

File/Our Ref:  
Your Ref:  
Please quote in reply



**By your side**

21 March 2024

Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au)

**Re: Issues related to menopause and perimenopause**

The Australian Services Union ('ASU') one of Australia's largest Unions, representing approximately 135,000 employees. Around 50% of ASU members are women, the exact percentage varies between industries, e.g. in social and community services around 70% of our members are women.

Recognising menopause and perimenopause in Australian workplaces is critical. Menopausal symptoms can have a profound impact on both the physical and mental health of women.

Women make up a significant portion of the workforce and understanding menopause and addressing the specific needs of women will go a long way in addressing gender inequality.

Many women undergo menopause during their mid-to-late careers, and by acknowledging and providing support, workplaces can retain valuable, experienced workers which in turn contributes to organisational stability and success. When workers feel supported, they are more likely to manage their symptoms effectively, leading to better focus and engagement at work.

Women who experience menopause or perimenopause should not need to take sick leave when they are unable to perform their work duties. Government should look to the recent UK Parliament report<sup>1</sup> which makes several recommendation including: the appointment of a Menopause Ambassador; production of model menopause policies to assist employers; a pilot 'menopause leave' policy; and the introduction of a new protected characteristic of menopause (including a duty to provide reasonable adjustments) in the Equality Act.

In early 2024 our Queensland Together Branch conducted a reproductive leave survey regarding menstruation, menopause/perimenopause and reproductive procedures such as IVF, vasectomy, hysterectomy and termination of pregnancy.

623 respondents shared their working life experiences regarding menopause and perimenopause.

---

<sup>1</sup> UK Parliament, House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, Menopause and the workplace [Online] <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/23281/documents/169819/default/>

# Queensland Together Survey Results

## Do you experience menopause symptoms?

- 86% said yes

## How frequent are your menopause symptoms?

- 40% daily
- 31% multiple times a week
- 18% other
- 11% once a month

## If you experience menopause symptoms, do they impact your ability to perform your work in any way?

- 84% said yes

## Have you ever utilised personal leave to deal with menopause symptoms?

- 51% said yes

## Have you ever considered taking personal leave to deal with menopause symptoms, but chosen not to because your personal leave balance was insufficient, or you otherwise needed that balance (e.g. for carer responsibilities)?

- 61% said yes

## If you had a separate allocation of personal leave to deal with menopause symptoms, so that taking time off did not reduce your sick leave balance, would you utilise it?

- 87% said yes

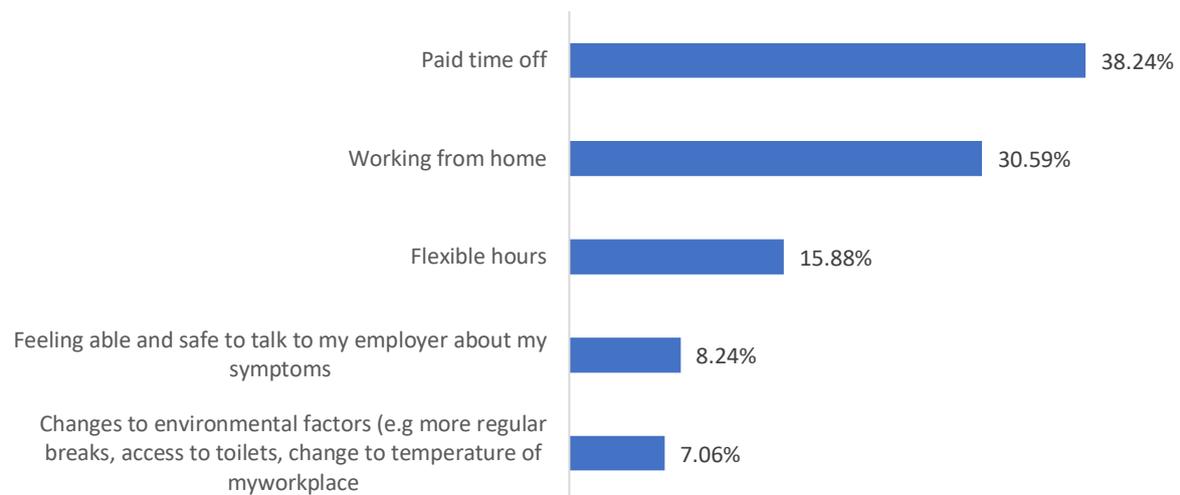
## Do you feel like you can talk to your line manager about taking leave or changing your work arrangements to deal with menopause symptoms?

- 60% said no
  - 67% felt it would impact negatively on their career or how they are viewed in the workplace.
  - 21% felt their line manager would not understand.
  - 12% felt they would not be believed.

## Have you considered leaving the workforce because of your symptoms?

- 34% said yes

## Which do you think would best help you to manage your symptoms at work?



### Common menopause/perimenopause symptoms experienced by survey respondents:

- Painful periods
- Brain fog
- Tiredness
- Lack of energy
- Aching muscles/Sore joints
- Hot flushes
- Heart palpitations
- Interrupted sleep/Insomnia
- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Anxiousness/Mild Depression
- Unproductive
- Diminished confidence
- Itchy skin
- Trouble concentrating
- Irregular periods
- Exhaustion
- Nausea
- Inability to regulate emotions
- Migraines

Government should explore initiatives that support women during menopause and perimenopause. This could include providing paid menopause leave to recognise the validity of these challenges and enable women to prioritise their health without exhausting their sick leave or compromising their financial well-being if they are required to take unpaid leave.

By offering paid time off, workplaces can empower women to manage these symptoms effectively, ensuring that they return to work rejuvenated and better equipped to contribute to their roles. Paid menopause leave would also go some way to combating the 1 in 3 women who have considered leaving the workforce due to their symptoms.

Government should also consider promoting the following workplace measures to assist women going through menopause and perimenopause.

1. **Flexible work hours:** Allow women to have flexible work hours, enabling them to adjust their schedules to better manage menopausal symptoms, such as fatigue, brain fog or insomnia.
2. **Work from home:** Allow women to work from home when needed, providing a comfortable environment that suits their specific needs.

3. **Temperature control in the workplace:** Create a comfortable and adjustable workplace temperature to accommodate women experiencing hot flashes.
4. **Educational workshops:** Conduct educational workshops or seminars to increase awareness about menopause and its effects, fostering a supportive and understanding workplace culture.
5. **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Provide access to EAPs that offer counselling and support services to help women navigate the emotional and psychological aspects of menopause and perimenopause.
6. **Comfortable and appropriate work attire:** Allow more relaxed dress codes or temperature-appropriate clothing options to help women manage body temperature fluctuations. Consideration should be given to mandatory clothing e.g. darker colours, breathable materials.
7. **Designated workplace rest areas:** Create designated rest areas where women can take short breaks when needed to manage symptoms like fatigue or stress.
8. **Open communication:** Foster an open and supportive culture that encourages women to communicate their needs and challenges during menopause and perimenopause without fear of stigma or discrimination.
9. **Supportive managers:** Train managers to be understanding and supportive of employees experiencing menopause and perimenopause. Encourage open communication and accommodate individual needs.
10. **Flexible breaks:** Allow flexible break schedules, enabling women to take breaks as needed to manage symptoms.

Implementing workplace accommodations for menopause and perimenopause acknowledges the diverse experiences of women in the workforce. Every woman's menopausal journey is unique. Government must promote initiatives and awareness where women feel valued, supported, and empowered to perform at their best, irrespective of the challenges associated with this life stage.

Yours faithfully



Emeline Gaske  
**ASSISTANT NATIONAL SECRETARY**