

# FACT SHEET

# PERIMENOPAUSE: NAVIGATING THE WORKPLACE

The menopausal transition is an experience that significantly impacts many working individuals\*, with profound implications for their career trajectories and well-being. Menopause is a gender and age-equity issue, and as such remains one of the last “unspoken” issues in workplaces.



## Menopause and the Gender Pay Gap

Whilst we’re living and working longer, menopause contributes to the gender pay gap because women\* retire 7.4 years earlier than men, often during their prime leadership years (1). Understanding the issues and identifying supportive practices are essential for creating inclusive workplaces that respect and accommodate this life stage.

## Workplace Difficulties

With its many hormonally-driven physical, psychological and cognitive changes, menopausal symptoms can catch individuals unprepared during inconvenient occasions like meetings or conferences. Symptoms potentially impacting work performance and stress include hot flushes, migraines, panic sensations, irritability, and cognitive issues including difficulty concentrating and word finding, general “brain fog” and memory issues.

Struggling to function optimally can create substantial stress and anxiety, fostering diminished confidence for some, and this can be further compounded by potential menopause-related stigma (2).



## Impact on the Individual

A recent Victorian Women’s Trust research project indicates over half the respondents who have experienced menopause said managing work during their menopausal transition was “challenging.”(3).

Other studies report one-third of individuals experienced moderate to severe difficulties coping at work due to menopause. Risk factors for difficulties included financial deprivation, poorer self-rated health, depression, and adverse psychosocial occupational factors (4).

Menopause and its symptoms significantly influence work attendance and performance, with a substantial economic

impact. In March 2023, the Australian Institute of Superannuation Trustees estimated that each year, early retirement due to the impacts of menopause could cost a staggering \$15 billion per year in wages and superannuation (5).



## Impact on the Workplace

The effects of poor support and policy for individuals experiencing menopause have far-reaching impacts on the workplace too. There is little research on menopause and sustainable career outcomes (6), but anecdotal evidence suggests that many people experiencing menopause are also in their professional prime, so workplaces run the risk of losing valuable expertise and wisdom.

A recent Female Lead article captures factors contributing to many leaving or reducing work responsibilities during midlife.

“It’s a time in which there is a significant increase in the proportion of stressors... as professional women cope with a complex collision of care (children, siblings, partners, and parents), together with financial, work, and health issues (menopause or otherwise) – all of which have physical, mental, and emotional manifestations.” (7)

Menopause’s impacts can increase absenteeism, decrease productivity & negatively impact the psychological health of valued employees.

Recent studies show that 60% of respondents report the support at work was poor or below average (3). There is no doubt that awareness and support of people experiencing menopause is needed amongst employers in all sectors (2,3,4,6), but those with financial difficulties and those with jobs in which they feel insecure, unappreciated, or dissatisfied are at greatest risk (4).

### Benefits of Being a Menopause-Supportive Employer

According to Menopause Friendly Australia, a leading provider of menopause workplace services, the benefits of creating a menopause-supportive workplace include: talent attraction and retention, support of diversity, equity and inclusion, fulfilling their psychological duty of care to employees experiencing menopause, boosting productivity and work satisfaction and reducing absenteeism (8).



### The Path Forward

To reduce the high rates of people departing their careers due to menopause, workplaces must ensure their environments are adaptive and considerate of this natural life stage. Not only can this retention strategy improve corporate performance and culture, but also supports societal gender equality and economic participation objectives. Open discussion and proactive measures will serve as critical steps in making menopause an accepted and accommodated aspect of working life.



All About Her Centre for Menopause is a collective of health professionals for Australian women whose lives are impacted by menopause, and education and training for the psychologists and health professionals who support them.

We exist to ensure that perimenopausal, menopausal and postmenopausal women feel understood, seen and supported at every step along the way.

Find out more at [www.allabouthercentre.com.au](http://www.allabouthercentre.com.au)

### Creating a Menopause-Friendly Workplaces

Workplaces can become more menopause-friendly through education and enhanced support, including:

- **Policy and Support:** a review of policies, including those on flexible working and sickness and incorporating menopause support can contribute to supporting gender and age diversity.
- **(Managerial Education:** educating managers about menopause's effects, reasonable adjustments, and supportive and sensitive communication is crucial
- **Workplace Adaptations:** assess workplace facilities to identify changes such as providing desk fans, access to cold water, and adapting uniforms and dress codes, reducing environmental factors that could worsen symptoms.
- **Employee Support:** open discussion within the company, like menopause networks to help to normalise and destigmatise menopause in the workplace culture.
- **Advocating for Policy Change:** Including national policies supporting menopausal individuals, urging governments to address the superannuation gender gap and mitigate its impact on experienced people in the workforce. Recognizing menopause as a significant factor in this gap is crucial for policy reform.

References: (1) Menopause Friendly. (n.d.). Menopause at work. <https://menopausefriendly.au/home/menopause-at-work/>; (2) Jack, G., Pitts, M., Riach, K., Bariola, E., Schapper, J., & Sarrel, P. (2014). Women, work and the menopause: Releasing the potential of older professional women. Melbourne: La Trobe University. Retrieved from <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resourcefiles/2014-09/apo-nid41511.pdf>; (3) Circle In. (2021, March 30). Driving the change: Menopause and the workplace. Retrieved from <https://circlein.com/research-and-guides/menopause-at-work/>; (4) D'Angelo, S., Bevilacqua, G., Hammond, J., Zaballa, E., Dennison, E. M., & Walker-Bone, K. (2022). Impact of menopausal symptoms on work: Findings from Women in the Health and Employment after Fifty (HEAF) Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(1), 295.; (5) Australian Institute of Superannuation Trustees. (n.d.). The Treasury. <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/c2023-379612-australian-institute-of-superannuation-trustees.pdf>; (6) Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., Pak, K., & Santana, M. (2021). Menopause and sustainable career outcomes: A science mapping approach. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(23), 12559.; (7) Ryan, L. (2023, October 14). Forget the crisis: Forget the crisis. The 'midlife collision' is real and affecting a large part of the workforce. Fast Company. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90966565/forget-the-crisis-the-midlife-collision-is-real-and-affecting-a-large-part-of-the-workforce>; (8) The Menopause Friendly Accreditation. (n.d.). How menopause friendly is your organisation? Retrieved from <https://menopausefriendly.au/home/how-menopause-friendly-is-your-organisation/>

\*All About Her - The Centre for Menopause acknowledges that all people born with ovaries and who live long enough will experience the menopause transition. This includes cisgender women, transgender men, non-binary individuals, and any other individual with ovaries. We use the terms individuals/people to be inclusive of the many who do not identify as women, but who will nonetheless experience this significant life stage.

Disclaimer: The information presented is for general understanding only and should not substitute professional medical advice. If you are concerned about your health, talk to your doctor or healthcare team for personalised guidance.

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