

# The Midlife Workforce Health Playbook

A Strategic Toolkit for Canadian Employers

**Rooted in Wellness. Built for Results.**

# Introduction: Why Midlife Health is a Business Strategy

Midlife health is a critical component of a sustainable organization. Yet, for many employers, it remains a "blind spot." This playbook is designed for leaders who are ready to stop reacting to absenteeism and turnover, and start proactively managing the workforce health trends that drive productivity.

Inside, you will find three tactical tools to audit your organization, equip your managers, and harden your internal processes.

## Part 1: The Workforce Health Diagnostic

*Use this tool to pinpoint where your organization is currently experiencing "pressure" (e.g., absenteeism, turnover, or low engagement).*

### 1. Strategy Indicators

*Check all that apply over the past 12–24 months:*

- ☐ Absenteeism is increasing or unpredictable across teams.
- ☐ Short-term sick leave is frequently recurring in the same individuals.
- ☐ Long-term disability cases are increasing or extending in duration.
- ☐ Accommodation requests are increasing.
- ☐ HR is repeatedly involved in the same types of workforce issues.
- ☐ Managers escalate workforce health issues inconsistently.

### 2. Identifying Pressure Points

*Where is the pressure most visible?*

- ☐ Midlife workforce (menopause, fatigue, chronic conditions)
- ☐ Workload / psychosocial stress
- ☐ Caregiving responsibilities impacting attendance
- ☐ Loss of experienced employees before retirement age
- ☐ Increased overtime or coverage costs

**Leadership Note:** *If you checked more than four boxes, your organization likely has a significant gap in proactive workforce health support.*

## Part 2: The Manager's Conversation Guide

*The biggest barrier to workforce health is manager hesitation. Use these frameworks to ensure conversations are supportive, not intrusive.*

### The 4-Step Conversation Framework

1. **Initiate (Neutral & Supportive):** "I wanted to check in because I've noticed a change in consistency. I'd like to understand what support might help you be successful at work right now."
2. **Explore Impact (Not Diagnosis):** "How is this affecting your ability to manage your workload? Is there anything at work that is making things more difficult?"
3. **Support (Focus on Function):** "Let's talk about what adjustments might help you stay successful—schedule, duties, or environment."
4. **Summarize & Close:** Always clarify: What was discussed? What adjustments were agreed upon? When is our next check-in?

**Critical Rule:** Do not request medical details. Focus entirely on workplace function and performance support.

### 2.1 Manager's Scenario Library

#### Scenario A: Addressing Performance Declines

- **The Situation:** An experienced senior lead has suddenly become disorganized and missed deadlines.
- **The "Play":** 'I've noticed your recent projects haven't been completed in your usual thorough way. I value your expertise on this team and want to make sure you have the support you need to be successful. Is there anything at work currently making it harder for you to manage your workload?'
- **Key:** Keep the focus on the work output and support, not the employee's personal health status.

## Scenario B: Navigating Caregiving Stress

- **The Situation:** An employee mentions they are struggling to balance work with 'family stuff' (an aging parent or child care).
- **The "Play":** 'I appreciate you sharing that with me. It's clear you're managing a lot right now. Let's look at your current deliverables and see if we can adjust your schedule or priorities to better support you while maintaining team performance. What does a sustainable schedule look like for you this week?'
- **Key:** Focus on 'sustainable performance'—acknowledging the stress while protecting the work.

## 2.2 Addressing Common Manager Obstacles

### 'What if they get defensive?'

**Mitigation:** Remind yourself that defensiveness is often a sign of fear, and often fear of being viewed as incompetent or redundant. Reiterate your intent immediately: 'I'm not bringing this up to critique your work, but because I want to ensure you have the tools to continue succeeding in this role.'

### 'What if I don't have the budget for accommodations?'

**Mitigation:** Most meaningful accommodations are low-cost or cost-neutral. Focus on flexibility, such as staggered hours, quiet workspaces, or temporary reprioritization of tasks. Usually, the cost of an accommodation is significantly lower than the cost of turnover and recruitment.

### 'Am I crossing a line by asking?'

**Mitigation:** You are not asking about medical details; you are asking about workplace function. It is your responsibility as a manager to ensure that obstacles to productivity are removed. As long as you keep the conversation focused on 'How can I support your performance?', you are operating well within your role.

## Part 3: The Disability Management Process Review

*Effective disability management is about consistent execution. Review your current practices:*

### Assessment Checklist (Check "Yes" for consistent application)

#### Early Identification

- ☐ Attendance changes are identified within 5–10 working days.
- ☐ There is a defined trigger for HR involvement.

#### Modified Work & Accommodation

- ☐ Modified duties are considered in all suitable cases.
- ☐ Job modifications are documented clearly.
- ☐ Managers understand what is operationally possible.

#### Return-to-Work Process

- ☐ RTW plans are created before the return date.
- ☐ Follow-up after return is standard practice.

#### Interpretation:

**Mostly Yes:** Your system is stable.

**Mixed:** You have operational inconsistency and risk of delays.

**Mostly No:** You likely have high variability and compliance exposure.

## Part 4: Executive Summary

### Strengthening Our Workforce Sustainability

#### The Challenge

We are currently seeing rising short-term disability or turnover within our most experienced talent cohorts. This is more than a wellness issue; it is a risk to our institutional knowledge and leadership pipeline.

#### The Goal

Shift from reactive, high-cost crisis management to proactive, high-performance support.

#### The Solution

Implementing a standardized 'Workforce Health' framework. This involves training managers to identify health-related performance barriers early and standardizing our return-to-work and accommodation processes.

#### The Expected ROI:

- **Reduced Attrition:** Retaining high-value employees who are currently struggling in silence.
- **Lowered Disability Costs:** Proactive support reduces the duration and frequency of long-term leaves.
- **Operational Consistency:** Equipping managers to handle health issues confidently, reducing the administrative burden on HR.

## Next Steps: Turning Strategy into Results

Most workforce health issues are not policy failures; they are execution failures. If your audit revealed gaps in consistency or high variability in how your managers handle health, we can help you close those gaps.

**Work Health Strategies** helps organizations bridge the gap between human-centric wellness and business performance.

**Let's discuss your strategy; book a consultation call today!**

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