement for airfare and lodging will be made on a case-by-case basis. Requests must be submitted prior to purchasing plane tickets or booking hotels. Requests must be submitted at least two weeks before any planned air travel.

**20. How will L&I ensure that there are enough VRCs willing to take OOS/C referrals?**

L&I is committed to ensuring that high quality vocational services are provided to every referred worker. We also don't want to overwhelm counselors who attach to our new OOS/C hub. To smooth the transition, we will continue to use our current process, as a back up, until we have an adequate number of VRCs attached to our OOS/C referral hub.