

How to become a Menopause friendly workplace

A resource for your organisation



Women's Health East
Investing in Equality and Wellbeing for Women

Women's Health East acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We affirm that sovereignty was never ceded, and that colonialism and racism continue to impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and can contribute to the high rates of violence that might be experienced. We recognise the strength, resilience and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and express our hope for reconciliation.



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INTRODUCTION

This resource will assist your organisation in developing a workplace culture that promotes diversity and inclusion, values the retention of all employees, and provides an environment in which employees feel comfortable and confident in talking to their managers about adjustments they may require in the workplace to manage menopausal symptoms.

Although menopause will be experienced by almost 50% of the population, there is relatively low awareness and understanding of this topic. Menopause is rarely talked about within wider society, due in large part to the stigma and taboo surrounding it. As a result, menopause remains relatively undiscussed in workplaces, not even featured within conversations about employee health and wellbeing. Workplaces, however, provide an important setting in which to support employees through the menopausal transition.

This resource has been designed for organisations to better support individuals experiencing perimenopause or menopause. It provides information and practical resources to support staff experiencing menopausal symptoms at work and helps managers and HR professionals understand how they can provide the right support to their workforce.

The resource aims to assist workplaces to create an environment where everyone enjoys equal opportunity to achieve their best at work regardless of age, gender, or experience of menopause.

A note on language

Although this policy and associated resources often use the term 'women' to refer to people who experience menopause, we recognise that not all women experience menopause, and that not all people experiencing menopause are women (for example trans men, gender diverse people and intersex people may experience menopause). The content of this document is intended to support anyone experiencing menopause regardless of how they express their gender.

ABOUT MENOPAUSE

What is menopause?

Menopause is a natural part of ageing for people who menstruate. In medical terms, menopause occurs when a person has a final menstrual period and signals the end of their reproductive life.¹

Menopause usually occurs in individuals between the ages of 45-55, however some people can experience early or premature menopause between 40 and 45 years of age, or even earlier.¹ Early menopause can happen due to natural ovarian function ceasing, following ovarian removal, or as a result of cancer treatments.^{1,4} Research in the area of menopause is still evolving: one study found that Indigenous Australians may start menopause five years early than non-Aboriginal people². Other emerging

research found that trans women can experience menopausal symptoms when changing or stopping feminising hormone therapy³.

Perimenopause is the lead up to menopause when an individual starts experiencing the symptoms of menopause.⁴ This lasts an average of 4-6 years but can be experienced for as little as one year and as long as 10.⁵ There is no way to predict when a person's perimenopausal symptoms may appear and how long they may last; every person is different.⁴

A **postmenopausal** woman or person is someone who has had no menstrual periods for 12 months.¹

What are the symptoms and the impact on people experiencing menopause?

Experiences and symptoms of menopause can demonstrably affect a person's life in a range of ways. Around 60% of people undergoing menopause will experience mild symptoms, 20% will have no symptoms, and another 20% will experience severe symptoms, which can continue into their later years. Some of the most common symptoms include:

- Hot flushes, night sweats, aches, and pains
- Related symptoms such as fatigue, forgetfulness and difficulty concentrating ¹

Some individuals experience mood changes such as mild depression, anxiety, and irritability with menopause. These symptoms are often related to physical changes such as hot flushes, night sweats and poor sleeping.⁶



To read more information on the symptoms of menopause visit the Better Health Channel's [Menopause resource](#) or visit Jean Haile's [Menopause health topic](#).



MENOPAUSE AND THE WORKPLACE: A CASE FOR ACTION

Why is it important for organisations to consider menopause?

Women aged 45-55 represent a growing proportion of the Australian workforce. In 2017, almost 80% of women in this age group were in paid employment.⁷ Statistics on the number of trans and gender diverse people in this age group do not yet exist, but emerging research has found that this number is not insignificant⁸. When we consider the large workforce participation rate of people aged 45-55 it's evident that a considerable number of employees in Australian workplaces will currently be experiencing menopause. This therefore presents a challenge and opportunity for employers and organisations to recognise and support workers in this stage of their lives.

Women, trans, intersex and gender diverse people in this age group contribute exceptional talent, experience and leadership potential. This cohort comes with a diverse background of experience which cannot be undervalued or underestimated, and retention of this cohort adds value to your organisational workforce.

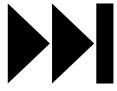
Workplaces have legal responsibilities to their employees, including to provide a safe and healthy working environment which does not adversely impact on health, and which is free from discrimination, both direct and indirect. In Victoria, the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004⁹ provides a framework to protect the health and safety of all workers at work, and employers have a duty of care under this Act to do so. Employers must also ensure compliance with relevant anti-

discrimination laws, including the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act.¹⁰

A menopause friendly workplace can improve productivity and performance and reduce personal leave that could result from menopausal symptoms. Changes to workplace culture also demonstrate to all employees that their employer is fair and inclusive of all people and their experiences. This can be a key factor in employee retention across the organisation.

There is a growing movement of change in this area. An increasing number of Australian workplaces are implementing menopause friendly workplaces or policies, with the Victorian Government recently suggesting that addressing menopause symptoms in the workplace is part of creating an inclusive workplace.¹¹ The Australian Greens party have introduced "Reproductive Health and Wellbeing Leave" as a 2022 election promise.¹²

It's a matter of equality. Menopause affects all people who menstruate at some stage of their lives. Menopause is not an illness, but a natural part of the ageing process. Menopause is a key issue that needs to be addressed as part of applying a gender lens to the health and wellbeing of employees. Additionally, **your organisation is seen as promoting and actively reinforcing equality, diversity, and inclusion,** which can facilitate public trust and buy in, and enhances your organisation's reputation as an employer of choice.



For more information on why menopause should be on your organisation's agenda, see [‘Menopause and the workplace’](#) by the Australian Menopause Society, or [“Why menopause at work?”](#) by MIPO.

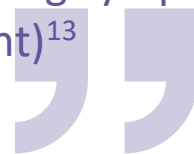
Menopause at work

An individual's experience of menopause doesn't happen in isolation at home but impacts on their everyday lives – including when they are at work. A 2021 Australian study by Circle In heard from more than 700 women about their experience of menopause in the workplace.¹³ It found that individuals experience challenges during their menopausal transition, yet they receive little or no support from their employers.

Of study respondents, 83% reported that their work was negatively affected due to menopause. When symptoms were severe, almost half considered taking a break from work or retiring. Forty-eight percent of respondents experienced a drop in confidence at work, and almost half felt stressed having to hide their experience. Additionally, 60% reported that support from their workplace was poor or low.



At varying times during my cycle, the impact of pain and other symptoms meant I needed time off from work and didn't reveal the reason for my 'illness'. I had not experienced pain or the other quite debilitating symptoms prior to perimenopause” (Circle In participant)¹³



To read more about women's experience of menopause in the workplace, see [‘Experiencing peri/menopause at work: Women's stories’](#) by MIPO.

The intersection of age, gender, health, and menopause

Menopause interacts with a wide range of individual experiences and traits which add further complexity to how individuals experience menopause in the workplace. Age and health related issues, along with gendered experiences in the workplace, can all interact with menopause, increasing its impact on those going through this transition phase.

For example, people of menopausal age can experience additional life stage stressors which can affect their mood, including:

- physical signs of ageing
- changes in sexuality and relationships
- health issues
- changes to the family unit (such as children leaving home, or divorce)
- caring for ageing parents
- career changes
- financial worries⁶

Many people experience menopause along with other age-related health issues, and therefore must self-manage pre-existing conditions along with menopausal symptoms which can be physically and emotionally taxing.

Gender also plays a role in how women experience menopause in the workplace. An Australian study¹³ found that it was often difficult for women to separate their menopausal experience from their broader experiences of workplace interactions and unequal practices. Outdated gender stereotypes of what is expected of women in relation to their mood, temperament or ability impacted on how they managed their menopausal experience. For example, some women were afraid to disclose their menopausal experience in fear of being labeled difficult, assertive, overly emotional, or unfit for their job

“I find it difficult to get support or express the need for support at the workplace as gender related health issues such as this could be perceived as a weakness and could provide the basis for lack of promotion and ability to perform. I definitely feel older women are disadvantaged in the workplace” (HE269).¹⁴

“I don’t want my male boss to withhold opportunities because he thinks I can’t handle it. I already have to fight for equality”.¹³

Gender diverse or transgender people face further discrimination in the workplace in general, and there are additional barriers for menopausal people from this cohort to seek support from work in managing their menopausal symptoms. Menopausal trans or gender diverse people may not feel comfortable discussing menopause symptoms in the workplace, as doing so may require disclosure of their trans status and therefore

open themselves up to the risk of transphobia and further discrimination.

Menopause intersects with other individual experiences and characteristics, such as disability, cultural background, sexuality, and age, often compounding to increase discrimination and inequality for individuals. Managers and HR professionals need to take these complexities into account when addressing menopause in the workplace.

From what has been presented, it's clear that there is an opportunity for workplaces to support staff through their menopausal transition, and to help mitigate the negative effects of experiencing menopause in the workplace.

Read on to find out how.



PRACTICAL TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

Menopause symptoms are diverse and vary between individuals; a flexible and person-centred approach is key to supporting staff undergoing menopause. Workplaces are well positioned to support employees who are experiencing menopausal symptoms. The following section provides practical recommendations and resources to enable employees experiencing menopause to feel better supported in their workplace. It provides managers with the tools to support their staff and foster an environment in which those undergoing a menopausal transition feel comfortable to initiate discussions on how their workplace could be adjusted to accommodate menopausal symptoms.

Staff awareness raising and training

Providing staff with appropriate menopause related information can assist them in better understanding the effects of menopause and feel more comfortable discussing and addressing the impact that menopause can have on individuals carrying out their roles. This helps to foster a workplace where menopause is taken seriously, and where menopausal individuals feel comfortable in seeking support.

Examples of this include:

- Promoting awareness campaigns in the workplace through distributing emails and posters e.g. World Menopause Day 18th October
- Ensuring up to date, reliable and relevant information on menopause is available alongside the organisation's existing health and wellbeing resources

- Providing access to EAP services and peer support groups as required
- Normalising stories of menopause in the workplace
- Providing all of staff training on menopause, the symptoms, and workplace implications.

It is also highly beneficial to provide line managers and supervisors with training surrounding awareness of day-to-day menopause-related episodes and ways to sensitively support staff undergoing menopause.

Additionally, investing in management training can ensure that all managers are prepared to talk about menopause and ultimately make it less of a taboo topic in the workplace. This gives managers the skills to open a conversation and direct employees to the right support services.

To access a suite of free best practice resources for managers and HR professionals visit the Australian / UK [Menopause Information Pack for Organisations website](#). This includes downloadable tools, tips and guidance to help you support menopausal transition in your workplace. For examples of posters that promote a menopause friendly workplace, see these [menopause support posters](#) or the Jean Hailes [tips for managing menopause poster](#).



Environmental workplace adjustments

Adjustments to the physical work environment can help to provide a more comfortable environment for people experiencing menopausal symptoms. The processes and procedures to support affected staff members adjust their work environment must be easy to access.

Adjustments could include:

- Provision of desk fans when working from home or the office
- Easy access to drinking water
- Allowing employees to adapt uniforms (where applicable) to ensure they are comfortable
- Offering a quiet space to work.



For a more comprehensive look at reasonable adjustments, please download the [5-minute manager guide: Menopause and Reasonable Accommodation Practices](#)

Flexible working arrangements

Flexible working is key to creating a menopause -friendly workplace. It's also important to normalise the use of flexible working for menopause management.

Flexibility in employment and working options, to be collaboratively agreed on with the employee, could include:

- Additional breaks
- Flexibility in where to work in the office – e.g. a cooler room at the office
- Flexible start and finishing times
- The option of working from home as needed
- Reduced work hours on a temporary basis
- Walking meetings, or the preference to turn cameras off while on Zoom or Teams calls
- Agreed time away from work as required.

Communication

Messaging and images used internally and externally provide a platform to demonstrate your organisation's commitment to workforce diversity and inclusion and enable people of all ages to feel seen and valued. Examples include:

- Simple changes such as updating policy materials to include images of middle-aged women. In doing so, organisations can ensure women of all ages feel recognised and included, which is important for those experiencing menopause.
- Consider the visibility of images of different working people, and the subliminal messages that visual communication can send e.g., only using images of male managers, or of younger female workers or older female workers who look relatively young. Showing a diversity of images in your communications promotes equality and inclusion and demonstrates a commitment to diversity.

Policy audit

The best way to begin working towards a menopause friendly workplace is to think creatively about when inclusion and accommodation for menopausal transition might be embedded into existing policies and practices.

While you're reviewing policies- e.g. occupational health and safety, anti-discrimination policy, diversity and inclusion etc, think about whether you could add menopause content in there too. This audit is a good way of assessing the difficulty level of adapting policies to include menopause – it's often easier than you might think to do this. This process also helps embed menopause as part of normal workplace conversations.



For more assistance on auditing your policies, please see [A health check for existing policies](#)





RESOURCES FOR MANAGERS

Support from line managers is very important for those experiencing menopause to feel fully supported at work. A manager's role is to normalise conversations about menopause to encourage trust and transparency with staff. This helps to create an environment where staff members feel confident enough to raise

issues about their symptoms and ask for support and adjustments at work, allowing staff to achieve their best at work

Several free resources are available to assist managers. These are not exhaustive, and other examples can be found on the internet.

Creative conversations for line managers and supervisors

A guide on how to have conversations with your employees about menopause

Working Through menopausal transition: a collaborative tool

A framework to structure a conversation between managers and employees on supporting menopausal transition

Menopause Guide and checklist for leaders

FURTHER RESOURCES

Australian resources

Menopause Information Pack for Organisations (MIPO)

<https://www.menopauseatwork.org>

Australian Menopause Society

<https://www.menopause.org.au>

Jean Hailes for Women's Health

<https://www.jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause/resources>

Australian HR Institute: Menopause in the Workplace

<https://www.ahri.com.au/ahri-assist/health-safety-and-well-being/health-and-wellbeing/menopause-in-the-workplace>

Ask EM (Early Menopause) Monash University

<https://www.askearlymenopause.org>

Meno Martha, evidence-based international menopause directory

<https://menomartha.com>

International resources

Working through menopause (UK)

<https://neu.org.uk/media/5821/view>

Wales TUC Cymru Menopause Toolkit (UK)

https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Wales_TUC_menopause_Toolkit.pdf

Queer Menopause Resources (UK)

<https://www.queermenopause.com/resources>

Good Housekeeping: We need to talk about the LGBTQ+ menopause experience (UK)

<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/uk/health/a35227597/lgbtq-menopause-experience>

Training

Menopause@work Asia Pacific training (Australia)

www.thea.com.au/menopause-at-work/education/manager-training

Menopause in the Workplace (UK)

<https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk>

Menopause Policy examples

Included below are some examples of different types of menopause policies. The policies are all quite different in length and content and provide some ideas and direction on how your workplace menopause policy may look.

Future Super Menstrual and Menopausal Guidelines (Australia)

<https://www.futuresuper.com.au/blog/a-bloody-good-policy>

Victorian Women's Trust Menstrual and Menopause policy (Australia)

<https://www.vwt.org.au/menstrual-policy-2>

Channel 4 Menopause Policy (UK)

<https://assets-corporate.channel4.com/flysystem/s3/2020-10/Channel%204%20Menopause%20Policy%202020.pdf>

London South Bank University (UK)

https://www.lsbu.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/297904/Menopause-Policy-.pdf

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (UK)

<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/264720/menopause-policy-version-2.pdf>

The National Education Union (UK)

<https://neu.org.uk/media/5811/view>



MENOPAUSE POLICY TEMPLATE

The following template is based on the Victorian Women's Trust's Menstrual Leave Policy (2017)¹⁵. This example shows how your policy could be set out, but it is up to individual organisations as to how much or how little detail they include in their policy, and what the policy requirements are. For more information about the Victorian Women's Trust's work in the progressing gender equality or to make a donation, visit: www.vwt.org.au



[Insert org logo]

Menopause Policy

STATEMENT

[insert org] is committed to creating a safe and supportive work environment for all staff across the life stages.

This policy aims to assist women and other people experiencing menopausal symptoms in the workplace and to support them and their colleagues and managers in addressing the occupational aspects of menopausal symptoms. It also seeks to remove the stigma and taboo surrounding menopause and create an environment where perimenopausal or menopausal staff members feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support and adjustments at work.

This policy sets out guidelines for members of staff and managers in providing support to manage menopausal symptoms at work.

* A note on language: although most discussions of menopause centre women we recognise that not all women will experience menopause, and not all people experiencing menopause identify as women. The content of this document is intended to support anyone experiencing menopause.

Menopause definition

The menopause is a natural part of ageing. The medical definition of the menopause is when a person has had their last menstrual period. Around 30-60% of individuals experience intermittent physical and/or psychological symptoms during the menopause. For some, symptoms include hot flushes, night sweats and related symptoms such as sleep disruption, fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Mood disturbances, anxiety and depression are also reported. These symptoms can adversely affect the quality of both personal and working life.

Policy overview

The policy is designed to be flexible depending on the needs of an employee experiencing menopausal symptoms, providing for the following options:

1. The possibility of working from home, as outlined in the Working from Home Policy.
2. The opportunity to stay in the workplace under circumstances which encourage the comfort of the employee. These circumstances will be considered collaboratively by the employee and their line manager.
3. The possibility of taking a day's paid leave, as outlined in the Special Leave Arrangements Policy or the Staff Work Hours and Leave Entitlements policy.

In the case of paid leave, employees are entitled to a maximum of [insert number] paid days per calendar year (pro-rata, non-cumulative) in the event of inability to perform work duties because of menopause, and associated symptoms.

PRINCIPLES, STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

Staff Training and Awareness

[insert org] will continue to embed a culture of openness and inclusion regarding age-related health experiences through staff education and training activities, as part of a general commitment to staff health and wellbeing.

Measures will include where possible:

- Training around menopause in orientation programs for new managers.
- Raising awareness in the workplace for organisational leadership – this could be providing them with the Women's Health East Menopause Policy Resource or delivering training on menopause and how to support staff.
- Annual staff education around menopause, and the workplace support available to employees experiencing menopausal symptoms. Empathy, openness and understanding about what menopause is can normalise discussions and make individuals experiencing menopause feel more comfortable in speaking to management and seeking support.

Workplace flexibility

[insert org] supports workplace policies and practices which provide flexible opportunities for work arrangements that accommodate employees experiencing menopause.

Measures will include:

- Flexibility in employment and working options, to be collaboratively agreed on with the employee. This could include:
 - a. Additional breaks
 - b. Flexibility in where to work in the office – e.g. a cooler room at the office
 - c. Flexible work start and finishing times
 - d. The option of working from home as needed

- e. Reduced work hours on a temporary basis
- f. Walking meetings, or the preference to turn cameras off while on Zoom or Teams calls

- Adjustments to the physical work environment. This could include:
 - a. Provision of desk fans when working from home or the office
 - b. Easy access to drinking water
 - c. Allowing employees to adapt uniforms (where applicable) to ensure they are comfortable
 - d. Offer a quiet space to work.
- Paid leave/sick leave
- Counselling support, through Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Communications:

[insert org] will work to ensure internal and external communications actively promote healthy ageing and life stages, including menopause related material.

Measures will include:

- Use social media, website and other publications to continually raise public awareness of menopause.
- In external publications, ensure that images reflect women, trans and gender diverse people of all ages.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Management has the responsibility to:

- Take part in menopause awareness training
- Ensure that they are familiar with menopause friendly workplace resources, and this policy
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the policy and where it can be found, and where to find information and seek support
- Ensure that they listen and act on the needs of each individual in an open manner and have confidential conversations with employees
- Work together with each individual to ensure that they have the right supports in place to satisfy their needs and that of the employer.
- Ensure that regular check ins and a review are in place to make sure that working conditions still meet the needs of employees and employer.

All staff have the responsibility to:

- Educate themselves about menopause and become familiar with this policy.
- Communicate with their line managers to ensure that a safe and comfortable work environment is available to them.
- Be willing to help and support their colleagues

Further resources and support

Women's Health East 2022 *How to become a Menopause friendly workplace: A resource for your organisation*

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¹² Australian Greens Victoria 2022, Workers would get 'reproductive leave' under plan to address gender inequality', Available from: <https://greens.org.au/vic/news/workers-would-get-reproductive-leave-under-plan-address-gender-inequality>

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