



Menopause Works Here™

Creating a Menopause Inclusive Workplace:

A Playbook for Employers

This Playbook has been made possible thanks to the support of Sun Life. We thank them for their generosity.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
State of the Nation:	2
Key Statistics from the MFC Menopause and Work in Canada Report	
Understanding Menopause:	4
Menopause Basics and Menopause at Work	
What Can Employers Do?	8
Your Five-Point Action Plan	
1. Culture & Communications	9
2. Policies	16
3. Accommodations	17
4. Employee Benefits	18
5. Join Us:	20
MFC's Menopause <i>Works Here</i> TM Campaign	
Acknowledgements and Resources	21



Canada's Working Women are a Force to be Reckoned With

Unleash the Potential: Menopause at Work

One-quarter of Canadian workers are women over the age of 40 and the fastest growing segment are those aged 45-55, an age when most reach menopause. In the prime of their working lives, these women are the backbone of critical sectors. They provide much needed skills and are highly valued for their abilities, experience and leadership.

What faces every one of these employees*? Menopause. It's a universal experience that somehow remains taboo. It's an experience rooted in changing hormone levels that can lead to a number of symptoms - there are more than 30 - that can have an impact at work. Too many women feel alone and suffer in silence, and one in 10 may leave their job altogether. Three-quarters say they want to see support from their workplace.

Breaking the silence and the stigma of menopause at work isn't just the right thing to do, it also benefits the bottom line. You have an exciting opportunity to lead the way and show that you are an employer of choice by creating a menopause inclusive workplace. To help get you started, this playbook includes a simple five-point action plan. Our hope is that it inspires and energizes you to tap into the power of women in the prime of their working lives.

** People who are transgender, non-binary or intersex may also experience menopause, which can be distinct for each person due to age-related hormonal changes or hormone treatments and surgeries.¹*

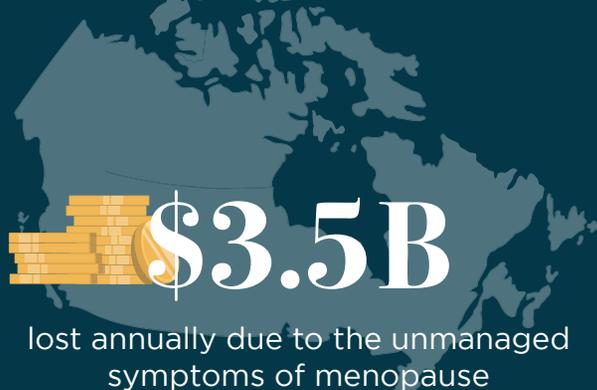
Benefits to Becoming a Menopause Inclusive Workplace

- ✓ Improve employee retention
- ✓ Increase productivity and contribution levels
- ✓ Reduce absenteeism
- ✓ Support employee health and wellbeing
- ✓ Increase employee engagement
- ✓ Reduce cost of attrition, recruitment and training
- ✓ Strengthen employee value proposition
- ✓ Support diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging strategies

¹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/supporting-our-nhs-people-through-menopause-guidance-for-line-managers-and-colleagues/#transgender-non-binary-and-intersex-staff-and-the-menopause>

Key Statistics from the MFC *Menopause and Work in Canada* Report

Cost of Menopause to the Canadian Economy



\$3.5B

lost annually due to the unmanaged symptoms of menopause

5M

working women over the age of 40



1/4

of Canada's workforce



1 in 10

women may leave the workforce due to symptoms that aren't managed



Women

45-55

are the fastest growing demographic of working women



\$237M

loss of productivity annually due to the unmanaged symptoms of menopause



\$3.3B

in lost income annually due to a reduction in hours and/or pay or leaving the workforce altogether



540K

lost days of work

Key Statistics from the MFC *Menopause and Work in Canada* Report



9 out of 10 women experience menopausal symptoms

1/4

hid their symptoms at work

1/3

working women say their menopause symptoms negatively impacted their performance at work

2/3

would not feel comfortable speaking to their supervisor about their symptoms



79%

would not feel comfortable speaking with Human Resources about their symptoms



79% of menopausal working women feel their employer does not provide or do not know if they provide support related to menopause

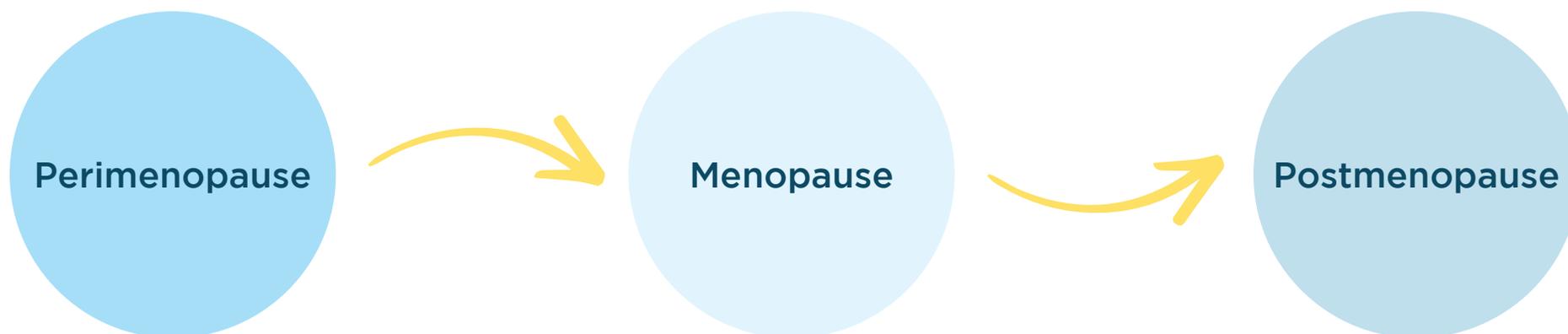


75% would like to see menopause support in their workplace

Menopause is a Continuum

Menopause is a natural phase of life and a universal experience that will happen to women and some transgender and non-binary people. Menopause is a continuum that will last between one-third to one-half of an average woman's life and includes three stages: perimenopause, menopause and postmenopause. "Menopause" is often used to describe the entire continuum.

Use the Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable *Menopause Basics Backgrounder* to increase understanding and knowledge in your workplace.



Key Statistics

- Women will spend up to half their lives in menopause
- 45-55 most women enter menopause
- Average age is 51
- 1 in 100 before the age of 40
- 1 in 1,000 before the age of 30

Symptom Knowledge Gap

There are more than 30 symptoms associated with menopause. Each person's menopause journey is unique, with some experiencing very few symptoms while others have symptoms that can last for up to a decade or more. Why are there so many symptoms? Women have estrogen receptors throughout their bodies, which is why they may experience everything from hot flashes and night sweats to joint pain, skin changes, dry eyes and recurrent urinary tract infections.

Other Common Symptoms



Lack of energy



Depression



Muscle and Joint Aches and Pain



Insomnia



Bladder Control Issues

Knowledge is power. With evidence-based information, women can act. Lifestyle changes, preventative care and a range of safe and effective treatment options can help women live their best life through perimenopause, menopause and postmenopause. Raising awareness about menopause and its impact in the workplace, together with actively addressing challenges and removing barriers faced by employees experiencing symptoms, can play a key role in breaking the stigma of menopause and in closing the menopause knowledge gap.

Use the Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable ***Menopause Basics Backgrounder*** to increase understanding and knowledge in your workplace.



Encourage employees to download and print the [MenoPause Symptom Tracker](#)

Blindsided in the Prime of their Working Lives

What does menopause in the workplace look like?

Menopause is more than hot flashes; women can experience a broad range of symptoms that can last for years, which can impact their health and their work. This leaves a critical group of employees in the prime of their working lives potentially:

- **Struggling in Silence**

Menopause is a taboo topic, leaving women feeling alone and silently trying to cope, giving their best to their work without asking for the support that could make a difference.

- **Being embarrassed**

The stigma of menopause - and the pervasive ageism that impacts women in mid-life - contributes to women feeling embarrassed about their menopause experience and working to hide symptoms or challenges they may be having in the workplace.

- **Fearing repercussions**

Attempts to discuss issues with managers are often met with confusion about what to do or not to do. Worse still, it may set in motion a negative attitude toward a menopausal woman for bringing up the issue and may affect her job or career prospects.

The Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable *Menopause at Work* tool will aid you in educating people managers about common symptoms and how they may impact work.



- **Working to overcome perceived shortcomings**

Women may feel they aren't performing at their best and will work extremely hard to overcome perceived shortcomings so they can meet their own high standards. Without reassurance and open dialogue, this can derail one's career or job progress.

- **Dismissing the impact**

Women sometimes dismiss or minimize their symptoms because menopause is a natural process. They may think they need to "tough it out", assuming things will get better. Some may be caring for aging parents and supporting children while juggling work and may chalk up their symptoms to their busy lives or workplace stress. They may not explore the impact of hormonal change or consider whether they have an underlying condition not related to menopause.



Women's Lived Experience

The Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable *Menopause at Work* tool will aid you in educating people managers about common symptoms and how they may impact work.

“The tiny bins in the stalls of the shared office washroom could not nearly accommodate the garbage I produced. I had to bring in my own garbage bags and wet naps. It was a nightmare on top of all my other symptoms.”

- Heidi

“When I feel a flash coming, wow, it's really intense. It comes through my legs, upper torso to my face and head. It almost feels like a volcano ready to explode. It's hard. I have no one to talk to, especially at work.”

- Nancy

“If there had been more flexibility at my workplace, I probably would have stayed in my position. If I woke up with a migraine, it would have been helpful if I could adjust my schedule and work the hours later in the day. At the time, I did not have the language to define the problem.”

- Julie

“I was a very good sleeper before menopause, 15 mins after my head hit the pillow I was asleep and I slept for 7-8 hrs without waking. After menopause, my inability to sleep started and a good night was 5 hrs and the average was 3-4 hours...I found it hard to absorb new information and my communication skills started to slip, which are a key component of my job.”

- Deepti



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan

The most important step is to see menopause as a real and valid workplace issue. Millions of women are experiencing menopause at work right now. These women are at the peak of their skills and capabilities. They are critical to the workforce and they may need - and most say they want - support from their employer.

Whether you are a small company with 10 employees or a large one with thousands, the following five-point action plan provides you with a framework to become a *menopause inclusive workplace*.

There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach; the playbook will help you consider key areas and take action in a way that works best for your organization and employees. For your employees in menopause, and for your organization's future success, it's a journey well worth taking.

5-Point Action Plan

1. Culture & Communication
2. Policies
3. Accommodations
4. Employee Benefits
5. Join Us

To be a menopause inclusive workplace the organization commits to considering menopause in the design of its workplace, its practices and policies, and to fostering a menopause inclusive culture that supports breaking the stigma of menopause at work.



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

1 Culture & Communication

It Begins with Dialogue

How do you create a menopause inclusive culture that allows women to thrive in the prime of their working lives? How do you break the taboo of menopause at work and normalize what is a natural life transition for more than half of the population?

Small steps can make a big difference. It begins with dialogue. Talk openly about menopause. It doesn't cost anything but helps to normalize the topic and shows that your organization cares. The stigma and negative image of the menopausal woman leads to silence. Some women fear being seen as weak, old or past their prime.¹ Others worry that their prospects for career advancement and job stability could be adversely affected.

The Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable *Tips For Managers and Supervisors* is a helpful tool for managers starting the journey to supporting a menopause inclusive workplace.



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

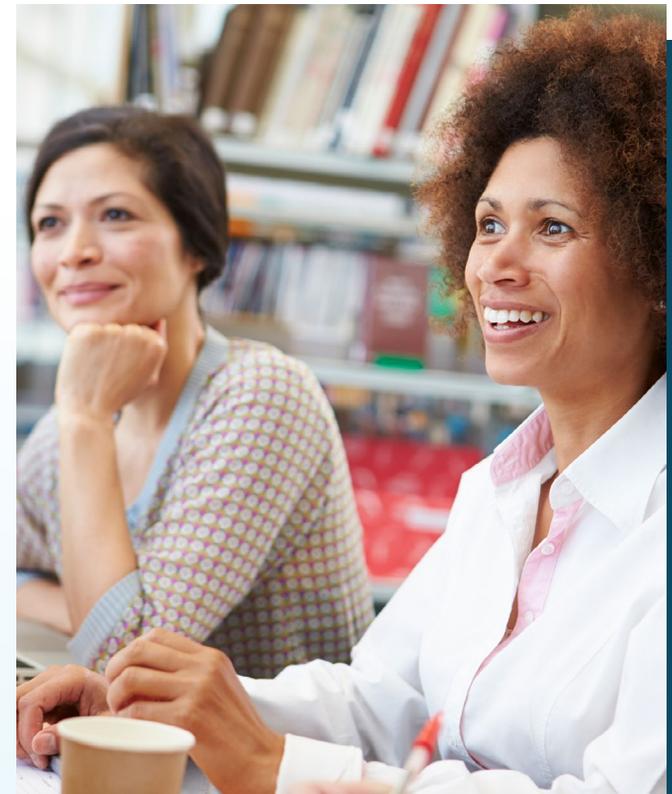
1 Culture & Communication

The Tone Starts at the Top

Workplace cultures that talk openly about menopause will help to overcome bias against those who experience it.ⁱⁱ Leaders who share their personal menopause journey or the story of a partner, family member or friend, break the taboo and open the door for others to do so as well. Find senior leaders to champion the cause, drive awareness and nurture a supportive culture. Identify channels and opportunities that allow leaders to encourage the conversation with sensitivity. Awareness and education opportunities could include:

- ✓ Hold menopause education and awareness events linked to World Menopause Month, World Menopause Day or other dates such as International Women's Day.
- ✓ Include menopause education as part of other workplace wellness programs. Bring in an external speaker who can support your leaders in level-setting knowledge and understanding within your company. A great place to start? Contact the [Menopause Foundation of Canada](#).
- ✓ Hold an informal round table with a leader willing to share their personal story and who can point employees where they can get [information on menopause](#) and [how to access support and care](#) if needed.

The Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable *[Tips For Managers and Supervisors](#)* is a helpful tool for managers starting the journey to supporting a menopause inclusive workplace.



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

1 Culture & Communication

Managers and Human Resources Play a Key Role

Managers, supervisors and human resources leaders play a key role in attracting and retaining talent, and in fostering a positive company culture. Yet, two-thirds of women would not feel comfortable talking about their menopause experience with their supervisor, and even more (70%) don't feel comfortable speaking with HR. Why? Reluctance to discuss the topic is directly linked to how women believe they will be perceived as a result – there's a stigma about menopause, say 40% of women surveyed.

While they don't need to be experts in menopause, managers and supervisors would benefit from having a basic understanding of what menopause is and how menopause shows up at work to be able to show sensitivity, break stigma and support potential accommodations.

Remember that not everyone will be comfortable speaking with their manager about this issue, and that's OK. Employers should make other options available such as connecting with human resources, a menopause champion or reaching out to an employee assistance program.

The Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable *Tips For Managers and Supervisors* is a helpful tool for managers starting the journey to supporting a menopause inclusive workplace.



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

1 Culture & Communication

Include Men in the Conversation

To break the stigma of menopause, everyone needs to be comfortable talking about it. Invite men to join the conversation and learn more about what half of the population will experience. This is key to creating a menopause inclusive workplace. Education and awareness will help male co-workers be better colleagues, managers and senior leaders. It will give them greater understanding and compassion for women who experience menopause at work and in their personal lives as well.

Men are also going through their own mid-life hormonal changes with a slow but steady decline of testosterone. Male andropause, sometimes called male menopause, doesn't get a lot of attention, but we know men have their fair share of mid-life challenges, including mental health struggles. Talking openly about mid-life changes should foster a stronger support network for everyone.

Communication

Better, open communication in the workplace will go a long way to breaking the menopause taboo around what is a universal experience for women. At the same time, it's not about shining a spotlight on women - three in 10 say they are concerned they would be perceived as "weak, old or past their prime." The goal is to normalize the conversation and ensure a shared understanding of the supports available.

The Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable *Tips For Managers and Supervisors* is a helpful tool for managers starting the journey to supporting a menopause inclusive workplace.



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

1 Culture & Communication

Offer Ways to Listen, Learn, and Provide Support

Create safe spaces for people to share their experiences and build community. This, provides support and demonstrates the company's commitment to employee wellbeing.

Include information about menopause on the company intranet: pointing to the [MFC Menopause Basics Backgrounder](#), the [MFC Menopause Symptom Tracker](#), or the MFC's [list of recommended websites](#) are great options to consider. You may also point to other evidence-based resources such as the ones shared at the end of the playbook.

- **Employee Resource Groups**
Create an employee resource group focused on menopause and/or add menopause to an existing resource group with a broader women's health mandate. ERGs foster inclusion and help employees on their menopause journey feel like they belong to a community at work.

The Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable *Tips For Managers and Supervisors* is a helpful tool for managers starting the journey to supporting a menopause inclusive workplace.



- **Employee Support Groups**
Allow employees to create a welcoming space to discuss the impact of menopause on their lives. This can be virtual or in person. Four in 10 women report feeling alone on their menopause journey. Connecting with others and sharing experiences in a workplace setting can be very empowering.
- **Union Leaders**
If your workplace is unionized, ensure Union representatives are included in plans to become more menopause inclusive, and in education and awareness activities, so they can help support their members.
- **Menopause Champions**
Champions are passionate about menopause, may have personal experience to offer and/or are very comfortable talking about menopause. The menopause champion volunteers point people to internal and reputable external resources like the [Menopause Foundation of Canada](#). They can help to raise awareness of menopause in the workplace, can help to organize a support group, and can gather feedback from employees on support they would value from the organization.

The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

1 Culture & Communication

Important Considerations

Menopause Myths and Misinformation

Menopause is more than hot flashes and it isn't something that you get through, push through or need to suffer through. It is a phase of life that can be very empowering with the right education, support and access to treatment as needed. Pointing employees to evidence-based sources of information on menopause (like those in the [resources section](#)) will help dispel the pervasive misinformation that's out there. To close the menopause knowledge gap, we need to bust the myths that create a negative environment for people in menopause. Get up to speed on menopause by reviewing the [MFC's Menopause Basics Backgrounder](#) and check out additional links provided at the end of this guide.

In our culture, menopause is overwhelmingly viewed as negative and is often the butt of jokes. The stereotype of the menopausal woman is unflattering and is fueled by ageism that devalues women as they get older.

The Menopause Foundation of Canada's downloadable [Tips For Managers and Supervisors](#) is a helpful tool for managers starting the journey to supporting a menopause inclusive workplace.

Ageism and Menopausal Humour

The symptoms associated with menopause are real and for many going through them, they're no laughing matter. While humour can be a wonderful way to connect, it may not be appreciated by everyone. Jokes can further trivialize menopause and stigmatize women experiencing symptoms. Women may avoid talking about menopause or may not seek support from their employer to avoid insensitive comments. Just as we have become more thoughtful about ageist and/or sexist remarks related to 'senior moments', 'pregnancy brain' and 'pms', encourage all employees to refrain from making seemingly harmless jokes about menopause.



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

1 Culture & Communication

Respecting Personal Boundaries

Menopause is a personal experience and is unique to each individual. While some women will be open to talking about it and sharing their story, others will not. Indeed, given the stigma, some women will not want to be associated with menopause and others will just want to keep it private. Organizations should not assume that women of a certain age, particularly those in senior leadership roles, will want to step up to “own” the menopause issue. Respecting personal boundaries is important. Seeing menopause inclusivity as an organizational goal will foster greater openness from women over time.

Confidentiality

If someone tells you about their health, including menopausal symptoms, this should be treated as confidential. If they want information about their situation to be shared, consent must be explicit. You should discuss with them who will be told and what can be disclosed.

The Menopause Foundation of Canada’s downloadable *Tips For Managers and Supervisors* is a helpful tool for managers starting the journey to supporting a menopause inclusive workplace.



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

2 Policies

Some organizations have chosen to create a specific menopause policy or guidance document, while others have reviewed their existing policies and are incorporating menopause. Either approach will work. The goal is to ensure that menopause is included and considered across the employment experience. Areas for review include policies, practices, programs, training and protocols through the lens of supporting women in menopause. This includes:

- ✓ **Health and safety**
- ✓ **Hiring and retention practices**
- ✓ **Recruitment policies and practices**
- ✓ **Sickness and attendance management**
- ✓ **Short and long-term absences**
- ✓ **Training and development for managers and employees**
- ✓ **Mental health initiatives workspaces**
- ✓ **Workplace environment**
- ✓ **Workplace health and wellness**
- ✓ **Diversity, equity and inclusion**
- ✓ **Others unique to your organization**



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

3 Accommodations

Workplaces should consider the needs of people working through perimenopause, menopause and postmenopause. In some situations, working environments can make symptoms worse. Consider supportive workplace adjustments that will positively impact your employee's ability to perform their job at the highest level.

Some of the areas recommended for review are the physical environment; hours, duties/accountabilities and workload; and uniforms and equipment. Involve employees and listen to understand their experience and which adjustments will be most meaningful. Remember that changes do not have to be big to make a big difference in someone's work life. Check out the [full list of accommodations](#) and see some examples below.

Physical

- Improved ventilation, humidity and air conditioning
- Easy access to washrooms or toilet facilities
- Ensure washrooms have large enough garbage containers to dispose of period products
- Easy access to cold drinking water

For a complete list of accommodations, download the Menopause Foundation of Canada's ***Making Workplaces Better Checklist*** to share with managers in your organization.



Hours, Duties/Accountabilities, Workload

- Hours and Shifts
 - Flexible working hours
 - Work-from-home or remote work arrangements
 - Consider a change to shift timing
- Breaks
 - Flexible break times or splitting breaks
 - Allow for additional or as needed bathroom breaks
- Duties, Accountabilities, Workload
 - Discuss possible adjustments (temporary or permanent) to workload, tasks and duties that are challenging

Uniforms and Equipment

- If a uniform is required focus on breathable natural fibres with options for layering

The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

4 Employee Benefits

Employer benefits are an important way to support employees experiencing menopause, so talk with your benefits provider to help you understand all of the options available. Comprehensive and flexible medical, vision, drug, paramedical and disability coverage, along with generous health and wellness programs, are key to being effective.

Medical, Vision, Drug and Disability Coverage

Work with your benefits provider to ensure drug coverage for all Health Canada approved products used to treat hormonal change and related symptoms of perimenopause, menopause and post menopause.

Health Care Spending Accounts and Personal Spending Accounts

Health Spending Accounts (HSA) typically cover health-related expenses, while Personal Spending Accounts (PSA) typically cover wellness-related expenses.

Generous spending accounts are an important way to support employees in the menopause continuum as they provide expanded coverage for key therapies and for

alternative treatment options. The flexibility provided by spending accounts can be particularly important for women to allow them to individually manage their symptoms.

- Pelvic floor physiotherapists can provide essential service for women dealing with the genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM)
- Cognitive behavioural therapy has been shown to support the management of hot flashes
- Nutritionists can be very helpful to support the management of weight gain, which is often a challenge for people at this time of life
- Wellness retreats can help individuals recharge and focus on the positive and energizing aspects of their menopause journey
- A host of alternative treatment providers such as acupuncturists, physiotherapist, naturopaths, registered massage therapists and chiropractors can help maintain optimal health
- In addition to these alternative treatment options, there's also a wide array of expenses related to:
 - Health and dental
 - Deductibles and co-insurance
 - Education and professional services

The Menopause Inclusive Workplace 5-Point Action Plan:

4 Employee Benefits

Employee Assistance Program

Employee Assistance Programs can provide a broad range of support that can help people in perimenopause, menopause or postmenopause. Research indicates that four in 10 women feel their relationships are negatively impacted during menopause and nearly three quarters of working women feel they can't talk to a supervisor or member of the HR team about their menopause challenges at work. Accessing a confidential EAP service that offers a range of services would provide additional support. Leading EAP services offer:

- Mental health support and internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy
- Support for families and relationships
- Work and career counselling

Mental Health Coverage

Talking about mental health as an element of menopause matters. Ensuring your plan has adequate mental health coverage is critical to supporting employees during this phase of life. Changing hormones can lead to anxiety, low mood, a loss of confidence and, for some, depression. People in minority groups are more likely to have experienced

discrimination and trauma, which can contribute to more severe symptoms during menopause. Ensuring your plan has adequate mental health coverage is critical to supporting employees during this phase of life. The Canadian Psychological Association recommends providing \$3,500 to \$4,000 per individual per year for mental health care. If your mental health maximum is combined with other paramedical providers, consider separating them.

Virtual Care

Virtual primary care is closing the gap around accessing convenient, quality primary care in Canada. These services, however, need to get up to speed on offering evidence-based menopause care and support that is grounded in the latest clinical practice guidelines from the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada. Employers are encouraged to press their virtual care providers to expand their expertise related to menopause.

Suicide rates for women in Canada are highest in mid life between the ages of 40 and 60.ⁱⁱⁱ



The Menopause Inclusive Workplace
5-Point Action Plan:

5 Join Us

Join the MFC's Menopause *Works Here*™ Campaign

Supporting women's health by being menopause inclusive has outsized benefits for the employer in terms of employee retention, productivity, engagement, and so much more. If you are committed to making your organization a better place for those experiencing menopause, join the Menopause *Works Here*™ campaign. Participating in the Menopause *Works Here*™ campaign is a positive way to demonstrate you support for the wellbeing of employees in the prime of their working years.

Joining is free and the campaign calls on workplaces to:

- Listen to the perspectives of menopausal employees to understand their experiences and needs;
- Learn about menopause and its impact at work; and
- Act to find meaningful ways to support employees at this stage of life.

Along with use of the digital logo and other benefits, organizations that participate in the campaign can choose to appear on the MFC's website list of companies who care about menopause and are committed to listening, learning and acting. Future employees will be just as excited as current ones to know your organization values and supports women through all life stages, including menopause.

Start your organization's journey by [joining the campaign today!](#)



Acknowledgements & Resources

The Menopause Foundation of Canada has created a downloadable list of these **Resources**; organizations are welcome to share this list with leaders, managers and/or employees.



The Menopause Foundation of Canada thanks the many women who have shared their menopause and work stories with us. We also recognize the outstanding work of organizations in the United Kingdom who are taking action to create menopause inclusive workplaces and have shared resources publicly. We have taken inspiration from these materials and share links to the organizations and resources.

Evidence-based Sources of Health Information on Menopause

[The Menopause Foundation of Canada](#)
[The Canadian Menopause Society](#)
[The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada](#)

[The Menopause Society \(formerly known as The North American Menopause Society\)](#)
[The International Menopause Society](#)

Workplace Resources

[Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service \(ACAS\) Age UK](#)
[British Standards Institute Menopause Standard](#)
[Bupa Women's Health Hub](#)
[The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(UK\)](#)
[Co-op \(UK\)](#)
[European Menopause and Andropause Society](#)

[NHS Employers \(UK\)](#)
[NASUWT The Teachers' Union \(UK\)](#)
[Trades Union Congress \(UK\)](#)

ⁱ The Silence and the Stigma: Menopause in Canada. The Menopause Foundation of Canada. October 2022.

ⁱⁱ https://hbr.org/2022/12/research-workplace-stigma-around-menopause-is-real?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter_monthly&utm_campaign=womenetwork_activesubs&utm_content=signinnudge&deliveryName=DM244361

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistics Canada, [Canadian Vital Statistics Death Database; Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table 051-0001 - Estimates of population, by age group and sex for July 1, Canada, provinces and territories.](#)