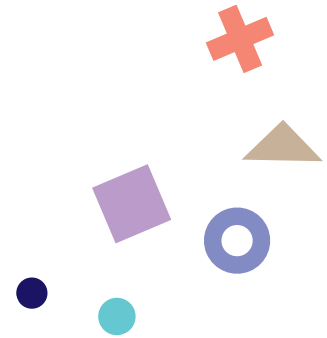


Why menopause at work? Why now?

Menopausal transition is emerging as an important workplace issue. Here are five reasons why it should be on your organization's agenda.



1. Demography is destiny

Most Western women reach menopause at around 51 years of age. At the same time, women aged 45-55 years represent an increasing portion of the global workforce. In Australia in 2017, for example, just under 80% of women aged 45-54 years were in paid employment¹. This included over 1 million in the same age range working in healthcare, education and retail, the three biggest employers of women in Australia². Similarly, according to a report for the UK's Department of Education³, in 2014 there were 4.3 million women aged 50 years and above in paid work in the UK. As the number of employed women transitioning through menopause increases, and with 25% likely to experience difficulties associated with menopausal symptoms at work⁴, employers will need to confront the challenges and opportunities of this demographic trend.

2. Employers can reap the benefits from retaining, developing and supporting diverse employees in the war for talent

Women aged 50 years and above are an under-appreciated, yet growing and important segment of the workforce. These are highly experienced, adaptable and energetic women with untapped leadership potential and in many cases, 10-20 more years in the labour force. By shifting mindsets, employers can view post-menopausal women as an important asset and leadership group that will bring distinctive and valuable experience and expertise to their age-diverse organizations. Older women are talent, then, and recognizing them as such is good for both employers (they have a new weapon in the war for talent) and female employees (they can retain financial independence for longer through continued employment and enjoy the benefits of working later in life).

3. Employers must comply with menopause-relevant legislation, and avoid the potential for litigation.

Menopause is a concern in relation to employers' legal responsibilities surrounding (i) duty of care for employee health and safety and (ii) discrimination.

Regulations such as the *Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974* and the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 and 1999* in the UK and *The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* in Australia are relevant to menopause at work. They are key in directing employers' attention to aspects of the workplace that may present health or safety risks for menopausal employees that require assessment and management⁵. This includes a duty to ensure work conditions and environments do not adversely impact on health, which is important given that employees report a range of workplace environmental and cultural characteristics as exacerbating their menopausal symptoms⁶.

Menopause may also be relevant when considering employers' legal responsibilities to provide a working environment free of direct and indirect discrimination, and to promote workplace equality. It is still to be widely tested in the courts as to whether menopause or its symptoms has protected status under legislation surrounding age, gender and disability. However, the few legal cases that exist in the UK suggest that menopause, or the symptoms connected to menopause, may carry weight under discrimination law. The most recent case in the UK that cited menopause (*Davies vs Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service*; May 2018) was based on unfair dismissal and disability discrimination (Section 15, *UK Equality Act 2010*). Given the high level of publicity, this provides an additional incentive for employers to promote and maintain a workplace culture based on inclusive practices, fairness, dignity and respect in order to avoid potential reputational damage.



4. Menopause can be costly for employers and employees

The financial (and other) costs of a difficult menopause can be significant for working women (e.g., if they feel compelled to leave employment or to revert to part-time status because of severe symptoms). Without adequate support for women going through menopausal transition, it may also be the case for employers that reductions in worker productivity or performance, and sickness absences could result from menopausal transition. In a UK study of employees, 40% reported that menopausal symptoms had a negative impact on work, and 12% took time off work due to symptoms⁷. A US study⁸ of health insurance claims by Fortune 500 companies found that employees with untreated hot flashes (vasomotor symptoms [VMS]) incurred 57% more indirect work productivity loss days (compared to those who had medical therapy). And in another study⁹, the estimated costs of work impairment related to VMS increased from US\$1100 (per woman, mild symptoms) to US\$6500 (per woman, severe symptoms).

5. All employees want a fair, inclusive and enabling workplace

Embedding support for menopausal transition in your workplace not only has benefits in decreasing turnover and attracting mid-later life women, but has the potential to positively impact all of your workforce. Organizations that consider diversity and inclusion as a strategic imperative rather than compliance issue perform better¹⁰. Moreover, positive diversity climate in an organization is associated with increased employee retention¹¹, while cohort-specific research has suggested millennials cite equality in the workplace as a leading factor in choosing and staying with their employer. Supporting menopausal transition in the workplace also has the potential to create ripple effects for the promotion of gender equality in society more broadly. Enabling women to stay in the workforce despite menopausal symptoms is key to gender equality, with EU figures suggesting that improving gender equality overall can significantly increase GDP per capita from 6.1% to 9.6%, which amounts to a difference of €1.2 trillion¹².

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