



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP



What are some of the strongest headwinds facing employers?

Employers today face significant challenges in an uncertain economic environment. With inflation, potential economic slowdowns, the rising incidence of chronic diseases and other pressures on benefits plans, organizations need to carefully manage costs while supporting their most valuable asset — their employees.

In this context, benefits plans are more important than ever. A well-designed, sustainable benefits plan is crucial for maintaining employee health, productivity and engagement. At Sun Life, our focus is on driving value through comprehensive solutions and support. This means constant innovation to provide access to health solutions and a seamless plan member experience, and to maximize the return on every dollar invested in employee benefits.

How is the demographic profile of people with chronic disease changing?

We're seeing concerning trends in the demographic profile of chronic disease, with important implications for employers and benefits plans.

Almost half (45.1 per cent) of Canadians now live with at least one major chronic disease.¹ This costs the Canadian economy an estimated \$190 billion annually, including \$122 billion in indirect income and productivity losses.² Meanwhile, chronic conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease are appearing with greater frequency among people in their 30s and 40s, and our data indicates women may be disproportionately impacted.

These shifts underscore the need for a dual approach. Some chronic conditions are largely preventable, so



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workplace wellness and prevention programs can have significant positive impacts. At the same time, effective disease-management support is essential for those already affected. Addressing both prevention and management helps to improve employee health outcomes while mitigating costs associated with chronic disease.

How can employers improve resilience for their organizations and employees?

Leadership should lead by example, modelling resilient behaviours and openly prioritizing well-being.

They also need to prioritize employee health and well-being. Even when business pressures build, maintain focus on supporting employees' physical and mental health through comprehensive benefits and wellness programs.

Secondly, find the strategy that works best for your organization — there are many to choose from. For example, develop organizational policies and procedures that adapt to employee needs and promote work-life balance. Offer programs and tools to help employees

better manage stress, maintain health and sustain productivity. Encourage open dialogue about health challenges, such as women's health, to create psychologically safe spaces for employees to voice concerns. Implement flexible work arrangements where possible to help employees balance work and personal responsibilities. And provide mental-health training for both employees and leaders.

Why has Sun Life made women's health a priority?

Women make up 48 per cent of the Canadian workforce³ and are the majority in many critical front-line professions. Supporting their health is essential for overall economic productivity, but working women often struggle to find adequate health support. The gender health gap leads to women stepping back from or leaving careers, resulting in lost talent and productivity. In fact, four in 10 working women have made career-limiting decisions due to health concerns or family care responsibilities.⁴

By making women's health a priority at Sun Life and in our benefits plans, we aim to create more inclusive, supportive work environments that allow all employees to thrive. This approach benefits individual women and contributes to the overall success and resilience of the organizations we serve.

1 Statistics Canada, Health of Canadians, 2023.

2 Government of Canada, Evaluation of the Healthy Living and Chronic Disease Prevention — Multi-Sectoral Partnerships (MSP) Program 2014–15 to 2018–19, March 2020.

3 Statistics Canada, Labour Force Characteristics, 2022.

4 The Gender Health Gap: Its Impact on Working Women in Canada. Research by Sun Life in partnership with Ipsos, 2024.