



Medication MANAGEMENT

SUPPORTING PLAN MEMBER HEALTH

BRIDGING the women's health gap with enhanced benefits plans

The participation of women in Canada's workforce has seen remarkable growth over the past several decades. Women now make up nearly half (47 per cent) of all workers in Canada.¹ This is a significant shift from the 1950s, when only about 25 per cent of women were active in the workforce.¹

"Historically, benefit plans were designed with men in mind, reflecting the predominantly male workforce of the mid-20th century. Today, as women make up nearly half of the workforce, it's important to recognize and address the gaps in plans to ensure they cater to the diverse health needs of all employees," says Jennifer Foubert, assistant vice-president, head of health, well-being and disability products at Manulife Canada.

The progress that has been made underscores the important role women play in driving business success. Studies show that companies with gender-diverse leadership outperform their competitors² and those leading in gender diversity are more likely to achieve superior financial returns.³

Despite this, retaining and supporting female talent remains a persistent challenge, in part because of the unique

health challenges women can face.⁴ Certain conditions can affect them differently or more significantly compared to men, highlighting the importance of more tailored plans and effective drug plan management.⁴

Women's health gap

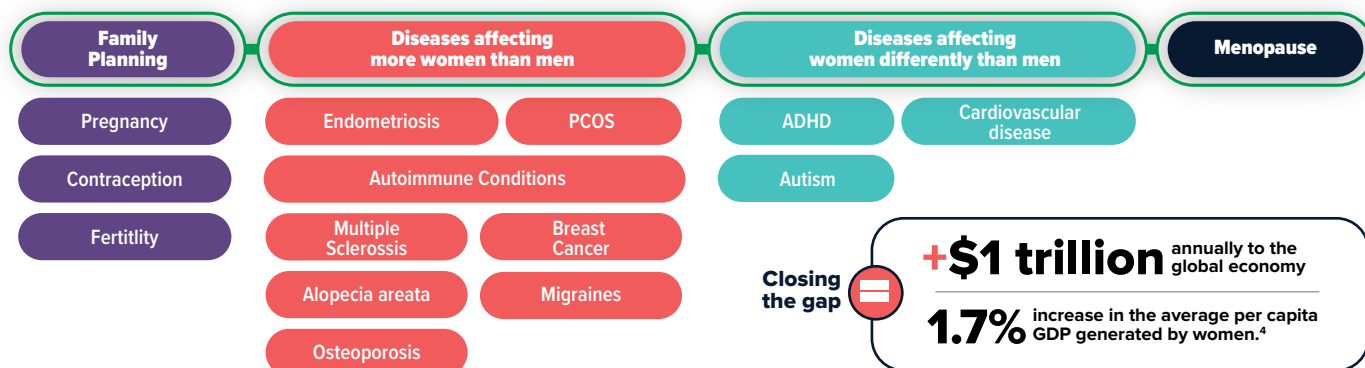
While women's health has been under-researched and underfunded, we do know women spend 25 per cent more time throughout their lives in poor health.⁴ We also know women may experience medication differently — both in terms of uptake and effectiveness — and they experience more frequent adverse or fatal events from medications than men.⁴

The women's health gap not only limits individual women, but directly affects the economy by limiting women's workforce participation and productivity.⁴

Closing this gap can help improve women's health and quality of life and empower them to participate more fully in the workforce. It's estimated this could add at least \$1 trillion annually to the global economy and drive a 1.7 per cent increase in the average per capita GDP generated by women.⁴ Moreover, it could offer a strong return on investment: every dollar invested in women's health is projected to yield approximately three dollars in economic growth.⁴

A challenge to these potential economic gains is that women may encounter health challenges throughout their careers, such as endometriosis, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), menopause and cardiovascular disease, and are often disproportionately affected by these conditions.⁵

Health challenges women may face throughout their careers



A closer look at selected conditions

1. Infertility

Canada's fertility rate has been declining over the past decade⁶ and one in six Canadians experience infertility.⁷ The fertility journey can come with emotional and financial challenges because of the treatments and procedures that are involved.

While fertility benefits can be of great importance for would-be parents, fewer than 1 per cent of employers offer fertility coverage as part of their benefit plan.⁸ Employers can make a difference for employees by offering fertility benefits that include drug coverage for prescribed medications that support fertility processes and procedures.

2. ADHD

As the medical community's understanding of ADHD has expanded, more adults are being diagnosed later in life.⁹ Further, because ADHD can be experienced differently by women, it's thought that it has likely been underdiagnosed in the past.¹⁰

ADHD can impact women's productivity and their career progression. Although ADHD isn't curable, it is treatable. Medications and psychotherapy are common treatments.¹⁰ Manulife Group Benefits aggregate claims data indicates that, in recent years, there has been an increase in claims from women aged 25 to 45 and the data reflects an

almost even distribution of drug claims between women and men.¹¹

To help address the unique health challenges women face, organizations can develop more tailored benefit plans. Effective drug plan management can play a key role in helping to ensure that these specific health needs are comprehensively met.

Key takeaways for plan sponsors: Enhance and continue building a better drug plan to support women's health

Ensure your drug plan provides coverage for a range of health issues, including:

- ✓ medications that support family growth products and fertility coverage;
- ✓ comprehensive coverage for mental health medications and counselling;
- ✓ medications to help manage menopause symptoms including hormone therapies.

By maintaining and expanding these initiatives, plan sponsors can further strengthen their support for women's health needs.

Effective drug plan management

Effective drug plan management is important for sustaining group benefits plans, enhancing health outcomes and maximizing resources to provide the best

possible care within the plan's budget. In women's health, the underlying data needed to inform these decisions can be limited, according to Bobby Currie, director of drug evaluation, Manulife Canada.

"By focusing on formulary management and using data analytics to track drug use and outcomes, we can make the most of benefit plan resources even when there's a lot of uncertainty. This way, we can help everyone get the best care possible within the plan's budget, leading to better health outcomes and a sustainable drug plan," says Currie. "It's exciting to see an increasing focus on women's health treatments in the drug development pipeline, bringing much-needed innovation to these important issues."

Driving better health outcomes

Empowering women in the workforce requires more than just acknowledging their contributions; it calls for a commitment to addressing the unique health challenges they face. By investing in women's health, we can help pave the way for a more prosperous and equitable future for all.

For more insights into women's health, read Manulife's report, [Promoting women's health for a vibrant workforce](#). Be sure to follow Manulife on [LinkedIn](#).

¹ The surge of women in the workforce | Statistics Canada

² Women and the workplace — How employers can advance equality and diversity — Report from the Symposium on Women and the Workplace — Canada.ca

³ Why diversity matters — McKinsey

⁴ Closing the women's health gap | McKinsey

⁵ 6 conditions that highlight the women's health gap | World Economic Forum

⁶ As more Canadians seek IVF treatment, advocates warn about infertility "crisis" — Global News

⁷ Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society

⁸ Use of fertility drugs up 26% following drop in 2020 | Manulife

⁹ Is ADHD Becoming More Common? | Psychology Today

¹⁰ ADHD in Women — Cleveland Clinic

¹¹ Behind the rise of adult ADHD claims — Manulife

Sponsored by:

