




Endometriosis *Workplace Policy*

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Endometriosis

Endometriosis is a common, chronic inflammatory disease in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus is found in places outside of the uterus, most commonly in the pelvic region. This condition is estimated to affect at least 1 in 10 women, girls and those assigned female at birth and a minimum of 120,000 individuals in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Endometriosis is generally considered to affect people in their reproductive years, for some it can be as early as their first menstrual period and for others it appears much later in life. Unfortunately, there is an average 8.7 year delay to receiving an endometriosis diagnosis in New Zealand, where many are experiencing this condition without official acknowledgement.

This document provides information on an Endometriosis Workplace Policy, focusing on the effective management of endometriosis symptoms in the workplace. This document will use the following terms:

Diagnosed endometriosis: individuals who have undergone evaluation by a medical professional (laparoscopy), that confirms the presence of endometriosis and therefore have received a formal diagnosis of endometriosis.

Suspected endometriosis: individuals who are experiencing symptoms consistent with endometriosis and are therefore being considered for the condition. They may be undergoing review from medical professionals, including testing such as physical examinations, ultrasounds and blood tests, but a confirmed diagnosis has not yet been established. This also includes individuals who are waiting for a referral to a gynaecologist or on a waitlist for surgery.

Endometriosis symptoms

Endometriosis symptoms can have a significant effect on an individual's performance at work. Symptoms vary greatly, and commonly include (but aren't limited to):

- Pain with periods
- Bowel issues
- Bladder issues
- Fertility issues
- Fatigue
- Pain in other places
- Pain at other times, not just at period times
- Feeling moody, emotional or irritable
- Heavy bleeding
- Prolonged bleeding

ENZ Community Workplace Survey 2023

92%

Respondents find it challenging to manage their endometriosis symptoms in the workplace

66%

Respondents disclosed that workplace stress negatively impacts their endometriosis symptoms

88%

Respondents have had to take sick leave to manage their condition

48%

Respondents have had to take unpaid leave

Endometriosis and the workplace, NICM Health Research Institute study ([Armour et al. 2022](#))

65%

65% of respondents had taken unpaid leave to manage the condition

1 IN 3

One in three respondents missed out on a promotion as a consequence of the condition

1 IN 6

One in six respondents lost their job from managing their condition

Introduction to an Endometriosis Workplace Policy

What is a Workplace policy?

This is a formal document that outlines the support and accommodations available to employees diagnosed with endometriosis or those suspected of having the condition. This policy serves as a guideline for creating an inclusive work environment that understands and addresses the unique challenges faced by individuals experiencing endometriosis symptoms.

Who is an Endometriosis Workplace Policy for?

This is designed for all staff within a workplace. Its purpose is to provide support to individuals diagnosed with endometriosis or those experiencing its symptoms. The policy will help managers understand how they can assist employees facing endometriosis-related challenges in the workplace.

Why is an Endometriosis Workplace Policy important?

The policy sets out to help those impacted with endometriosis symptoms to feel empowered to ask for adjustments to ease symptoms without embarrassment, carry out their role in a safe working environment and have open discussions with managers to help them succeed in the role and ensure they feel part of an inclusive work culture.

When should an organisation consider developing an Endometriosis Workplace Policy?

An endometriosis workplace policy can be implemented at any time, but there are a couple of considerations:

- Assessing the current workplace environment: Consider factors such as the size of the organisation, employee demographics, diversity, culture, communication channels and HR processes. This will help to determine what is reasonable and feasible to include in the specific workplace policy at this time.
- Considering the company stage and maturity: It is important to tailor the policy to the specific context, ensuring it is practical and impactful for your workforce.

How do you implement an Endometriosis Workplace Policy?

1. Research and Understanding Endometriosis: Increase knowledge and understanding of endometriosis, its symptoms and the impact it can have on individuals lives.
2. Consultation/Lived Experience: Engage with all employees including those with lived experiences to provide first-hand insights and feedback on the effectiveness of your draft policy.
3. Drafting the Policy: Use the Policy Template as a guide and apply to the organisation based on a feasibility assessment and company goals.
4. Communication: Plan how you will introduce the policy to all staff with clear guidance to ensure they understand how to access this if required.
5. Training: Create opportunities for staff to learn how to access and implement a workplace policy effectively.
6. Leadership modelling: Ensure staff in leadership positions are modelling implemented procedures.

Where do you access resources to support the implementation of an Endometriosis Workplace Policy?

- Endometriosis New Zealand (ENZ) Website: ENZ regularly shares the latest in information and resources on endometriosis on our website: <https://nzendo.org.nz/>
- Endometriosis New Zealand Workplace Resources: ENZ's workplace framework also includes employers and employees guides on managing endometriosis in the workplace. These are available at <https://nzendo.org.nz/resources/>. If you are interested in printed copies of any of our resources contact us at info@nzendo.org.nz
- Endo Talk Workplace Presentation: If your workplace would be interested in a workplace presentation from ENZ on understanding endometriosis, its impact and managing the condition in the workplace, register your interest at info@nzendo.org.nz

Endometriosis Workplace Policy Template

Policy Statement

[Organisation name] is committed to creating a work environment that values the health and well-being of all employees and enables those with diagnosed endometriosis or suspected endometriosis to thrive in the workplace.

Responsibilities

[Organisation name] encourages employees to discuss their condition, symptoms and the impact it has on them in the workplace with their manager. Through this open and honest communication, managers and employees can work through the available options to ensure appropriate measures which support their working environment are in place. Employees must inform [Organisation name] about any condition or symptoms that may affect their ability to perform their role safely.

Managers at [Organisation name] are responsible to support their team members and should

- Ensure they are aware of the support [Organisation name] provides and terms of policies.
- Ensure all members of their team are aware of policies and where to find information and seek support.
- Ensure they listen to the needs of each employee individually and are open and willing to have sensitive confidential conversations.
- Work together with the employee to ensure the right support is provided that satisfies both [Organisation name] and the employee's needs.
- Ensure regular check-ins are in place to review any support and make any necessary changes to an employee's working environment or pattern that are required from both [Organisation name] and the employee's perspective.

If an employee is experiencing endometriosis symptoms, the following options are available:

- Flexible Work Arrangements

Employees may request flexible work arrangements, such as change in shift patterns, shorter hours, flexible hours, job sharing, working remotely or from home to manage symptoms and medical appointments. These requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Flexible working requests must be in writing and include:

- employee name;
- date of the request;
- details of the request;
- whether the request is temporary or permanent;
- intended start and end date; and
- changes [Organisation name] may need to make.

[Organisation name] will respond in writing no later than one month after receiving the request.

If the request is refused, [Organisation name] will notify the employee in writing to notify:

- the request is refused; and
- the ground for refusal;

- Reasonable Job Modifications

[Organisation name] will explore job modifications, such as changing responsibilities, reducing the pace of work, managing workloads, wearing loose and appropriate clothing or modifying workstations while maintaining productivity and performance standards.

- Sick Leave, Unpaid Leave and Other Leave

Employees can use their entitlement of sick leave as needed. Employees can request additional leave such as unpaid leave, and [Organisation name] will consider the request. [Organisation name] will provide a supportive environment for employees to access their leave entitlement to take time off to manage symptoms, attend medical appointments or for surgeries and recovery from surgeries.

- Accessible facilities, amenities, and spaces

[Organisation name] is committed to providing accessible facilities and amenities for employees with endometriosis, including bathrooms, showers, hygiene products and period products. [Organisation name] will endeavour to provide suitable spaces for employees to rest and manage symptoms during work hours. These spaces may include comfortable and quiet rooms equipped with items such as heat packs, blankets, pillows and other pain relief.

- Support Services

Managers will seek opportunities to signpost to organisations to provide support and/or access to occupational health professionals who may be able to provide additional support.

Education and Awareness

[Organisation name] will offer endometriosis information sessions and resources in the workplace to educate all employees and managers about endometriosis, its impact, and the importance of fostering an inclusive and understanding work environment.

[Organisation name] will seek opportunities to raise awareness about endometriosis in the workplace, including sharing stories and lived experiences of employees via events, newsletters and/or internal communications.

Confidentiality

[Organisation name] respects the privacy of employees and will treat all medical information including endometriosis, with strict confidentiality.

Policy Review

[Organisation name] will review this policy annually with its effectiveness being assessed through:

- Staff participation and surveys.
- Management review, including considering rates of absenteeism, presenteeism and improved productivity.
- HR Guidance on what's feasible here for maintaining a fit-for-purpose policy