

Supporting employees with childhood-onset heart disease (CoHD)



This factsheet provides employers with essential information about CoHD to better support employees in the workplace. Understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by employees with CoHD can create a supportive and productive work environment.

What is CoHD?

CoHD refers to a range of heart conditions that develop during childhood, including congenital heart disease (present at birth) and acquired heart disease (developed after birth).

Is CoHD a disability?

Not all people with CoHD will identify with having a disability however in the context of employment, CoHD can be considered a disability. Medical conditions, including CoHD, are often included under disability discrimination laws and equal opportunity employment schemes. This means employees are entitled to protections and accommodations in the workplace to ensure fair treatment and equal opportunities.

Work impacts

While not all employees with CoHD will experience significant work-related challenges, it is important for employers to recognise that these may arise for some people. The



symptoms and impacts of CoHD can fluctuate over time, and some employees may appear symptom-free while still facing underlying struggles.

Employees with CoHD may face:

- **Fatigue:** Due to the heart's reduced ability to pump blood efficiently.
- **Difficulty concentrating:** As a result of fatigue or medication side effects.
- **Anxiety about their health:** Which can distract from work tasks and overall participation in workplace activities.

Recognising these potential challenges and being prepared to address them through supportive workplace practices can significantly enhance the work experience for employees with CoHD. Employers should be mindful that the impact of CoHD can change over time and be flexible to adapt support as needed.



What support can I offer as an employer?

If an employee has spoken to you about their condition and requires reasonable changes to enable them to work safely, you are legally required to implement any reasonable adjustments, provided this does not cause 'unjustifiable hardship' for your business (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014). Here are some examples of adjustments you might consider:

Offering flexibility in breaks and meeting times to accommodate medical appointments.

- Providing a hands-free headset if treatment has made holding a phone difficult for the employee.
- Allocating a private and clean area for medication administration.
- Installing an emergency defibrillator in the workplace.

If an employee discloses their condition to you, they have the right to privacy. You are not allowed to share this information without their consent.



Procedures and recovery

Employees with CoHD may need medical procedures such as surgeries or cardiac interventions. Recovery times can vary, requiring flexible work arrangements and understanding from employers to accommodate their health needs.

Common procedures:

- **Surgeries** significant procedures that may be required to repair or replace parts of the heart.
- **Cardiac interventions:** procedures such as interventions or implants to improve heart function.
- **Ongoing treatments:** continuous management, including medication and regular cardiac monitoring.

Typical recovery times and workplace support:

Recovery times can range from a few days, weeks to several months, depending on the procedure.

Workplaces can support recovery by:

- Offering flexible work hours or remote work options.
- Providing leave of absence for medical treatments and recovery.
- Ensuring a supportive and understanding work environment and work place which enable an employee to settle back into work comfortably.



Encouraging proactive communication and planning:

Employers should encourage open dialogue about health needs and accommodations. Proactive planning helps in anticipating potential challenges and creating tailored support strategies. Encourage an inclusive workplace culture that recognises and accommodates diversity in health and provide training for managers on accommodating employees with chronic health conditions.

- **Create a safe space:** Foster an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their health without fear of stigma or discrimination.
- **Regular check-ins:** Schedule regular meetings to enable employees to share and request any adjustments needed.
- **Confidentiality:** Ensure that all health-related conversations are kept confidential and handled with sensitivity.



Resources and references

HeartKids [Employment and Your Heart Factsheet](#)

Job Access (2022). Supporting staff to disclose disability. [[Online](#)] Available at: Job Access

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2014). *Disability Discrimination*. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/disability-discrimination>

Australian Human Rights Commission (2022). Know your rights: Disability discrimination. [[Online](#)] Available at: Australian Human Rights Commission

Fair Work Ombudsman (2022). Bullying, sexual harassment & discrimination at work. [[Online](#)] Available at: Fair Work Ombudsman

About HeartKids

HeartKids is the only Australian not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting and advocating for families impacted by childhood-onset heart disease (CoHD).

HeartKids provide support and resources for everyone impacted by CoHD. To learn more about support for employees head to heartkids.org.au/support/schools-and-workplaces/



HeartKids Helpline and webchat

The HeartKids Helpline offers support and guidance to those impacted by Childhood-onset Heart Disease, including families, caregivers, health professionals, and anyone seeking information or referrals. Our team is here to listen and assist without judgment, ensuring everyone feels supported. Contact the Helpline on **1800 432 785** or speak to our staff on **webchat** via heartkids.org.au.

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This fact sheet was reviewed and updated by HeartKids in June 2024. It was endorsed by the HeartKids Clinical Advisory Committee at the time of publication. Clinical information might change after this date. The information in this fact sheet is general. It is not a substitute for medical advice from your doctor. Always talk to your doctor about matters that affect you or your family's health. Have feedback about our resources? Contact office@heartkids.org.au.