

# TIPS FOR MANAGERS OF PEOPLE DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER

## FACT SHEET

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This fact sheet was produced by Breast Cancer Network Australia

If one of your employees has been diagnosed with breast cancer, it can be difficult to know what to do or how to help. This fact sheet provides information about your obligations as an employer and how to manage an employee's breast cancer diagnosis within the workplace.

This fact sheet includes information on:

- communication with your employee
- respect and privacy
- making adjustments
- understanding breast cancer
- guidelines and policies
- developing a work and breast cancer plan.

### Communication is key

Listen to your employee and try to understand their situation – it is fine to ask questions when they are sharing information with you.

*Every situation is different, so what works for one workplace or woman may not work for another. Open communication is crucial.*

Stay in contact with your employee if they are on sick leave – agree on how and when you will communicate. However, keep in mind that the way they want to be contacted may change, depending on the treatment they are having and the side effects they are experiencing. For example, your employee may prefer a text message rather than a phone call while they are having chemotherapy.

Provide your employee with information regarding:

- their options for time off
- policies on flexible working
- their rights to be protected against discrimination
- services your organisation offers to help them e.g. employee assistance programs, mentors.



### Be sensitive to your employee's needs

Breast cancer treatments and their physical and emotional side effects are different for each person. Make time to understand your employee's individual needs.

*Don't make assumptions about what she needs, and ensure she knows she can ask for help. Ask what you can do to support her.*

### Respect your employee's right to privacy

Your employee may not want other people in the organisation to know they have breast cancer. When talking with your employee, ask them if they would like to share news of their diagnosis with colleagues and when and how they wish to do that.

### Be prepared to make adjustments

Cancer is legally defined as a disability, therefore you may need to make arrangements or changes in the workplace to accommodate your employee's needs. These changes are referred to as reasonable adjustments and can include flexible working arrangements such as part-time or home-based work.



*If you manage a woman who is having difficulties, try approaching her job in a different way. Have regular discussions with her about the workload and be willing to negotiate changes and reallocate resources if needed.*

For further information, refer to BCNA's fact sheet [Breast cancer, work rights and responsibilities – for employers](#).

### **Build your knowledge about breast cancer**

Learn about breast cancer, its treatments and the challenges your employee may face. This will help you support both your employee and others in the workplace.

BCNA has free booklets and fact sheets on a range of breast cancer-related topics, including the brochure [Helping a friend or colleague with breast cancer](#). For information about breast cancer or to download or order a fact sheet or booklet, visit [bcna.org.au](http://bcna.org.au).

### **Organisation guidelines and policies**

Your organisation may already have guidelines or policies to support your employee and help you manage the situation. These can include policies about:

- sick leave
- financial support
- long-term illness
- time off work
- occupational health.

### **Discuss a work and breast cancer plan**

Talk to your employee about a work and breast cancer plan. This will help you to find out what support they might need before, during and after treatment. This may include:

- a phased return to work
- working from home
- reasonable adjustments to support their wellbeing.

### **Recognise the impact on your team**

Be aware of the impact that your employee's breast cancer diagnosis can have on others in the workplace.

For extra support or information, speak with your line manager or human resources department, or call BCNA's Helpline on 1800 500 258.

### **Employer checklist**

- Are you aware of your obligations to support your employee following their breast cancer diagnosis?
- Has a coordinator been appointed to take responsibility for implementing and reviewing your employee's work and breast cancer plan following their diagnosis?
- Have you discussed all reasonable adjustments with human resources (or equivalent)?
- Is your employee aware of their employment rights and responsibilities?
- Have you discussed with your employee if they wish to communicate their diagnosis with colleagues?
- Have the key accountabilities of the job been discussed with your employee?
- Are you aware of internal policies and procedures regarding an employee with a serious illness?
- Have you arranged a review meeting with your employee to update their work and breast cancer plan?

### **Further information**

BCNA supports all Australians affected by breast cancer, including family, friends, carers, employers and colleagues.

For information, support and referral, call BCNA's Helpline on 1800 500 258 or visit [bcna.org.au](http://bcna.org.au).

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