

# The Chronic Illness Inclusion Checklist:

Creating a healthier, more supportive workplace

Many organizations are making meaningful strides in supporting employees with chronic illnesses through flexible work, wellness programs, and inclusive leadership. As workplace needs evolve, there's always room to refine these efforts to ensure every employee feels valued and empowered. Chronic illnesses can challenge traditional work structures, but proactive policies, thoughtful accommodations, and an open culture enable employees to thrive.

This checklist helps leaders, HR professionals, and managers assess current initiatives, identify gaps, and enhance inclusivity—strengthening commitment, reducing stigma, and fostering a healthier, more engaged workforce.

## Foster an inclusive culture

- Promote open dialogue: Encourage a workplace culture where employees feel safe discussing health challenges and requesting accommodations.
- Provide inclusive leadership training: Equip managers with skills in empathy, confidentiality, and accommodation strategies to foster a supportive environment.
- Address stigma and bias: Develop awareness initiatives, storytelling opportunities, and training to challenge stereotypes and reduce bias.
- Lead by example: Ensure leadership visibly supports inclusion efforts, reinforcing an organizational commitment to workplace accessibility.

## Enhance communication & awareness

- Offer employee education: Provide ongoing training on chronic illness awareness, accessibility, and best practices for inclusivity.
- Establish confidentiality protocols: Create clear, safe channels for employees to disclose their health needs without fear of stigma.
- Implement feedback mechanisms: Utilize employee resource groups, confidential surveys, and pulse checks to assess needs and measure the impact of policies.
- Ensure clear policy communication: Regularly communicate workplace policies and accommodation options so employees understand their rights and available support.

## Empower employees

- Provide self-advocacy resources: Offer guides and workshops that help employees articulate their needs and navigate workplace accommodations.
- Establish peer-support networks: Facilitate employee-led support groups or mentorship programs for individuals managing chronic illnesses.
- Encourage regular check-ins: Schedule one-on-one or team meetings to assess employee needs, address concerns, and adjust accommodations as necessary.
- Celebrate strengths and contributions: Recognize and value employees for their skills and achievements beyond their health status.

## Provide meaningful accommodations

- Offer flexible work arrangements: Provide options such as flexible hours, remote work, and hybrid models to accommodate varying health needs.
- Ensure ergonomic and physical supports: Supply ergonomic tools, quiet/wellness spaces, and accessible office configurations to promote comfort and productivity.
- Expand health and wellness benefits: Include policies for mental health days, additional paid sick leave, wellness programs, and access to counseling or employee assistance programs.
- Facilitate workload adjustments: Offer temporary workload modifications or job-sharing options for employees managing fluctuating health conditions.
- Create an accessible workplace: Ensure physical spaces, digital tools, and meeting formats are inclusive for all employees, including those with mobility, sensory, or cognitive challenges.

## Implement & review policies

- Audit existing policies: Evaluate workplace policies to ensure they effectively support employees with chronic illnesses.
- Develop clear accommodation guidelines: Establish a transparent, structured process for requesting and implementing accommodations.
- Monitor and measure impact: Use key metrics to assess the effectiveness of inclusion initiatives and make data-driven improvements.
- Commit to continuous improvement: Regularly update policies based on employee feedback, legal requirements, and best practices.

## Need support in implementing these strategies?

Creating an inclusive workplace is an ongoing process, and you don't have to do it alone. If you need guidance on any of these action items—whether it's refining policies, training leaders, or developing a stronger workplace culture—Unum Co. is here to help.

Get in touch with us today to learn how we can support your organization in creating a healthier, more inclusive workplace for all employees.

Farah Meghji - farah@unumco.ca  
Megan Marsiglio - megan@unumco.ca

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