

Menopause Support Policy



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Policy Review Date is: May 2025 (subject to changes in legislation)
Queries to: Employee Relations; Diversity & Inclusion.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 An Post is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for all employees.
- 1.2 An Post acknowledges that employees may have challenges presented by menopause symptoms, and that such challenges are not unique to any particular group. What does this mean? For employees who are experiencing menopause, we are committed to providing a working environment that provides practical wellbeing supports.

2. Menopause

- 2.1 Menopause is a natural stage of life which all women will experience, yet it remains a considerably taboo subject. Menopause needs to be normalised, acknowledged and accepted. By having conversations about menopause, its impact at an individual level, and the challenges it presents, we can move closer to a more supportive, inclusive workplace.
- 2.2 80% of women experience symptoms¹, however, we recognise that the experience of menopause will vary for each individual and that the symptoms can sometimes cause real challenges for women in the workplace, which may not always be obvious to others. We also recognise that this is a sensitive issue for many women, and some women may not wish to disclose that they are impacted by menopause.
- 2.3 To demonstrate our commitment to inclusivity, we want to ensure that we raise awareness of menopause in the workplace and provide supports to those who are experiencing menopause symptoms. We consider it important to provide appropriate supports to employees who disclose that they are impacted by menopause symptoms.
- 2.4 We have consulted with An Post Group of Unions through partnership forums and their guidance and inputs have also informed this policy.
- 2.5 **The Aim of this policy is to ensure that managers and employees recognise their responsibility to:**
 - Understand menopause and how it can affect employees, and their colleagues.
 - To raise awareness amongst employees, and to outline that supports are available.
 - To respond positively to employee needs, enabling impacted employees to raise concerns and seek support in a dignified and confidential way, so they can perform at their best.
 - Promote the services provided by our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and Occupational Health & Support Services to those going through menopause.
 - Foster an environment in which employees can openly and comfortably engage in discussions about menopause.

¹ Menopause Health, themenopausehub.ie, March 23rd 2021

3. Scope of Policy

- 3.1** This policy applies to all people employed by An Post. While the policy mainly refers to women, we also recognise that the menopause can impact other employees. Menopause can be experienced by; transgender men, people who are intersex, people who identify as non-binary, and particularly those who may not have accessed medical forms of transition (see appendix 1).

4. Understanding the stages of Menopause

- 4.1** Menopause is a natural part of the aging process and usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55.
- 4.2** Each stage of menopause has a wide range of symptoms affecting a woman's mental, physical and sexual health. The variety of symptoms associated with menopause can range in severity and duration and will be different for each woman. Symptoms can impact every part of a woman's life, including her working life.
- 4.3** Menopause is a catch all for all phases of menopause which includes the following:
- Perimenopause - is the time leading up to the end of a woman's periods when changes start to happen. This is due to the fluctuation in hormones, especially estrogen and progesterone, resulting in symptoms. It can start in the late 30s/early 40s. The average age of perimenopause is 45.
 - Post-menopause - is a biological stage of life when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months. The average age of post-menopause is 52. During the years after menopause, women may see a reduction in their hot flushes, mood swings, and sleep disturbances, along with general improvement in mood and mental clarity. Because the body's oestrogen levels remain low, there are several new health conditions postmenopausal women need to be aware of, including increased risk of heart disease, osteoporosis and cognitive disease (Alzheimer's).
 - Early menopause - occurs before the age of 45.
 - Premature menopause - occurs before the age of 40 (also known as POI - premature ovarian insufficiency) or because of illness or medical treatment. Breast cancer patients can experience menopause due to their medical treatment.
 - Surgical menopause - follows the removal of one or both ovaries or radiation of the pelvis. This can be very sudden with symptoms starting abruptly and can happen at any age.

4. Understanding the stages of Menopause (con)

4.4 The average length of time for symptoms to persist is 7.5 years. There are over forty symptoms of menopause, which include:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Poor concentration and/or memory issues, brain fog
- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Insomnia and fatigue
- Anxiety, irritability or depression
- Low energy
- Joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Reduced self-confidence
- Mood swings.

4.5 See The Menopause Hub symptom checker for the full list [here](#).

5. Impact on working life

5.1 For some women, experiencing symptoms of menopause will be a private matter, and for others their symptoms may be such that, discussing their experience and having the understanding of their manager and/or colleagues would be helpful.

5.2 For many women in An Post, the nature of their jobs may be customer-facing or in an enclosed office environment, with some working on a hybrid basis.

5.3 In some cases, women may benefit from workplace supports or the provision of a reasonable accommodation to assist them to undertake their roles effectively.

5.4 Women who may be experiencing menopause symptoms should first discuss these with their line manager, if they feel comfortable in doing so, or alternatively their HR manager. Line managers should make themselves available to discuss any challenges an employee may have, and what supports where possible, can be put in place. Please refer to the Company intranet for details on the An Post Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), alternatively, your line manager will provide information.

5.5 Research has shown that menopausal symptoms can present challenges for an employee when undertaking their day-to-day duties. Accordingly, An Post will not discriminate against an employee who discloses that they, or their work, are affected by menopausal symptoms.

6. Practical Supports available to employees

- 6.1 Open Communications:** An Post is committed to fostering a culture of open communication so employees experiencing symptoms of menopause can feel confident discussing their work-related issues linked to menopause with their managers. Line managers are expected to engage empathetically and to offer supports to their employees where feasible. Supports are to be discussed on a case-by-case basis.
- 6.2 Facilities:** Most large An Post locations provide changing and washroom facilities which can be accessed during the working day. For those working as Postal Operatives, or performing other working arrangements outside of offices, facilities should be discussed directly with the line manager. Where feasible, An Post will provide access to restrooms when employees need to manage difficult symptoms.
- 6.3 Environmental factors:** Temperature control can be an important factor for some women experiencing menopause. For office employees, desk fans will be provided upon request, as well as access to cold drinking water. Changes to office seating plans will also be made as appropriate so that affected employees can be near a window or an open door, or if the employee wishes to be away from radiators. Windows will also have fully functioning fitted blinds, if appropriate.
- 6.4 Breaks:** Flexibility around the taking of breaks, or increased breaks during the working day will be considered, where practical.
- 6.5 Work-wear and dress code:** Flexibility over dress codes, as well as the provision of spare work-wear/uniforms, can be provided as required for those who require a change of clothes.
- 6.6 Change of duties:** Where feasible, changes to the employee's duties which assist in the management of menopausal symptoms may be put in place, in agreement with local management (and local colleagues if appropriate), for the duration of their menopausal symptoms.
- 6.7 Performance / targets:** Line managers should work with the employee to determine how best to support them and make any appropriate adjustments, if menopausal symptoms are impacting the employee's work performance or achievement of targets.
- 6.8 Sick absences:** Where, during ASMP processes it becomes clear that absence(s) are related directly or indirectly to menopausal symptoms, consideration will be given to the aims of this policy before making any decisions under the ASMP processes.
- 6.9 Flexible working arrangements:** In areas where flexi-time does not exist, arrangements such as an earlier/later start/finish times will be considered with the employee where feasible. Requests for hybrid/remote work will also be considered and may be put in place where practical and appropriate.
- 6.10 Medical Appointments and Support:** We encourage employees to speak to their GP when they are experiencing symptoms. We would ask that employees work with their line manager to ensure that time off is supported and planned for, giving as much notice as reasonably possible where the medical appointment cannot be scheduled outside working hours.

6. Practical Supports available to employees

- 6.11 Training:** The company will provide awareness/training sessions to line managers and employees to increase awareness and understanding of menopause, which will help them support and make adjustments, where possible for those affected.

7. Occupational Health

- 7.1** The Occupational Health and Support Service is available to all employees with experiencing menopause. It is designed to assist employees manage personal difficulties and aims to promote and maintain the wellbeing of employees.

8. Employee Assistance Programme

- 8.1** All employees have access to a confidential 24/7/365 helpline, and access to the EAP platform. The platform provides advice, information & support on matters relating to health, mental wellbeing, financial & social issues, personal and family challenges. The EAP offers support to all employees, their partners, and dependent children over the age of 16 still living at home.

9. Communication and information

- 9.1** All employees will be made aware of this policy as well as the supports available through the EAP services. It is important that employees understand the effects of menopause and that supports can be put in place in a discreet way for those affected. In that regard, all employees should be comfortable about discussing workplace menopausal impact in carrying out their duties.
- 9.2** An Post will consider additional suggestions put forward by employees and their trade union representatives with a view to providing a more inclusive and supportive environment as we have greater experience with the implementation of this policy.
- 9.3** It is acknowledged that as menopause is transitional, and accommodations may only be required temporarily. Line managers and employees should check in regularly and employees should advise their line manager when they are comfortable to resume regular duties, and where supports are no longer required.

10. Management Responsibility

- 10.1** It is important that all managers are aware of; this policy, the support guide for line managers, and the menopause charter, and they should ensure that employees reporting to them have access to same. Guidelines will be provided to managers on how to respond to employees' requests for supports related to menopausal symptoms.
- 10.2** Appropriate tools and information on menopause will be provided to all line managers so that they understand that menopause is a workplace issue that requires due consideration from a health & wellbeing perspective.
- 10.3** Managers will consider all employee requests for support/s sympathetically and with due respect for all concerned. Appropriate supports will be put in place through consultation with the individual concerned as required.
- 10.4** Any supports which may have an impact on other work colleagues will be communicated discreetly at the request of the impacted employee.
- 10.5** Managers will uphold An Post's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and will not discriminate against employees who are experiencing menopause.
- 10.6** Managers should be aware that employees experiencing menopause may have difficulty with their work performance due to their symptoms. Accordingly, line managers should have due consideration for this. Managers will encourage open, confidential, and regular dialogue to support those impacted and should contact their HR Manager for further guidance or support.

11. Employee Responsibility

- 11.1** Employees experiencing the menopause and associated symptoms are encouraged to seek support from their line manager, or relevant HR manager if they are experiencing challenges in the workplace. This is encouraged so that supports can be put in place in a timely manner, to enable the employee to carry out their work. Such information will be treated confidentially.
- 11.2** An Post also encourages employees to take a positive approach to their health and wellbeing by seeking medical advice from their GP, or by visiting their local women's wellness centre.
- 11.3** As above, confidential supports are available through An Post's Employee Assistance Programme should an employee or a member of their family need support in coping with the impacts of menopause. The counsellors and experts are highly experienced in personal and work related issues and can support anyone dealing with issues. The EAP offers support to all employees, their partners, and dependent children over the age of 16 still living at home.

11. Employee Responsibility

- 11.4** All employees have a right to work in a respectful working environment. Employees should co-operate to support their colleagues by understanding that any supports colleagues are receiving are based on medical reasons. Furthermore, inappropriate remarks or alleged 'banter' regarding menopause will not be tolerated and employees engaging in same will be subject to the Company's disciplinary procedures.

12. Monitoring

- 12.1** This policy will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to reflect our employees' needs, changes to best practice and legislation, and in any event will be reviewed every two years.
- 12.2** The An Post Menopause Support Policy is a collective agreement registered with the Joint Conciliation Council and any amendments will be made through that forum.

13. Resources

- 1. The Menopause Hub - Ireland's first dedicated menopause clinic**
www.themenopausehub.ie
Tel: 01 2107948
- 2. HSE**
www2.hse.ie/conditions/menopause/
- 3. My Second Spring - Women's resource**
mysecondspring.ie
- 4. Irish Family Planning Association - Menopause Checkup**
www.ifpa.ie
Tel: 1850 49 50 51
- 5. The Women's Health Clinic - Medical Services**
www.womenshealthclinic.ie
Tel: 01 230 0556

13. Resources:

6. Employee Assistance Programme with Spectrum.Life

anpost.spectrum.life

(Organisation Code: An Post)

Tel: 1800 903 542

7. The Women's Health Concern

www.womens-health-concern.org/

14. Appendix 1

14.1 Menopause & Trans /Non Binary People

14.2 Transgender or 'trans' people have a gender identity or gender expression that differs from the sex that they were assigned at birth. There are a variety of terms that people who don't feel entirely male or entirely female use to describe their gender identity, like non-binary, or genderqueer. Intersex is the term that a person may use when they have been born with both male and female sex characteristics. All of these people may experience menopause.

14.3 Transitioning can help many transgender people lead healthy, fulfilling lives. There are no specific set of steps necessary to 'complete' a transition, it is a matter of what is right for each person. All transgender people are entitled to the same dignity and respect as anyone else and be able to live, and be respected, according to their gender identity, regardless of which legal or medical steps they have taken.

