



# Guidelines for employers

*to assist employees after a  
breast cancer diagnosis*



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# Background

The Irish Cancer Society believes that all patients should feel supported remaining at work after their cancer diagnosis or in their return to work after a period of absence, and that their quality of life, finances and career prospects should not be affected by their illness.

These guidelines provides information and guidance to help employers understand the prevalence and impact of breast cancer; how it may impact your employees and advice on how best to support employees after they receive a breast cancer diagnosis.

All information signposted to throughout the guidelines can be accessed at [www.cancer.ie/employer-guidelines](http://www.cancer.ie/employer-guidelines).

## About breast cancer

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers in Ireland, with more than 3,600 women and approximately 37 men diagnosed per year.

It accounted for 31% of the most commonly diagnosed invasive forms of female cancer on average, between 2017 and 2019, excluding non-melanoma skin cancer in Ireland.<sup>i</sup>

An estimated 60 women per year in Ireland receive a breast cancer diagnosis during pregnancy. The anxiety caused due to receiving this news is substantial. A cancer diagnosis at any time is hugely difficult but can throw the world off its axis for new parents, adding huge stress and anxiety to families.

Sixty-four percent of breast cancer are women aged 64 or under.<sup>ii</sup> As more people than ever are living with or beyond cancer, many people with a breast cancer diagnosis will continue their lives and careers after active treatment. Instances of breast cancer will become more prevalent, as the working population are increasingly likely to remain in the workforce post retirement age.

The financial impact of cancer on patients and their families is significant. The 'Real Cost of Cancer' Report of 2019 shows that on average, a diagnosis of cancer meant an additional €756 a month in expenses, with a drop in monthly income of €1,527.

Despite this financial burden while being out of work, only 16% of women with breast cancer in Ireland return to work within six months post-diagnosis.<sup>iii</sup> The length of active treatment for most women is part of the reason for this, along with a substantial recovery period and surgery time.

There are a range of obstacles facing employees with breast cancer returning to the work place - these can include physical, psychological and emotional issues as well as non-medical barriers such as lack of employer or colleague support or inflexible working arrangements.

Breast cancer itself is physically challenging, and treatment side effects, while unavoidable in many cases, can compound difficulties for those trying to return to the workplace. Research comparing the ability of long-term breast cancer survivors to work versus those of a cancer-free control group found that health-related factors were most strongly associated with work ability, with fatigue increasing the risk of rating low work ability by almost 11 times.<sup>iv</sup>

It is important that individuals, employers and society are aware of such physical, psychological and financial stress associated with a breast cancer diagnosis.



# The ESRI Research

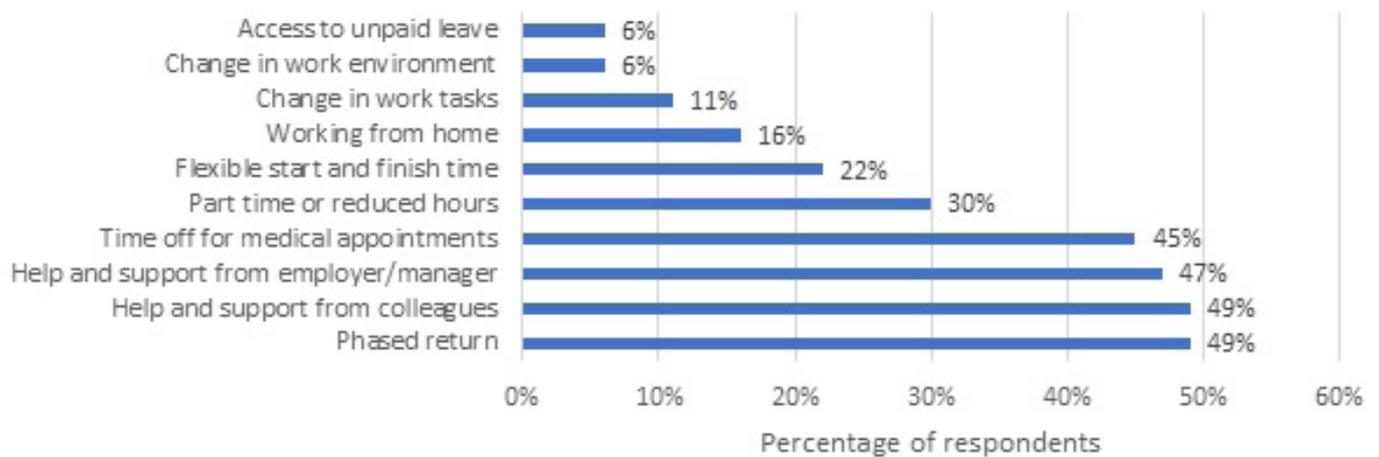
The Irish Cancer Society funded the Economic Social Research Institute (ESRI) to conduct research investigating the impact of a cancer diagnosis on employment, due to the shortage of evidence on the specific barriers faced by working-aged individuals seeking to return to employment in an Irish context.

We wanted to begin building a solid evidence base on the barriers and facilitators of a return to work, and use this to support positive change for patients.

The main findings of the ESRI research were as follows:

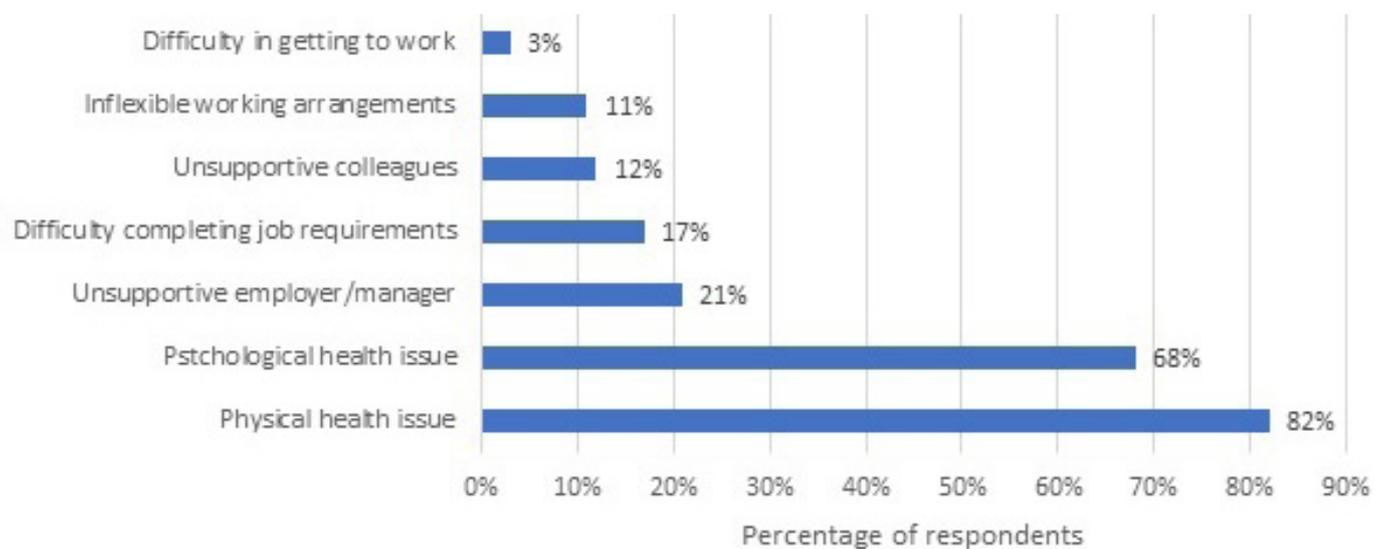
- Nearly half of all respondents reported that their cancer diagnosis had a negative impact on their career prospects, with females, younger workers, the self-employed and those working in the public sector more likely to report a negative impact.
- Roughly 2 in 5 respondents (38%) considered their leave period to be too short, with financial need being the main reason behind their return to employment.
- The most commonly reported factors that facilitated a return to employment for those with a breast cancer diagnosis were a phased return (49%), help and support from colleagues (49%), help and support from employer/manager (47%), time off for medical appointments (45%) and part time/reduced hours (30%).<sup>v</sup>

**Figure 1: Percentage of respondents reporting work-related factors, which facilitated return to work\***



\*Note: N= 161 Source: ESRI Return to Work questionnaire

**Figure 2: Percentage of respondents reporting particular barriers to returning to work\*\***



\*\*Note: N = 66. Caution is required when interpreting the percentages in the table due to the relatively small number of respondents.

Source: ESRI Return to Work questionnaire

The most commonly reported barriers to returning to employment for the same cohort were physical and psychological health issues (82% and 68% respectively), an unsupportive employer or manager (21%), difficulty completing job requirements (17%) and unsupportive colleagues (12%).

Following the ESRI Report, the Irish Cancer Society published a set of recommendations for employers, government, trade unions and representative groups. In addition, the Society itself reflected on how they can better support workers to remain or return to work post-diagnosis.

A series of stakeholder forums took place with those who have direct experience of remaining/returning to work after a cancer diagnosis, trade union representatives and employer groups.

Such engagement fostered a better understanding of the challenges faced by cancer patients and survivors in the workplace. The following topics emerged:

- Poor awareness among colleagues/employers of long-term side effects of cancer.
- The lack of state supports for the self-employed.
- Differences in experiences among participants in returning to work, depending on the sector of employment.
- An inconsistent awareness by employers of their legal obligations towards employees returning to the workplace e.g. to provide reasonable accommodations.

The forums highlighted the need for further training for employers, the expansion of State benefits for the self-employed and greater insight into the public sector disparity when it comes to returning to the workforce.

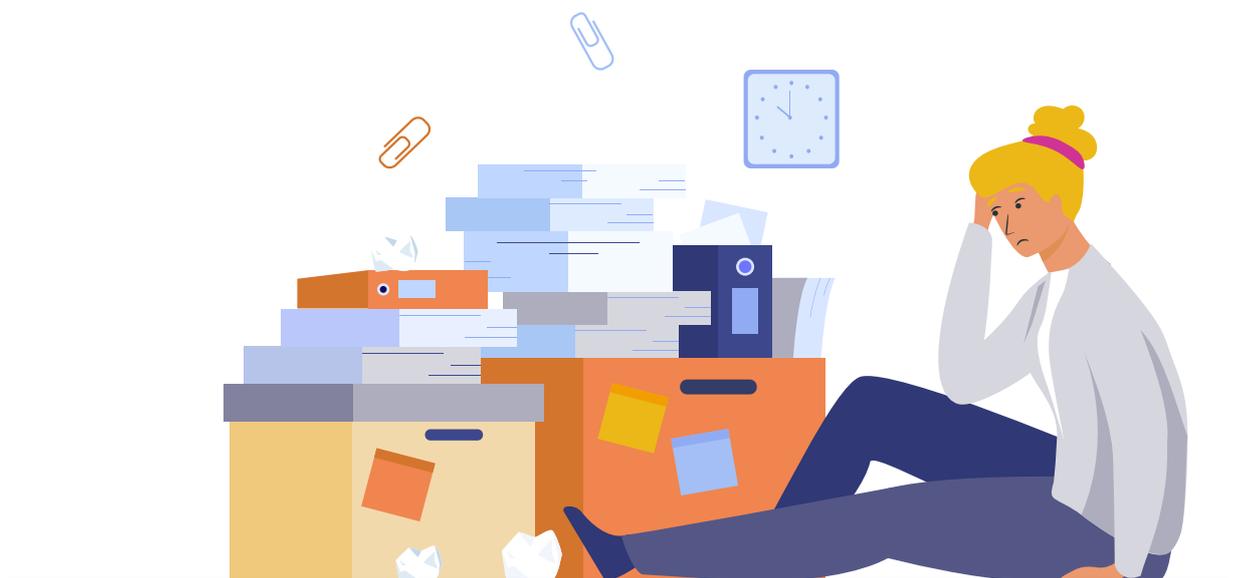


# Introduction

At the Irish Cancer Society, we hear every day about the personal challenges a cancer diagnosis brings. Many are unprepared for the effect it can have on their livelihood and don't know how to talk about their cancer with their employer.

Research indicates that most employers rarely consider how they would respond until one of their staff is directly affected by a cancer diagnosis.<sup>vi</sup> Thinking ahead of time about how to communicate with your employee, how they may be facilitated to work during treatment if possible and how to confidently return to the workplace post-active treatment (often with ongoing care), will make the situation easier for all involved and avoids an ad hoc response. As each individual's situation is different it is important not to be prescriptive at this stage.

A good starting point is the development of a standalone workplace policy on cancer and other chronic or serious illnesses, which outlines supports for those who have been diagnosed with cancer. This should include provisions for sick leave, attending medical appointments, a regular point of contact at the company, modifications to the workplace, and organisational principles for supporting people affected by cancer. Where this is not possible, provisions for supporting employees with chronic or serious illness should be included in a company's sick leave policy. The Irish Cancer Society have a template Cancer and Chronic or Serious Illness Policy for employers, which can be accessed via [www.cancer.ie/employer-guidelines](http://www.cancer.ie/employer-guidelines).



# How to support an employee with breast cancer

It can be difficult to know how to react to the news that an employee has breast cancer (please refer to [www.cancer.ie/employer-guidelines](http://www.cancer.ie/employer-guidelines) for signposted information) and there may be uncertainty on how best to support them.

It is normal to have many questions, including how to engage with your employee and the wider team about the illness, what adjustments might need to be made in the workplace/working schedule and what is expected of you as an employer. Where available it is important to link in with any HR resources or your organisation's leadership to help best navigate this difficult time.

Having a meeting to make an individual plan for the employee might seem "too much" for the employee. It is okay to ask the employee what they want and need. Be clear and upfront about what can be accommodated so all parties are fully aware.

## Emotional support

If an employee comes to you to talk about a breast cancer diagnosis, it is important to consider the following:

## Communication

- Avoid distraction by organising a confidential area to speak.
- Reassure the employee that conversations will be kept confidential.
- Allow the employee to speak at their own pace.
- Listen to what they have to say and don't feel a need to respond.
- Don't agree or disagree – keep your response neutral, such as simply nodding your head. You

will learn more from listening to them.

- It is ok to ask questions but take your cue from them; if they feel uncomfortable answering the question, don't push them for an answer. Some people are quite private while others will be more open.
- Pay close attention and try not to interrupt, then summarise what you've discussed.
- Let the employee know that you care and that your door will be open to them should they wish to discuss anything. Encourage them to continue communicating with you.

It is important to show empathy and understanding towards the employee during this difficult time. As emphasised during the stakeholder forums by those with direct experience of returning to work post-diagnosis, the emotional turmoil that cancer can have on the employee is considerable.

There are many supports to make your employee aware of, including [cancer support centres](#), support groups for different types of cancers, counsellors, [booklets](#) and online forums.

Please also visit [Irish Cancer Society services](#) for more information.

Provide the employee with the details of any Employee Assistance Programme supports (if relevant), including counselling supports, as well as legal and financial information.



## Confidentiality

- Never discuss one employee's medical condition with another employee without their permission.
- If the employee wants others to be made aware of their situation, discuss with them how this should be handled.
- If the employee does not want to share information regarding their medical condition immediately, you should decide together what you are going to tell other staff about their absence, if relevant.

## Practical support

It can be useful to inform yourself about breast cancer as well as the relevant treatment and its common side effects from reputable sources, such as the Irish Cancer Society website, or other advocates for individuals with breast cancer. However, this should not be used to advise the employee but rather to provide you with context for the support you may need to put in place.

Information on the types of breast cancer can be found on the [Irish Cancer Society website](#).

Call the Irish Cancer Society Cancer Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 for any further information required.

Please note that there are many different types of breast cancer and treatment paths, so never assume that because you have personal knowledge of someone who has had breast cancer and the treatment protocol they went through, that it is the same for everyone.

If the employee is absent from the workplace, include them by keeping them up to date with what's happening in work if they are happy to receive such updates – their job is important to them. The employee might prefer that a nominated next of kin receive the updates, provide them with that option.

The employee should decide on the frequency of these updates and the method by which they occur (by email, post, text, etc.). Please note that communication preferences may change over time and should be kept under review.

Provide your employees with details of the Irish Cancer Society Support Line (1800 200 700). A cancer nurse will provide support and more information if they are interested in participating in counselling.



# Case Study

## Judith\*

In 2018, I was diagnosed with early stage triple positive breast cancer, which involved 5 months of chemotherapy, surgery, radiation and 6 months of immunotherapy.

I chose to try to work through treatment where possible, in practical terms that meant managing work commitments around the impact of chemo on energy levels and susceptibility to infection. I stopped work before surgery to build up my strength and returned two weeks after completing radiotherapy.

My employer has a really good illness policy which meant I didn't start to come under financial pressure until I had hit the end of my paid leave. However, I completely underestimated the impact of radiotherapy on energy levels and then discovered I would have to wait a full year before I was entitled to any additional paid sick leave – this led to me dragging myself into the office, but by 2pm, it was as if my battery had run out.

I came back full-time on a phased basis, over 6 weeks, which really helped. My relationship with my line manager was critical in helping me manage expectations, ensuring I was able to take the time to attend appointments. As I look back now, I would have recovered quicker if I had more time to regain my energy levels and if I had known more about the long-term physical and mental impact of treatment - e.g. brain fog, joint pain, fatigue, and on my confidence levels. It took me a full two years to get to a point where my confidence started to return and I felt in a position to get my career back on track but I am still dealing with the physical impact (chemo-induced menopause etc.).

\* The name has been changed

# Side effects after cancer treatment

Please bear in mind that breast cancer and/or its treatments can have long-term effects on your employee, physically and emotionally. For example, fatigue can last for many months or years, and some side effects from treatment and preventative medication can develop weeks or months after treatment has ended.

This impact will vary depending on the type of breast cancer and the person themselves.

Eighty-two percent of respondents in the ESRI research who had received a breast cancer diagnosis reported physical health issues. Lymphoedema, for example, arising from the surgical removal of lymph nodes, can cause substantial upper-body pain. In addition, chemotherapy can lead to issues involving memory and concentration, among others.<sup>vii</sup> For one of our stakeholder participants, the side effects of being on hormone suppression medications was a lack of sleep, which proved a huge barrier in her return to work.

The emotional turmoil that cancer can have on the employee is also considerable. Sixty-eight percent of respondents in the ESRI research who had received a breast cancer diagnosis reported psychological health issues. Participants in the stakeholder forums noted the significant toll on their confidence levels, in particular, and the importance of peer support during this time.

The most commonly reported physical or psychological health issues by respondents of the ESRI research with a breast cancer diagnosis were as follows:

Tiredness	87%
Insomnia or disturbed sleep	76%
Difficulty remembering things	68%
Pain	64%
Anxiety	60%

Even if everything seems to have gone back to normal, it is important to check-in with the employee regularly.

Recovery does not always follow a straight path and emotional impacts may hit later on in the recovery process. It is important to respect the very personal impact of the side-effects due to living with and beyond cancer.



# Guidelines and policies

As an employer, it is your duty to inform your employee about company policy and schemes when they advise you of their cancer diagnosis. Inform yourself about your employees' rights and entitlements in collaboration with your HR resources. Employees on extended leave due to cancer should be fully informed of their contractual sick pay and leave entitlements, as well as other statutory entitlements for which they may qualify.

Being aware of legal requirements and any guidelines and policies in your organisation means you can give clear guidance to your employees about their rights and entitlements and meet your obligations as an employer. Pay particular attention to any policies relating to sickness absence, sick pay and occupational health provision, as well as long-term absence. The same applies to any company guidelines or policies that exist in relation to supporting an employee who has cancer or who is caring for someone with cancer.

Be mindful that a lot of this information will be new to the employee therefore delivering such information in an easy to understand way is crucial.

The Employment Equality Acts protect employees with a disability from discrimination, and puts a positive obligation on employers to make "reasonable accommodation". This means taking appropriate measures to meet the needs of the employee in the workplace, including practical changes to the work or working conditions. Depending on the circumstances, such measures could include adjusting the role, training, reduced hours, remote working or flexible working times. A person undergoing cancer treatment, or returning to work after cancer will fall within the scope of this Act.<sup>viii</sup>

## Cancer Support Plan

Remember that every employee's needs and situation will be different. Some employees may want to continue working, not just for financial reasons, but for continuity and to give themselves a focus that is not their illness.

When the employee is ready, a meeting with the

employee, yourself as manager and a member of HR should be held to develop an individual plan. This plan can be developed if the employee is taking time away from work for illness or treatment or if they decide to remain in work during treatment.

## What is a Cancer Support Plan?

A Cancer Support Plan is a short, simple document, developed by the employer and the employee. It sets out the practical work-related details about an employee's absence from work, return to work, or arrangements to stay working during cancer treatment.

**Please note** that if an employee decides to remain at work there may be treatment impacts that they had not considered at the outset. Any plan should be approached with a level of flexibility built in as changes can occur during treatment.

## Why develop a Cancer Support Plan?

When going through cancer, there are a million and one things to worry about, details to sort out and logistics to manage. A Cancer Support Plan is a practical way an employer can help reduce that worry for an employee, by providing clear information about how their employment will be managed.

Cancer is unpredictable, but a Cancer Support Plan at least gives some certainty and reassurance about how work will be managed during this time. In many cases, it's not about lots of extra benefits or changes. It's about explaining policies and benefits that are already in place, talking about what the employee needs and wants, and agreeing a path that works for all.

Developing a Cancer Support Plan is also a way to have a good conversation between employer and employee. It's a chance to show the organisation cares, provide reassurance to the employee, and to the employer, that the correct supports are being put in place.

**Helpful tip:** Be aware that if the employee chooses to discuss their cancer diagnosis with you at the time of their initial diagnosis, they may not have all the facts surrounding their treatment plan in place. As such, scheduling such conversations for a little later may be useful and regular communication is key.

Please refer to Appendix 1 for a template Cancer Support Plan, which sets out areas to be discussed with the employee. These include:

- Any adjusted working or time-off arrangements. More information on the type of arrangements available are included below.
- The expected duration of arrangements/time-off. This is just an estimate, as it is important to remember that illness does not always behave predictably and so flexibility and understanding may be required as circumstances around treatment and issues can change.
- Pay and benefits. This includes sick pay entitlements while taking time off from work (these are outlined in full in your workplace Sick Leave Policy); any pay related implications of adjusted working arrangements; annual leave implications, if any; social welfare entitlements; pension or permanent health insurance matters.
- Agreement of how and in what form medical certificates need to be submitted.
- The employee's preferred means of communication with you during periods of absence.
- Communication with team members and other colleagues, and what information, if any, the employee would like shared with them.

Clearly communicate options with the employee, ensuring such lines of communication are established and maintained – ask what they need from you as their employer and how you can best support them.

If the employee's suggestion(s) cannot be accommodated, provide them with an explanation why and alternative options.

Adjusted working arrangements may include:

- Temporarily reduced working hours: weekly working hours could be reduced on a temporary basis.
- Flexible hours or changes in working times: A temporary change to start times may be granted, a 'split-shift' may be given, or changes may be made to days of work.
- Remote working: every effort will be made to accommodate staff members who normally work from a physical premises to undertake temporary remote working, if suitable.
- More frequent breaks.
- A temporary reduction in workload.
- A temporary or permanent change in role/responsibilities.
- Modification of work equipment or addition of new equipment.

These adjustments must be discussed and agreed with the employee as part of their individual plan. They will be monitored with the employee over time and alterations will be made where appropriate.

Such arrangements will be dependent on each individual's needs, as well as what is feasible within individual roles. In some instances (e.g. manufacturing), part-time or flexible working may be the only real option.

# Emotions at work

A diagnosis of cancer can have an emotional impact, not just on the employee diagnosed with cancer, but also on their colleagues and on you as an employer. Colleagues may be upset or unsure about how to react. Please note that emotional reactions will vary from person to person. More information on the emotional effects of cancer can be found [here](#).

Encourage communication between you and the employee and you and the team on how everyone is doing – bring the situation back to them and its effect on their working life. If you are not backfilling the role with a new hire, it is important to be mindful of the workload and additional pressure on colleagues.

If you feel more emotional support is needed for you or any of your colleagues, discuss this with HR. Provide the employee with the details of any Employee Assistance Programme supports (if relevant), including counselling supports, as well as legal and financial information. You can call the Irish Cancer Society Support Line on 1800 200 700 for information about local cancer support groups in your [area](#). Free support is available for you as well as your colleagues.



# Managing workload

Particularly in the case of smaller organisations, a replacement might not be immediately available for the employee absent from work.

It is important to consider the following options:

- Can the employee still work and do they still want to work?
- Can other colleagues help cover the employees' workload?
- Do temporary replacements need to be hired?

An employee's fitness to work in this circumstance would need to be informed by expert medical advice. Where they are certified unfit for work/decide to take time away from the workplace it may be useful to backfill their role with a specified purpose contract rather than a fixed term contract as the return date may be uncertain.



# Returning to the workplace after a period of absence

Many employees return to their place of work before they are ready, due to financial concerns. Such considerations must be addressed during conversations about returning to work.

## Before returning to the workplace



### Employee organises meeting to discuss returning to work

- Ensure medical certification as fit to work received.
- Meet one month in advance of proposed return.
- Inform of meeting agenda in advance.
- Offer meeting venue options to the employee.
- Ensure HR representative in attendance.



### Return to Work plan agreed

- Relevant supports/ accommodations outlined.
- Catch up meetings scheduled to review arrangements every 6 weeks.



### Communication with colleagues on return

- Suggest employee drafts an email with return date noting that they will be in touch in due course.



### Signpost employee to supports available

- Employee Assistance Programme (if relevant)
- Buddy system
- Irish Cancer Society supports

Please refer to Appendix 2 for the Returning to Work meeting checklist.

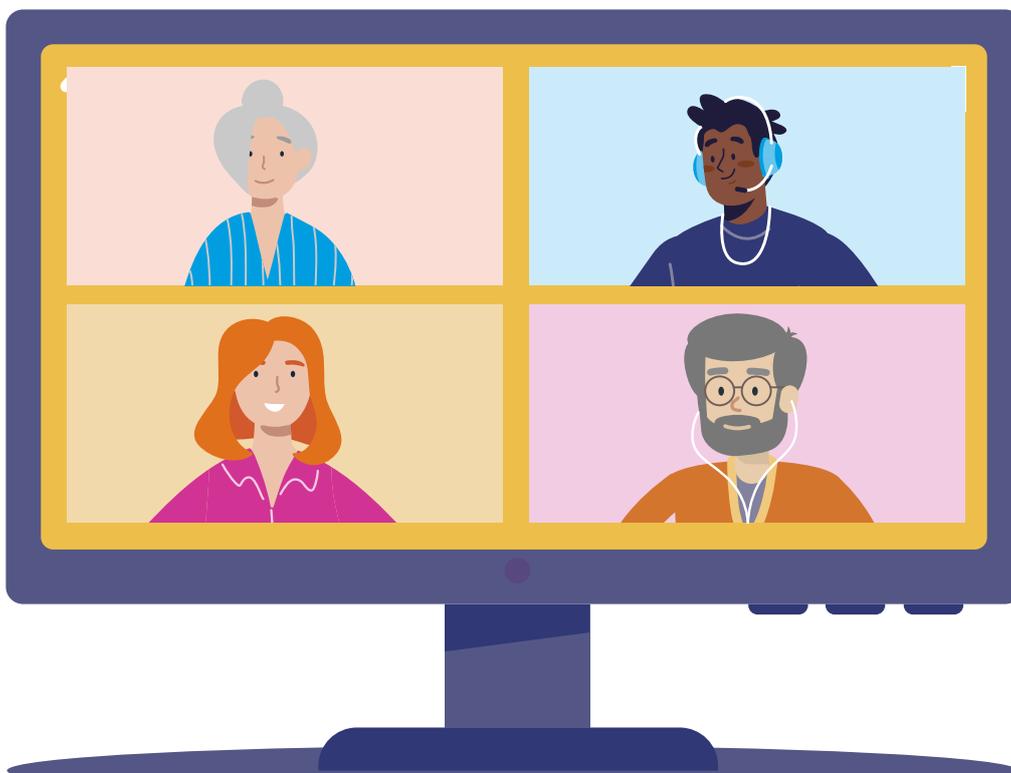
# Occupational health assessment and reasonable accommodations:

It is required that the individual attend either their GP, relevant medical professional, or occupational health physician to ensure they are medically certified as fit to return to work.

The assessor will be able to confirm if the employee is fit to work, and will help to outline what if any accommodations are needed (specific equipment, a reduced working week, a change in working hours, a change in duties etc.). The HR Department will take the lead on any engagement with medical experts.

It should be agreed locally what arrangements can be put in place, and to have these arrangements reviewed periodically (e.g., every 6 weeks),

Once the employee is deemed fit to work, a meeting should be organised one month in advance to discuss a return-to-work plan with them (please refer to Appendix 2 for the Returning to Work Template). Depending on the length of absence, a re-induction programme or a refresher course on technology or systems may be important to ensure a successful return.



# Return to Work Meeting

Provide the employee with the option to attend this meeting at work, at home, by video call or at a neutral venue, whichever is most comfortable for them. Offer the employee the option to bring along a family member, friend or trusted colleague for moral support.

Inform the employee in advance of the purpose of the meeting, providing them with reassurance that this is not in any way designed to force them back into work, nor to discipline them for being off work, but rather solely intended to support them.

The following areas should be discussed at the return to work meeting:

- What working arrangements will look like for your employee on their return to work. This may include adjusted working arrangements or a phased return to work.
- The estimated length of adjusted working arrangements or phased return which can be reviewed and adjusted as needed.
- Time-off for medical or non-medical appointments (e.g. counselling, support groups).
- Communication with your employee and HR. Designated catch-up times should be scheduled between the employee, manager and HR to discuss how the return to the workplace is going, and whether any additional supports or adjustments need to be made.
- Communication with colleagues, including what information to share about the employee's return to work. To avoid an influx of overwhelming calls, an idea would be for the employee to draft an email notifying colleagues of their return date with a note to say they would be in touch in due course.
- Any concerns, worries or questions your employee has about returning to work, and any additional supports that can be put in place. This should include any longer-term affects the employee may be experiencing, emotional, physically or otherwise.

# Other practical supports for consideration:

- Assist the employee with any necessary forms or paperwork.
- Organise a parking space at work if possible/relevant.
- A "buddy system" is recommended for colleagues returning to work after a period of leave (as referred to in the Cancer and Chronic or Serious Illness Policy). If the employee chooses to participate, a colleague will be assigned as a buddy whose role is to provide peer support for the employee's return to work. This includes introductions to any new colleagues, any organisation updates, as well as a listening ear.



# What to do when a return to the workplace is not possible

The employee may make the difficult decision to choose not to return to the workplace for various reasons, including not being physically or emotionally capable.

It is essential to show understanding and compassion for this decision.

Encourage the employee to seek advice from a HR resource before leaving the job, ensuring that they take some time to evaluate their decision. Sometimes the individual may not have considered alternatives to this decision such as postponement of a return to the workplace; a career break; or internal secondment/assignment to a different role in the organisation (if available), which may be possible and give the employee more options.



# Supporting employees with a terminal diagnosis

While most employees who receive a breast cancer diagnosis will recover, unfortunately some curative treatments can fail resulting in serious ill health or terminal illness.

As an employer, it can be extremely difficult to know how to deal with such an emotionally charged situation. Individuals will deal with this conversation differently. It is important to handle the situation as per the employee wishes.

Liaise with supports from Occupational Health where applicable and those externally, including the Irish Cancer Society. Call the Irish Cancer Society Cancer Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 for support and more information.

If the employee is absent from the workplace, include them by keeping them up to date with what's happening in work if they are happy to receive such updates – their job is important to them. The employee should decide on the frequency of these updates and the method by which they occur (by email, post, text, etc.). Please note that communication preferences may change over time and should be kept under review. If the employee is on extended leave, liaise with HR and Occupational Health resources to ensure contact is maintained during the absence.

Keep your other employees up-to-date as to the situation, if the employee with breast cancer has agreed for this information to be shared, and give information on counselling supports. Details of any Employee Assistance Programme supports (if relevant), including counselling supports should be circulated. Provide your employees with details of the Irish Cancer Society Support Line (1800 200 700). A cancer nurse will provide support and more information.



## Supporting an employee with a terminal illness who wishes to remain at work

An employee may be well enough and may wish to remain in work despite their terminal diagnosis, for as long as possible. It has to be acknowledged that individuals have different views about work and have different priorities regarding their personal and family life. For some individuals work is a safe and supportive environment and can be therapeutic. For others their priorities may differ. Providing flexibility and reassurance to your employee is key during this time.

In some cases the diagnosis may not in the immediate future prevent an employee from attending work and may in the medium term only require small adjustments to the role or work environment. All options and supports should be explored with the employee.

However, it is essential to get an occupational health assessment to confirm that the employee is indeed fit to work and in what capacity. An ergonomic assessment may also be advisable depending on their stage of terminal illness.

After the initial shock of the news has passed, organise a meeting with the employee to create/update their Cancer Support Plan (as per the template in Appendix 1).

Ensure that the reasonable accommodations included within the plan are sufficient to enable the employee to keep working, if it is their wish to do so. Considerations must be placed on which aspects may present any difficulty and if/how this difficulty can be removed to allow the employee to remain at work.

# If your employee dies

When someone in your life has died, there is a natural period of sadness and loss. You are likely to experience a range of emotions from shock, relief, guilt to grief, possibly for a long time afterwards.

As someone who would have had day-to-day contact with the employee, the emotional toll of their loss will be deeply felt. While supporting your colleagues and those around you, it is important to remember to look after your own health and well-being.

There is a wide range of support services and literature available for those who have experienced a bereavement. Call the Irish Cancer Society Cancer Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or drop into your local [Daffodil Centre](#) to find out about useful publications and services.

Helpful booklets from the HSE and the Irish Hospice Foundation include: [Grief in the Workplace – Supporting a Colleague](#) and [Grieving the Death of Someone Close](#).

- You will need to inform their colleagues of the news and other clients/relevant people connected to their work, outlining the funeral arrangements. Once again, reach out to your HR resources for support and advice. If there is an Employee Assistance Programme available in your organisation, share the details with any relevant persons.
- Mark the employee's death internally within the organisation. This could involve holding a memorial service, sharing memories, opening a condolences book, closing for the day etc. and marking afterwards e.g. anniversary, a plaque or tree planting, etc.
- If possible, offer bereavement counselling to staff. Recognise that the time for bereavement counselling often isn't immediately but after a little while. Remember to re-offer supports further down the line.
- Your HR resources will lead in liaising with the employee's next of kin on financial and other relevant matters.



# Carers

A carer is a person who helps someone who is ill. This can mean giving nursing and personal care at home, supporting them emotionally or dealing with practical matters such as housework or managing money. A carer could be a family member, partner, friend or neighbour.

A carer is often the person who knows the most about the patient and cares deeply about them. A carer is also often the link between the patient and all the other people caring for them.

The caring role can be challenging, both physically and emotionally. It is very normal for carers to feel tired and stressed at times.

Ensure that the employee with these caring responsibilities knows that they do not have to do everything on their own and that is okay to ask for help.

Provide your employee with the details required to talk to one of the Irish Cancer Society nurses in confidence if they have any worries or questions, or need help getting support. The Freephone number is 1800 200 700, or the email [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie).

Supporting caregivers in the workplace is crucial. In order to do so, the following points should be considered:

- The carer may need to reduce their hours or take a period of absence from work.
- A carer's need for extra time off work may increase stress levels – for the carer who has to try to

manage their workload while working shorter hours, or for other staff members who are supporting their absent colleague - offer support where available. Ensure that the employee is aware of their rights and responsibilities in combining caring and work.

- Carers may need extra practical and emotional support from their colleagues and you as an employer at this time. Provide caregivers with a support network, including details of support services that might help them deal with the situation. Keep all channels of communication open. This is especially important in situations where longer-term solutions may be required.



# Irish Cancer Society information and supports

Our cancer nurses can offer practical and emotional support to anyone affected by cancer. They can give information on treatment and side-effects, and signpost to supports and services.

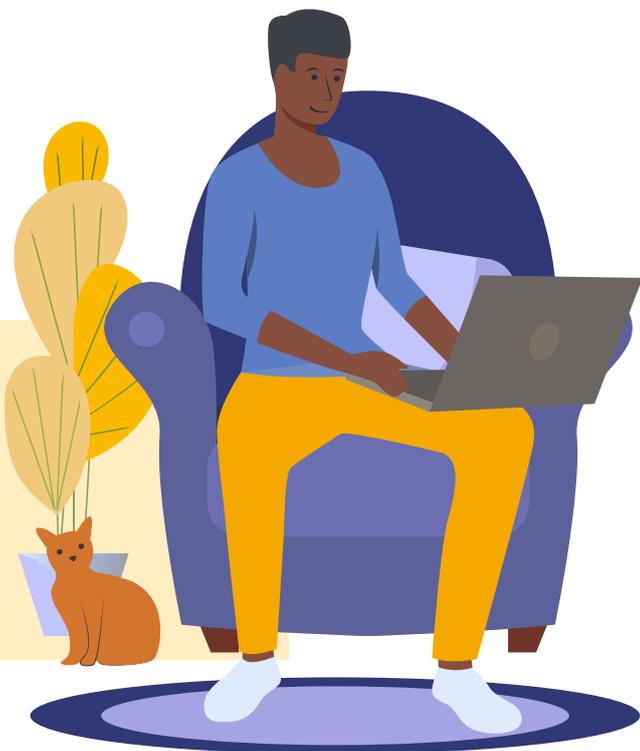
Call the Irish Cancer Society Cancer Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700.

All information signposted to throughout the guidelines can be accessed at [www.cancer.ie/employer-guidelines](http://www.cancer.ie/employer-guidelines).



# Useful information

- Workplace Relations Commission – Free information service for employers, directors and business owners. [www.workplacerelations.ie](http://www.workplacerelations.ie)
- [Citizens Information](#) – For information about employment rights, including carers' rights.
- [The Employee Retention Grant](#) – helps private sector employers to keep employees who acquire an illness, condition or impairment (occupational or otherwise) that affects their ability to carry out their job.
- [Partial Capacity Benefit](#) – This is paid if the employee cannot work to their full capacity.
- The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2011 – Reasonable steps employers are required to take to accommodate employees with an illness or disability. <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/21/enacted/en/html>



## Resources for employers without in-house HR resources:

- Department of Social Protection – please refer to the Illness Benefit Section for any Illness Benefit queries. 01 7043000 or see <https://www.gov.ie>
- Occupational Health Professionals (OHPs) will provide advice on navigating the regulations, the risks and the role played in keeping your employees safe in the workplace.



# Appendices

# Appendix 1

## **Cancer Support Plan Template**

This checklist should be completed by the manager, in conjunction with the employee, at the individual planning meeting, and a copy should be kept by both parties and sent to [HR contact point]

Employee name: \_\_\_\_\_

Manager name: \_\_\_\_\_

	Yes	No	Action/Comment
<b>Working arrangements</b>			
Are adjustments to working arrangements required? If yes, describe the adjustments agreed in comment box			
Is there an expected timeframe for these arrangements to remain in place? (estimate) If yes, outline in comment box			
Is time-off required? If yes, outline the expected timeframe in comment box (estimate)			
<b>Pay and entitlements (the following should be explained and discussed)</b>			
Sick pay entitlement			
Permanent Health Insurance (PHI)			
Social welfare entitlements See gov.ie for further information			
Impact on entitlements (e.g. impact on annual leave)			
Pension implications			
Time off for medical appointments			
Time off for non-medical appointments			
<b>Communication plan</b>			
Medical and social welfare certs			
Communication plan between employee and manager during period(s) of absence Outline agreed plan in comment box			
Communication with colleagues Outline agreed plan in comment box			
<b>Supports (employee to be made aware of the following supports)</b>			
Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)			
Irish Cancer Society services			

This plan can be updated at any time after discussion with your manager and/or HR. Any adjustments will result in temporary adjustments to your contract and may have pay implications, this will be discussed with you.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Manager

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee

# Appendix 2

## Returning to Work Meeting Template

Employee name: \_\_\_\_\_

Manager name: \_\_\_\_\_

	Yes	No	Action/Comment
<b>Return to work arrangements</b>			
Has a return to work date been agreed?			
Is there a requirement for a phased return? If yes, outline details in comment box			
<b>Working arrangements</b>			
Are adjustments to working arrangements required? If yes, describe the adjustments agreed in comment box			
Is there an expected timeframe for these arrangements to remain in place? (estimate) If yes, outline in comment box			
<b>Pay and entitlements (the following should be explained and discussed)</b>			
Sick pay entitlement			
Permanent Health Insurance (PHI)			
Social welfare entitlements See gov.ie for further information			
<b>Impact on entitlements (e.g. impact on annual leave)</b>			
Pension implications			
Time off for medical appointments			
Time off for non-medical appointments			
<b>Communication plan</b>			
Communication plan between employee and manager – regular check-ins Outline agreed plan in comment box			
Communication with colleagues Outline agreed plan in comment box			
Has buddy been identified? Introduction with buddy to be arranged			
<b>Supports (employee to be made aware of the following supports)</b>			
Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)			
Irish Cancer Society services			

This plan can be updated at any time after discussion with your manager and/or HR. Any adjustments will result in temporary adjustments to your contract and may have pay implications, this will be discussed with you.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Manager

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee

# Appendix 3

## *Checklist for Managers*

Task	Status	Staff Responsible	Date for Completion
I am aware of who is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the Cancer and Chronic or Serious Illness Policy (or equivalent) within the organisation.			
I understand my organisation's legal obligations when it comes to sick leave and labour protection of an employee with a disability or chronic or serious disease (including cancer).			
<b>In the instance of an employee being diagnosed with cancer</b> I have agreed with the employee how to best to communicate with colleagues about their absence from the workforce.			
I have made the necessary arrangements to temporarily cover the employee's tasks in their absence.			
I have kept in touch with the employee (via their preferred communication channel).			
I have agreed a return to work plan with the employee.			
I have made the necessary and requested accommodations for the employee to come back to work (e.g. phased return, relevant equipment etc).			
I have scheduled designated meetings to catch up with the employee and a member of HR (if relevant).			
I am aware of wider emotional supports available for the employee and colleagues (e.g. the Irish Cancer Society).			

# References

- i. NCRI 2021 Annual Report.
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- iii. Sharp, L. O'Driscoll, D, O'Leary, E, Higney, K, Bradley, C. (2014) Patterns and predictors of workforce participation in cancer survivors 6-months and 12-months post-diagnosis. In: NCIN Cancer Outcomes Conference June 9-10.
- iv. Carlsen, K., A.J. Jensen, R. Rugulies, J. Christensen, P.E. Bidstrup, C. Johansen, I.E. Huitfeldt Madsen and S.O. Dalton (2013). 'Self-reported work ability in long-term breast cancer survivors. A population-based questionnaire study in Denmark', Acta Oncologica, Vol. 52, No. 2, pp. 423-429.
- v. <https://www.esri.ie/publications/returning-to-employment-following-a-diagnosis-of-cancer-an-irish-survey>
- vi. <https://www.cancer.ie/about-us/about-the-irish-cancer-society/what-we-do/cancer-advocacy/returning-to-work-after-a-cancer-diagnosis>
- vii. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2017) The road to a better normal: Breast Cancer patients and survivors in the EU workforce. Economist Impact | Perspectives. Available at: <https://impact.economist.com/perspectives/perspectives/healthcare/road-better-normal-breast-cancer-patients-and-survivors-eu-workforce/infographic/road-better-normal-breast-cancer-patients-and-survivors-eu-workforce> (Accessed: 13 July 2022).
- viii. [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/equality\\_in\\_work/equality\\_in\\_the\\_workplace.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/equality_in_work/equality_in_the_workplace.html)





## To find out more about our services:

Visit us at [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

Call our Support Line **1800 200 700**

Email us on [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

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