



HSE MENOPAUSE POLICY

Policy Procedure Protocol Guideline Clinical Guideline

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<i>It is the policy of the HSE to ensure that employees are supported if experiencing symptoms related to menopause/perimenopause</i>
Description:
<i>The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness of the impact of menopause and perimenopause on employees and to outline how the organisation, including managers and colleagues can support these employees</i>

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PART A: Outline of PPPG Steps

1. Introduction

- 1.1.** The HSE is committed to ensuring that all employees are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their working environment. It is also committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce.
- 1.2.** This policy has been developed based on the three key principles from the 'Menopause in the Workplace Policy Framework for Civil Service Organisations'¹. These are:
 - Health, Safety, Welfare and Wellbeing at Work
 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I)
 - Be an Employer of Choice
- 1.3.** Priority 2 of the HSE People Strategy 2019-2024 focuses on wellbeing and engagement. The organisation is committed to developing an integrated focus on the entire employee experience that addresses all aspects of work, the workplace and staff health, safety and wellbeing and prioritise key periods of transition for staff during their career journey.²
- 1.4.** Priority 4 of the Health Services Healthy Ireland Implementation Plan 2023-2027 focuses on "Supporting staff personal health and wellbeing" enhancing the healthy behaviours of HSE staff and creating a workplace that supports these behaviours.³
- 1.5.** This document is intended to support persons who are experiencing, or who may in the future experience, menopausal symptoms. When this guidance document talks about "women" it is intended in the most inclusive sense of the word. It is used as shorthand to describe all those who identify as women as well as those that do not identify as women but who share women's biological realities and experiences. In using this term, we seek to include not exclude.¹
- 1.6.** It must be recognised that everyone's experience of menopause will be different and the support required may vary.
- 1.7.** There are differences in biological and hormonal changes in women of different races and ethnicity. There can also be significant differences among perceptions, attitudes and expectations surrounding menopause, and this can be influenced by race, culture and ethnicity.⁴

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The purpose of this policy is to give guidance to managers and employees on how to be supportive in the management of employees with menopause related concerns, with a focus on awareness and support in the workplace.
- 2.2. This policy is concerned with menopause and related issues in HSE employees. The Programme for Government has made commitments to promote women's health with greater emphasis on women's experience of health care and to support work of the Women's Health Taskforce. Menopause care was identified as a key action under the Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023 which commits to changing the approach to menopause care in Ireland and to increase public supports available to women before, during and after menopause.⁵
- 2.3. As per the 'WHO Healthy Workplace Model' the HSE will work with staff to take personal and professional responsibility for their own physical and psychological health and wellbeing through self-care and to ensure standards and policies are in place to help people to feel 'in control', supported and enabled to achieve a work-life balance.⁶

3. Policy Statement

The HSE believes that our employees are our most important asset in the delivery of high quality health and social services. We are committed to protecting the safety, health and welfare of our employees and those who come in contact with our activities. In this regard, the HSE is focused on improving health, safety and wellbeing, and in supporting our employees throughout their working lives. Supportive practices greatly contribute to an inclusive working environment and can go a long way towards retaining valuable employees, encouraging connectivity, enhancing team morale and motivation, maintaining productivity and reducing sick leave absence

The World Health Organisation (2010) describe "A healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace by considering the following, based on identified needs:

- Health and safety concerns in the physical work environment;
- Health, safety and well-being concerns in the psychosocial work environment including organisation of work and workplace culture;

- Personal health resources in the workplace, and
- Ways of participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families and other members of the community." ⁶

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken with the HSE Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Team and EqIA Expert Panel. The assessment found that the implementation of and compliance with this Policy is unlikely to have a negative impact on any HSE employee on any of the nine grounds of discrimination.

4. Scope

- 4.1. This policy applies to all HSE employees.
- 4.2. Section 38 agencies are required to adopt or develop a Policy which is consistent with this Policy.

5. Objectives

- 5.1. To develop a HSE Menopause Policy in line with any identified legislative requirements and evidence based practices.
- 5.2. To outline clear roles and responsibilities of responsible persons.
- 5.3. To provide educational resources for all HSE employees.
- 5.4. To provide advice on the supports, process and guidance on evidence based practice which is aimed at supporting employees who may be experiencing the menopause or related concerns.
- 5.5. To provide guidance for managers and employees on relevant organisational supports.

6. Outcomes

- 6.1. An inclusive working environment for employees and others who fall under the scope of this Policy by providing a framework for supporting employees experiencing menopause, menopausal symptoms or related concerns.
- 6.2. Clear roles and responsibilities of responsible persons are clearly outlined as part of this Policy.
- 6.3. Employees are provided with practical guidance on relevant organisational

supports.

7. Aims of the Policy

- 7.1. The topic of menopause is not one which has traditionally been openly discussed in the workplace and there has been a lack of broad awareness and understanding of the impacts that menopause symptoms can have in the workplace. Women account for over 78% of the total HSE workforce. Menopause usually happens between the ages of 45-55, although it may occur at a younger or older age. At any one time the HSE could have approximately 29% of female employees within this age cohort.⁷
- 7.2. This document aims to create a safe environment for all employees working in the HSE to openly share, if appropriate and at their own discretion, that they are experiencing menopausal symptoms. Menopause transition, should be acknowledged in the workplace as a natural process and employees should be able to seek support and discuss their experience of menopause openly.
- 7.3. It is important for everyone, in particular people managers, to understand the potential impact menopause can have on the individual and their performance at work.

8. Definitions¹

8.1. Menopause

The word “menopause” will refer to the various stages and types of changes that an individual may go through at this time and includes perimenopause, post menopause, early menopause, premature menopause, and induced menopause.

- Menopause refers to the time when menstruation (periods) stop and the ovaries lose their reproductive function. Usually, this occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. The average age that this occurs in Ireland is 51 years.
- Menstruation may start to become less frequent over a few months or years before they stop. Sometimes they can stop suddenly. In some cases, menstruation can become very heavy in the years coming up to menopause.
- Natural menopause is deemed to have occurred after 12 consecutive months without menstruation for which there is no other obvious physiological or pathological cause and in the absence of clinical intervention.

8.2. Perimenopause

- Perimenopause (sometimes known as menopause transition) refers to the lead-up to menopause, when the signs and symptoms of menopause are first observed and ends one year after the final menstrual period. The age in which this begins varies, but the average age is 45 years old. However, some individuals start to experience symptoms in their 30s or rarely even younger.
- Perimenopause can last several years and can affect physical, emotional, mental and social well-being. The Health Service Executive report that typically perimenopause symptoms can start up to 7 years before the last menstrual period.

8.3. Post-menopause

- A woman is considered post-menopausal if she has not had her period for an entire year (12 months). They are postmenopausal for the rest of their life. In this third phase of the menopause transition, they may still experience symptoms, commonly for a further five to seven years, though many experience symptoms for longer than this.

8.4. Early menopause

- Early menopause is when an individual's menstruation stops before the age of 45. It can happen by itself or as a side effect of some treatments.

8.5. Premature menopause

- Premature menopause, also known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI), is when an individual experiences menopause before the age of 40. It is uncommon (<1% of population), it can have significant impact on health.

8.6. Induced menopause

- Induced menopause refers to menstrual periods that stop after surgical removal of the ovaries, chemotherapy or radiation damage to the ovaries, or from the use of other medications to intentionally induce menopause as part of the treatment of certain diseases. Induced menopause can happen at any age, pre natural menopause.

9. Menopausal Symptoms¹

- 9.1. Individuals may experience a spectrum of physical and psychological symptoms associated with menopause; the severity and duration of the symptoms will vary

significantly. Some may experience multiple symptoms, either physical, psychological or a combination of both, over a prolonged period of time, and others may not.

9.2. Common Physical Symptoms

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Difficulty sleeping
- Fatigue
- Lack of energy
- Vaginal dryness and pain, itching or discomfort
- Reduced sex drive (libido)
- Discomfort during sex
- Irregular periods
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations (a fast-beating, fluttering or pounding heart)
- Recurring Urinary Tract Infections
- Loss of muscle
- Digestive/gut issues
- Weight gain
- Joint aches and pains

9.3. Common cognitive and psychological symptoms

- Low mood and irritability
- Anxiety
- Problems with memory or concentration such as brain fog
- Tearfulness
- Loss of confidence and self esteem

10. Impact of Menopause on Working Life

10.1. Menopause is a normal and healthy life stage. However, for some, it may not be an easy transition. Research has indicated that:

- 86% of women say that menopause can have a big impact on their everyday lives
- 28% of women in menopause say they would be happy to talk about it to their manager at work¹⁰

10.2. Specific research undertaken in 2021 to understand women’s experience of menopause in the workplace found that:

- 12% of menopausal women have given up work due to their symptoms
- 43% have considered giving up work due to their symptoms
- 39% have taken time off work due to menopause
- 22% have taken three or more days off work because of menopause¹¹

10.3. A survey undertaken in 2021 found that the top five symptoms of menopause experienced that impacted work included:

- Brain fog (77%)
- Anxiety (65%)
- Loss of confidence (60%)
- Insomnia (47%)
- Aches and pains (46%)¹²

10.4. In 2020 and 2021, the *Women’s Health Taskforce* conducted substantial outreach to women, including a Radical Listening exercise wherein over 278 women were invited to share their views and experiences of healthcare in Ireland.¹³ Women who engaged in this exercise reported that menopause was a taboo subject – something “not spoken about by anyone, they felt dependent on mothers, sisters and close friends to provide information where it wasn’t available in mainstream media or talked about in the workplace”. Women in this exercise also reported feeling that their symptoms were dismissed, society did not support them and they felt a sense of loneliness and isolation.

10.5. The right approach and supports in the workplace can greatly improve the management of challenging symptoms.¹

10.6. The role of managers in supporting those experiencing menopausal symptoms is vital, not only for the person in question, but for their colleagues as well. Menopause education and awareness needs to be available to and understood by everyone in the organisation.

11. Roles and Responsibilities

11.1. Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The CEO has overarching responsibility to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable the safety, health and welfare at work of all employees and others affected by the HSE activities by:

- Ensuring the development of this Policy.
- Delegating operational responsibility for coordinating, implementation of and compliance with this Policy and any associated procedures to the Executive Management Team, Senior Managers and Line Managers for all matters within their control.

11.2. Senior Managers e.g. Regional Executive Officers/Chief Executive Officers/Chief Officers, Assistant National Directors

- Ensure there are adequate and appropriate arrangements in place for the successful implementation, monitoring, evaluation and audit of this Policy throughout their respective areas of responsibility.
- Ensure necessary resources are allocated and are available for the implementation of this Policy.
- Ensure implementation of this Policy by ensuring use of audit checklist - see section 18 and appendix VIII.

11.3. Human Resources

Human Resources have a pivotal role in raising organisational-wide awareness of menopause and creating and imbedding a culture that is supportive and inclusive. This can be achieved by:

- Engaging senior management team to secure buy-in and endorsement for menopause policies and initiatives
- Undertaking relevant training to gain an understanding of how work patterns could impact symptoms and supporting flexible working arrangements, where possible
- Improving understanding and awareness of menopause through the provision of learning and development supports for all employees, as part of their overarching learning and development and wellbeing strategies
- Provision of training and awareness supports for line managers, including guidance on their roles and responsibilities in supporting employees in line with

organisational policies

11.4. Line Manager

As a manager, building connection and trust in a team is vital. Regular and constructive informal communication serves to enhance working relationships and build trust. Including a Health and Wellness agenda item at meetings can be beneficial in promoting wellness initiatives and prompting discussions with the team.

Managers are not expected to be experts when discussing menopause, but they should have an understanding of menopause and of what supports are available to meet the needs of employees and be open to having conversations with them. See appendix VI 'Menopause and the Workplace – How Managers can Approach a Conversation'.

In providing support and guidance to employees, managers have the responsibility to:

- Ensure they have a good understanding of menopause, the symptoms and how they impact the individual, the team and the workplace including workplace adjustments and supports that may be required.
- Ensure there is a system in place for the appropriate circulation or communication of this policy to all employees.
- Encourage all employees to have a strong awareness, through available training, on menopause and wellbeing at work. This communicates an openness to understand more about this life stage and to hear people's experiences of managing menopausal symptoms
- Normalise and support conversations about menopause among employees.
- Ensure privacy for all discussions.
- Ensure that the conversation is managed sensitively, professionally and confidentially and that no information will be disclosed to anyone else without their explicit consent.
- Respect an employee's right to discuss personal issues appropriate to a workplace setting. They may be more comfortable talking to a colleague, another manager, HR or a member of the EAP team.
- Signpost the employee to appropriate information, for example online or via their GP. / See Appendix V - Menopause and the Workplace – Information for Employees.
- Be supportive of any upcoming healthcare appointments or leave requirements in line with current HSE policies.
- Agree on any actions or adjustments that can best support the individual and

how to implement them.

- Arrange a follow up meeting to check back in.

As a manager, this conversation may feel uncomfortable at times. Be prepared for some silences. It is important to allow for this. Identify how you can support yourself. General support for managers on employee wellbeing issues is available through the EAP service. Also, you may wish to consider using the coaching service to increase confidence as a manager.

See Appendix VI for guidance on how managers can approach a conversation about menopause and Appendix VII for 'Considerations for Manager'.

11.5. Employee

It is important that employees take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. If an employee is experiencing menopause symptoms they may seek advice from their health care provider.

- If an employee is experiencing menopausal symptoms and feel they may need support at work, they should speak with their manager.
- Early discussions can help determine the most appropriate course of action, how to overcome any barriers and agree what support is needed.
- If an employee does not feel comfortable discussing this with their own manager, they could request a discussion with:
 - an alternative manager
 - Employee Assistance Programme
 - Occupational Health
- Employees should access information or access support services via their GP of other specialist menopause clinics - see <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/menopause/>.
- All employees have a responsibility to contribute to a respectful working environment, be willing to help and support their colleagues, and understand that colleagues may need adjustments to manage their menopausal symptoms.
- Employees should monitor how symptoms are impacting them and discuss with their manager on an ongoing basis to ensure that supports are appropriate, effective and sufficient
- If employees are experiencing menopause symptoms so severe that they are temporarily unfit for work, sick leave can be availed of in accordance with the [Public Service Sick Leave Scheme](#) and managed as per the [Managing](#)

[Attendance Policy and Procedure.](#)

- See Appendix V for 'Menopause and the Workplace – Information for Employees'

11.6. Occupational Health

Ordinarily where an employee is seeking workplace accommodations, referral to occupational health is not required as local management are best placed to decide whether a particular work accommodation is feasible or not.

- Where menopausal symptoms are leading to repeated short-term absences, or an employee's fitness for work is impacted, referral to occupational health may be necessary in accordance with the [Managing Attendance Policy and Procedure](#). This is in order to establish if all treatments are being fully utilised and to see if there are any additional accommodations not already identified that may be of benefit.
- In the case of long-term absence, referral of any absence regardless of cause is required after 4 weeks, as per the Managing Attendance Policy and Procedure.

11.7. Employee Assistance Programme

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is available to all HSE Employees. The EAP provides a non-judgmental, confidential and free service where every individual will be met with empathy and understanding. The EAP can provide a safe space to discuss the menopausal experience and to develop a client focused self-care plan.

- Employee Assistance Counsellors Therapists offer a range of services and have the training and expertise to work collaboratively with employees, offering emotional, solution focused and informational support to those who are experiencing emotional and mental health symptoms associated with the menopause.
- The EAP is available to support managers in enhancing a culture of wellbeing in their division and in supporting their colleagues who are going through menopause
- See <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-and-services/employee-assistance-programme-staff-counselling/> for further information

12. Workplace Supports – Colleagues

- 12.1. It is important to understand that every colleague's experience is unique and symptoms will differ from person to person. Chances are, given the demographic makeup of the HSE, there are individuals in every division experiencing perimenopause and menopause. So, a good first step would be to learn about what menopause is, how it affects individuals both directly and indirectly and what supports are available to support those going through perimenopause, menopause and post menopause. It is important that those going through this transition and experiencing problematic symptoms feel supported to continue to work to the best of their capabilities.
- 12.2. Not everyone will be willing to talk about their experience of menopause. It is still a personal, private and sensitive issue. But if they do wish to discuss this, listen to them and ask how they are feeling about what they are going through. Be present and focus on listening to their experience. This supports the building of trust.
- 12.3. Many individuals, especially those experiencing problematic symptoms may feel discouraged in the workplace and struggle to do things they have normally done or be reticent and/or anxious about progressing or taking on new challenges. Try and gently encourage them to seek help. Encourage those who disclose they are suffering to speak with their manager or consider accessing support. Words of encouragement can go a long way to bolster their self-esteem and validate their experience.
- 12.4. All colleagues have a very important role in creating and maintaining equitable workplaces. At the moment the conversation around menopause and the workplace is often focussed on actions and techniques the individual with menopause should employ. Male allyship can be a strong catalyst for culture change and bringing about greater quality and access to supports.¹
- 12.5. All employees should ensure they are informed and have an understanding about menopause in order to support colleagues appropriately - education modules are available on HSeLanD for all employees and for managers.

13. Workplace Supports – Personal Health and Wellbeing

- 13.1. The Health Services Healthy Ireland Implementation Plan 2023-2027 identifies the value of its staff and the important role in supporting staff health and wellbeing.³ One of the four strategic priority areas in this plan is "Supporting staff personal health and wellbeing". Positive lifestyle behaviours such as being

physically active, eating healthily, not smoking, avoiding harmful use of alcohol and looking after ones mental and sexual health and wellbeing contribute to better personal health and wellbeing. A healthy workplace environment provides opportunities to support staff in their efforts to improve and maintain healthy lifestyle behaviours.

- 13.2.** Promoting and supporting healthy behaviours and healthy environments can lead to many positive benefits for staff. Adopting and maintaining healthy lifestyle behaviours that support us to keep well day-to-day; stay well long-term; and nurture our social connections is essential for our overall physical and mental health and wellbeing. The HSE have developed a range of resource and initiatives for adopting healthy behaviours which can be found [here](#).

14. Workplace Adjustments

- 14.1.** Menopause, in and of itself, is not an illness. However, some of the symptoms of menopause can cause illness and may impact on work performance, attendance and wellbeing in the workplace. There may be times when an employee who is experiencing severe symptoms may need adjustments to support them to continue working. Managers should support employees wherever possible and should make all reasonable efforts to ensure an employee is able to share information confidentially to help manage their symptoms while at work.
- 14.2.** The purpose of workplace adjustments is to provide a supportive work environment and culture by making appropriate adjustments and removing barriers wherever possible. Services should not take a one-size-fits-all approach, and should instead explore options with employees to determine what support would be helpful and feasible.
- 14.3.** They should be flexible, making adjustments where possible, because very small adjustments can make a significant difference to the quality of working life for employees experiencing menopause. Services should consider what practical steps they can implement to support an employee and lessen the impact of menopausal symptoms at work and to also ensure that working conditions do not exacerbate symptoms.
- 14.4.** Adjustments may not just be physical but may also include consideration of work patterns, work design and work schedules, including for employees who are remote workers. Flexibility in the application of these adjustments may be helpful, where this is possible and should be based on service needs. If a blended working arrangement is in place, the [Blended Working Policy](#) must be followed.

- 14.5.** Employees should discuss their requests for support with their manager. Depending on the circumstances, requests will be considered and may be approved as requested or modified on a temporary basis with ongoing review to ensure that both the employee and the manager are satisfied that the arrangements in place are adequate for the needs of the employee and the business needs of the service. Requests should be considered on a case by case basis, balancing the needs of the employee and the service and reviewed as necessary’.
- 14.6.** Managers should confirm, by email or in writing, any arrangements agreed verbally.
- 14.7.** If the employee is voicing concerns of work-related stress as a result of the impact of menopause symptoms, the manager and employee should refer to the [HSE Policy for Prevention and Management of Stress in the Workplace.](#)
- 14.8.** Where agreed adjustments have been implemented but fitness for work is still impacted the manager should refer the employee to Occupational Health – Refer to [HSE Rehabilitation Policy.](#)

Table 1: Examples of Adjustments for Related Symptoms

Hot Flashes/Flashes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provision of a fan ○ Access to fresh drinking water ○ Access to a quiet area ○ Short breaks to step out for fresh air ○ A workstation close to a window
Heavy Menstruation/Periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Easy access to toilet/hygiene facilities ○ Access/provision of changing facilities if needed ○ Flexibility to use these facilities as and when needed ○ Adjustment of duties as necessary and as appropriate
Insomnia/Difficulty sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Flexible working patterns ○ Temporary Shift/Rota adjustments
Low mood/anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Suggest talking to their GP ○ Suggest speaking to EAP ○ Ask what might be helpful in terms of managing work
Isolation or Low Self Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Taking coffee breaks with colleagues ○ Regular team engagement ○ Buddy system ○ Regular check ins and feedback
Brain Fog (memory/ concentration issues)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One to one mentoring/coaching ○ Pacing of work ○ Keeping notes/using technology ○ Regular one to one check ins/Feedback

PART B: PPPG Development Cycle

15. Initiation

15.1. Policy Development Group

Members of the Policy Development Group can be found in Appendix I of this Policy. Conflict of Interest Declaration Forms were signed by members of the Policy Development Group and are retained on file in the Work Health & Wellbeing.

15.2. Approval Governance Group

Members of the Approval Governance Group can be found in Appendix II of this Policy.

15.3. Supporting Evidence/Resources

15.4. The following legislation is pertinent and was referred to during the development of this Policy:

- [Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005](#)
- [Safety, Health and Welfare at Work \(General Application\) Regulations 2007](#)
- [Employment Equality Acts, 1998 – 2015](#)
- [Equal Status Acts, 2000-2015](#)
- [Disability Act 2005](#)

15.5. Related PPPGs:

- [HSE Corporate Safety Statement](#)
- [HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedure](#)
- [HSE Dignity at Work Policy for the Public Health Service](#)
- [HSE Rehabilitation of Employees Back to Work After Illness or Injury Policy & Procedure](#)
- [HSE Managing Attendance Policy and Procedure](#)
- [HSE Long Term Absence Benefit Schemes Guidelines](#)
- [HSE Performance Achievement Policy and Guidance](#)
- [Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures for the Health Service](#)
- [HSE Blended Working Policy for the Public Health Service](#)

- [HSE Policy for Prevention and Management of Work-Related Stress](#)
- [HSE Flexible Working Agreement](#)

15.6. Further Information and Resources

- [HSE Employee Assistance Programme](#)
- [HSE Occupational Health](#)
- [HSE Menopause Policy Webpage](#)
- [HSE Information on Menopause](#)
- [HSE Coaching Service](#)
- [HSE Staff Health & Wellbeing](#)

16. Development of PPPG

While the process outlined in this document is based on the ‘Menopause in the Workplace Policy Framework for Civil Service Organisations’⁵ which was released by the Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform in October 2023, the information has been adapted based on the outcome of a literature search, as well as HSE policies and procedures.

16.1. Literature Search Strategy

- 16.1.1. A literature review was undertaken by the Policy Development Group. The search terms used included ‘Menopause, Healthcare Workers’, ‘Healthcare Personnel, Menopause’, ‘Healthcare Staff, Menopause’, ‘Menopause, Health and Social care’, and ‘menopause, Healthcare professionals’ Search dates were confined from 2018 to 2023.
- 16.1.2. The literature accessed was predominately legislation, journal articles, commentaries and health organisation policies and guidance.
- 16.1.3. Relevant literature was meta-analysed and a synopsis produced for the working group.

16.2. Literature Review Questions

- 16.2.1. The objective of the literature review was to determine the legal requirements, establish current evidence and best practice in relation to supporting employees with symptoms of perimenopause and menopause in the workplace.

a) Identify the potential health outcomes for healthcare workers experiencing menopause or menopause related issues.

The Department of Health published the results of a benchmarking survey on menopause in Ireland. *The Menopause Benchmark Survey* by Behaviour & Attitudes was carried out between September 30 and October 3, 2022 and includes a sample of 1,250 adults.¹⁰

The research showed that there is generally strong agreement that the impact of menopause is not sufficiently acknowledged or recognised and that the workplace poses particular difficulties.

- 82% of all adults agreed that menopause is not well understood in the workplace.
- 90% of all adults agreed it is important that employers understand menopause better.
- Only 30% of all adults agreed that they would be comfortable talking to a manager about menopause in work.
- Only 45% of all adults agreed that they would be comfortable talking to colleagues about menopause in work.

In terms of respondent's personal experience of menopause:

- Over half, 52% reported having a negative experience of menopause.
- 35% reported experiencing constant symptoms, 49% reporting experiencing moderate symptoms and 14% reported experiencing severe symptoms.¹³

In terms of the types of symptoms experienced:

- 78% of adults reported experiencing with temperature regulation issues.
- 71% of adults reported experiencing fatigue.
- 70% of adults reported experiencing sleep issues.
- 59% of adults reported experiencing period changes.
- 62% of adults reported experiencing memory/concentration issues.
- 57% of adults reported experiencing weight and body changes
- 56% of adults reported experiencing mood changes.
- 49% adults reported experiencing joint pain.¹³

b) Using available data, identify trends and patterns relating to work related concerns relating to menopause within Irish health and social care setting.

The review of literature highlights a lack of literature that captures all disciplines of staff in the health sector, it was established that the literature predominantly focused on the effects of menopause of clinical healthcare workers.

The retention of healthcare staff is a global issue and many countries are facing an unprecedented situation in which older nurses represent a significant and growing proportion of the healthcare workforce.¹⁶ Women are working later in life than they did in the past and strategies related to the retention of older female workers should be prioritised. The increased physical and emotional strain of undertaking multiple professional and personal roles places enormous strain on older female workers, all at a time when they are susceptible to hormonal changes arising from the menopause. Many women enter the menopause at the peak of their productive lives, and employers need to retain these women—with their skills, knowledge and experience—by developing resources to help them navigate this normal and natural stage of the ageing process.

Research has shown that the clinical environment and the demands of the medical profession create unique problems for menopausal doctors. The British Medical Association found that, of doctors surveyed who had experienced menopausal symptoms, 65% had experienced both physical and mental symptoms. 90% said that these symptoms had impacted their working lives, with 38% saying that the impact was significant. Of concern, only 16% discussed symptoms with their manager. Two-thirds of these doctors studied wanted to make changes to their working lives but did not feel they could.¹⁶

Currently there is no requirement to report menopause related concerns on the National Incident Management System (NIMS), hence data on organisational trends and patterns was not available. Similarly, published statistics were not available from the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). Menopause issues are not reportable to the HSA. There is no duty on employers to report absences to the HSA due to menopausal issues (HSA, 2022).

c) Identify legislative requirements and best practice in relation to the identification, prevention and management of work related stress.

Legislative Requirements

Under Section 8 of this [Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005](#), employers have a duty to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health and welfare of their employees, including protecting employees from hazards which could lead to mental or physical ill-health arising from work related stress. There are no specific regulations governing menopausal concerns.

There are no laws in Ireland that expressly provide for employees experiencing menopause. However, protection is afforded under the protected characteristics as set out in the *Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2021*. This legislation provides, for example, protections against discrimination in respect of gender-related issues. It also includes requirements to provide reasonable accommodation for any employee who has a disability. In the equality legislation, “disability” is a broadly-defined term that could, in certain circumstances, include some of the medical issues that can arise during menopause.

16.3. Recommendations from Literature Review

The Policy Development Group reviewed the results from the literature review in relation to menopause and its effects on employees, with specific reference to HCWs. The evidence supported the objectives as outlined in Section 6.

The key recommendations include:

- A policy be developed to assist the HSE in raising awareness of menopause amongst all their employees helping to promote and create an inclusive workplace environment that is fully supportive of all individuals affected by menopause.
- It will provide guidance on the range of supports that HSE employers can put in place and sets out the relevant roles and responsibilities, as well as the relevant legal obligations that employers have to their employees affected by menopause.
- To develop appropriate training for all employees, including specific training for managers.

- The policy will aim to ensure a level of consistency across the HSE and that there is adequate awareness and supports are in place to safeguard the health, safety, wellbeing and inclusion of all employees affected by menopause.
- Outline, while menopause is not considered a hazard in health and safety legislation, the symptoms of menopause (i.e., brain fog, memory issues, fatigue, stress, anxiety, hot flashes etc.) may have implications in relation to workplace comfort, performance and safety.
- In the context of menopause, employers and managers should help employees to manage their menopausal symptoms in the workplace and to ensure that their working environment and conditions do not exacerbate any symptoms.

These recommendations have informed the development of this Policy as set out in Part A of this document.

16.4. Resources necessary to implement the PPPG Recommendations

- 16.4.1. Set up a working group to develop and agree a policy
- 16.4.2. Ensure relevant consultation and governance for the policy
- 16.4.3. Develop supporting educational resources to communicate and train employees and managers on the policy.
- 16.4.4. This Policy revision requires local senior managers and line managers to review existing practices and procedures to ensure they are aligned with the requirements as set out in this Policy.

16.5. Governance and Approval

Formal governance for this Policy is provided by the Chief People Officer (Refer to Appendix III).

17. Communication and Dissemination

The Policy will be disseminated by the National HR Directorate for immediate implementation by relevant Services, in line with the agreed HSE protocol and is available on the [HSE National Central Repository](#).

18. Implementation

- 18.1.** All HSE Employees have a responsibility for implementation of this Policy as outlined in Part A
- 18.2.** Education & Training - HSeLanD modules have been developed for the communication and education of this policy.
- 18.3.** An Audit checklist is available in appendix VIII to assess the dissemination and implementation of the policy

19. Monitoring, Audit and Evaluation

- 19.1.** Managers are required to monitor and audit the implementation of this Policy within their area of responsibility using the Audit Checklist in Appendix VIII and maintain evidence of same.
- 19.2.** Implementation of this Policy shall be audited periodically at national level by National HR.

20. Revision/Update

- 20.1.** This Policy shall be reviewed at national level every three years or earlier if circumstances require it.

21. References

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22. Appendices

- Appendix I: Membership of the PPPG Development Group
- Appendix II: Membership of Approval Governance Group
- Appendix III: Conflict of Interest Declaration Form
- Appendix IV: Signature Sheet
- Appendix V: Menopause and the Workplace – Information for Employees
- Appendix VI: Menopause and the Workplace – How Managers can Approach a Conversation
- Appendix VII: Menopause and the Workplace – Considerations for Managers
- Appendix VI: Audit Checklist

23. Appendix I: Membership of the Menopause Policy Development Group

Please list all members involved in the development of the document. Identify chairperson/co-chair of the Development Group.

Name	Location
Dr Grainne McNally	Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit
Deborah Moriarty	Rehabilitation, Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit
Aoife O'Riordan	National Employee Relations, National Human Resources
Katrina Dempsey	National Health & Safety Function, Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit
Nodlaig Carroll	Organisational Psychology, Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit
Blanaid McDonnell	Employee Assistance Programme, Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit
Maria Molony/Michele Guerin	Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Manager/Equality Officer

Subject Matter Expert	Dr Cliona Murphy, National Clinical Director, National Women and Infant Health Programme, HSE
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24. Appendix II: Membership of the Approval Governance Group

Please list all members of the Approval Governance Group who have final approval of the document.

Membership of Approval Governance Group	
Name	Role and position
Ms Anne Marie Hoey	Chief People Officer
Dr Grant Jeffrey	Director Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit
Ms Norah Mason	Assistant National Director, National Employee Relations

Sign-off by Chair of Approval Governance Group

[Name of national document] was formally ratified and recorded in the minutes of the Approval Governance Group on 06/03/2024.

Name: (print)	Ms Anne Marie Hoey
Title:	Chief People Officer
Signature: (e-signatures accepted)	
Registration number: (if applicable)	

25. Appendix III: Conflict of Interest Declaration Form



CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

This must be completed by each member of the PPPG Development Group as applicable

Title of PPPG being considered:

HSE Menopause Policy

Please circle the statement that relates to you

1. I declare that **I DO NOT** have any conflicts of interest.

2. I declare that **I DO** have a conflict of interest.

Details of conflict (Please refer to specific PPPG)

(Append additional pages to this statement if required)

Signature

Printed name

Registration number (if applicable)

Date

The information provided will be processed in accordance with data protection principles as set out in the Data Protection Act. Data will be processed only to ensure that committee members act in the best interests of the committee. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

A person who is covered by this PPPG is required to furnish a statement, in writing, of:

(i) The interests of the person, and

(ii) The interests, of which the person has actual knowledge, of his or her spouse or civil partner or a child of the person or of his or her spouse which could materially influence the person in, or in relation to, the performance of the person's official functions by reason of the fact that such performance could so affect those interests as to confer on, or withhold from, the person, or the spouse or civil partner or child, a substantial benefit.

This is a controlled document designed for online viewing and must always be accessed from the National Central Repository (NCR). Whilst printing is permitted, printed copies are not controlled. Controlled documents must never be saved to secondary electronic/other locations which are accessible by staff or the public.

26. Appendix IV: Signature Sheet

(This is a tool for line managers to print off and have staff sign as part of good record keeping/audit trail. This Signature Sheet does *not* need to be attached with the final published document).

I have read, understand and agree to adhere to this Policy:

PPPG Title: HSE Menopause Policy

Print Name	Signature	Job Title	Date

This is a controlled document designed for online viewing and must always be accessed from the National Central Repository (NCR). Whilst printing is permitted, printed copies are not controlled. Controlled documents must never be saved to secondary electronic/other locations which are accessible by staff or the public.

27. Appendix V: Menopause and the Workplace – Information for Employees

If the symptoms of menopause are problematic and causing stress and concern it is important to recognise that it is ok to reach out for help. See the [HSE Menopause webpage](#) for information.

Accessing support from your personal health provider

There are a number of GPs and consultants in Ireland who specialise in menopause. To prepare for the visit:

- Keep a record of symptoms in as much detail as possible.
- Make a note of how long symptoms have been experienced.
- Keep a note of the date of the last menstrual period.
- Be informed about the different treatment options – See <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/menopause/menopause-treatment/>.
- HRT is a form of therapy which replaces the declining hormones. Write down any questions about benefits versus risks.
- Ask what other treatment options are available.

Specialist websites contains additional information on preparing for your appointment including resources such as the Green Climatic Scale (GCS), which is a simple tool to help assess your menopause symptoms across various health areas such as physical, psychological, sexual and vasomotor.

Lifestyle Changes

Many individuals are not prepared for the many changes that their bodies and minds go through in this natural transition. Having knowledge gives power and informs good choices. It can be a time to reflect and implement changes in lifestyle which may improve overall wellbeing and assist in managing problematic symptoms.

Some lifestyle changes to consider include:

- Regular exercise which benefits both physical and psychological wellbeing
- Build in some resistance exercises in addition to cardiovascular exercise. This supports muscle mass which is lost in menopause
- Relaxation and mindful breathing which can reduce the stress response and increase toleration of hot flushes
- Eating a healthy diet which supports bone health and cardiovascular health
- Awareness of intake of spicy food/alcohol as both can exacerbate hot flushes
- Stop smoking as it can impact on menopause and it's symptoms

This is a controlled document designed for online viewing and must always be accessed from the National Central [Repository](#) (NCR). Whilst printing is permitted, printed copies are not controlled. Controlled documents must never be saved to secondary electronic/other locations which are accessible by staff or the public.

- Keep the bedroom cool and use light layers rather than heavy bed clothes
- Talk to others, talk to a specialist, talk to your GP, talk to the [Employee Assistance Programme](#).
- Accessing credible source research and learn about the accurate facts and staying informed will enhance overall management of challenging symptoms.

Managing symptoms at work

If menopausal symptoms are impacting your workplace wellbeing, consider talking to your manager. While this is a personal choice, it could be an important step in securing the support you need at work. It can be difficult to disclose sensitive and personal information. You might consider talking to an Employee Assistance Programme Counsellor in preparation. They can provide you with a safe space to discuss your concerns and identify how this might be best approached.

- You can start with listing the symptoms which impact you most. Then review these to see which are impacting you most at work.
- Try to identify what adjustments might support you at this time and consider how any of the existing flexible working arrangements which are available to you might work to your advantage to support you at this time.
- Consider your desk or office space. Would a fan help or being near a window?
- If you are experiencing brain fog or short term memory difficulties, consider making a note of items you may need to recall and what reminders you could set to support your memory.
- Reflect on when you are at your best and plan your most demanding tasks around this time if feasible.

It is also vital you take regular breaks throughout the day e.g. getting outside to get some fresh air or employ breathing or mindfulness techniques. Your Employee Assistance Programme Counsellor can support you in building your personal self-care plan.

If feasible, consider bringing a “caught-out kit” to store in your desk or locker at work. This kit could include sanitary products, wet wipes, a towel and spare clothes.

Do consider talking to supportive work colleagues. Some may be at a similar life stage and could provide invaluable peer support.

28. Appendix VI: Menopause and the Workplace – How Managers can Approach a Conversation

Menopause and the Workplace – How Managers can Approach a Conversation

Discussing an intimate health condition can be very daunting and managing a sensitive conversation around health can be difficult. A good start is to approach with empathy and understanding. Arrange an appropriate and private space to meet and allow for sufficient time to listen.

Prepare for this meeting. Complete Manager training on HSeLanD. Listen carefully to what the employee is saying. Try not to make any assumptions. It is imperative to bear in mind that the menopause experience is individual to each person going through it.

Potential Risk Areas

Best Practice Approach	Best Practice Language
Speak calmly using supportive language	<p>“I wanted to meet you to see how you are doing”</p> <p>“How are you?”</p> <p>“How have you been?”</p>
If there is something in particular that you have noticed in relation to the person’s demeanour in, or performance at, work, communicate this respectfully and with empathy	<p>“I notice that you have been struggling a little with your work (could be deadlines/ timekeeping etc.) and am wondering if you are ok.”</p> <p>“I notice there is a lot going on for you now. Would you like to tell me about it?”</p> <p>“Is there anything that we can do which might be helpful to you?”</p>
If the employee discloses they are experiencing menopause symptoms, recognise that it is a very personal and sensitive topic. Ask general, open ended questions rather than direct questions	<p>“I am really glad you have shared this with me. I know this is not easy”</p> <p>“I’ve been reading up on menopause/completed the training and I know it’s different for everyone so I’d like to hear about what you are experiencing and how I can help”</p> <p>“It sounds like it has been a very difficult time for you”</p> <p>“Could you tell me more about this if you are comfortable doing so”</p>
Take your time and be patient with the employee	
Assure them that the conversation is confidential unless they wish that it go further e.g. HR	
You can provide supportive suggestions such as:	<p>“Would you consider having a chat with your GP? It could be very helpful. We can also look at how we can support you in work”.</p> <p>“The EAP service can offer you confidential support and discuss an action plan to enhance your wellbeing”</p>
Do invite the employee for a follow-on conversation to review any accommodations that have been agreed upon.	
Do enquire about their wellbeing as symptoms of menopause change over time.	

29. Appendix VII: Menopause and the Workplace – Considerations for Managers

Menopause and the Workplace - Considerations for Managers

Items for discussion	Considerations	
Information on Menopause	Is the employee aware of the HSEs Menopause policy, the HSE LanD menopause training programme for employees and the staff webpage on menopause? See https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/procedures-guidelines/hse-menopause-policy/	
Symptoms	How are symptoms affecting the employee at work?	
	What possible adjustments can be made to support the employee?	
Work-related Stress	Are the impact of symptoms on work causing work-related stress?	
	Does a work-related stress risk assessment need to be completed? See HSE Policy for Prevention and Management of Work-Related Stress	
Support	Is the employee aware of staff supports in the workplace that may be able to help? For example EAP or coaching service?	
Occupational Health	Has the employee been made aware of the facility for an Occupational Health (OH) referral (management referral/self-referral) and support to remain in the workplace?	
	Does the employee need OH management referral? (I.e. assessment where agreed adjustments have been implemented but fitness for work is still impacted – See HSE Rehabilitation Policy)?	
Possible symptom type with sample adjustments (please note this list is not exhaustive)		
Hot Flashes/Flashes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of fan • Access to fresh drinking water • Access to a quiet area • Short breaks to step out for fresh air • A work station close to a window 	Heavy Menstruation/Periods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to toilet/hygiene facilities • Access/provision of changing facilities if needed • Flexibility to use these facilities as and when needed • Adjustment of duties as necessary and as appropriate 	Isolation or Low Self Esteem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking coffee breaks with colleagues • Regular team engagement • Buddy system • Regular check-ins and feedback
Low Mood/Anxiety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggest talking to their GP • Suggest speaking to EAP • Ask what might be helpful in terms of managing work 	Brain Fog (memory/ concentration issues) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to one mentoring/coaching • Pacing of work • Keeping notes/Using technology • Regular one to one check ins/Feedback 	Insomnia/Difficulty sleeping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible working patterns • Temporary Shift/Rota adjustments

30. Appendix VIII: National Audit Tool

Methodology

Population: A sample of target users

Sampling: A total of 10% or 10 target users, whichever is greater, should be selected.

Frequency: To be determined locally at least annually.

Method: Record **Y** for **Yes**, if the criteria are met. Record **N** for **No**, if criteria are not met or **N/A** for **Not applicable**.

Compliance requirement:

[Should have a 100% compliance requirement unless your National 3PG allows flexibility – compliance levels should be set].

Is standard/criteria being met for the following statements:	Yes	No	N/A	Evidence
Is there a system in place for the appropriate circulation/communication of this Policy to all employees?				
Does each relevant department / unit have access to this Policy?				
Are roles and responsibilities communicated to all identified responsible persons?				
Are HSE and Non-HSE Support Services communicated to employees?				
Are employees aware of the education programme that is available on HSeLanD? (“Menopause and You- What Everyone Needs To Know”)				
Are managers aware of the education programme that is available on HSeLanD? (“Menopause and You- What Managers Need To Know”)				
Is there a system in place to monitor compliance with this Policy?				
Date of Audit: Audited by (name/title): Compliance Rate %:				
<p>Calculation of Compliance Rate %: The score, expressed as a percentage, is calculated by dividing the number of “yes” and “no” answers. “Not applicable” answers are excluded from the calculation of the percentage score.</p> <p>Example: If there are 6 “yes” and 2 “no” answers, the score is calculated as follows: 6 (yes answers) divided by 8 (total of yes and no answers) multiplied by 100 = 75%</p>				