Canadian Psoriasis Network
Réseau canadien du psoriasis
CAPP ACPP
Canadian Association of Psoriasis Patients
Association canadienne des patients atteints de psoriasis
Unmasking PSORIASIS

Honourable Seamus O'Regan Jr.
Minister of Labour
Employment and Social Development Canada

Honourable Carla Qualtrough
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
Employment and Social Development Canada

Sandra Hassan
Deputy Minister of Labour
Employment and Social Development Canada

Graham Flack
Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development
Employment and Social Development Canada

Dear Ministers O'Regan and Qualtrough, Sandra Hassan and Graham Flack,

On behalf of the Canadian Psoriasis Network, Canadian Association of Psoriasis Patients, and Unmasking Psoriasis, we are writing to share our efforts to support people living with psoriasis and/or psoriatic arthritis (PsA) in the workplace and request your ministry's support of our recommendations. Our community regularly experiences workplace discrimination and stigma and we are writing to share our specific recommendations for policy makers and employers.

Psoriasis affects up to 1 million Canadians and is a chronic inflammatory condition of the skin, causing itchiness and pain. It can begin at any age but often begins between the ages of 15 and 25 and can significantly impact their prime working years. Approximately 30% of people with psoriasis live with PsA, a chronic, autoimmune form of arthritis that causes joint inflammation, pain, and stiffness in the joints. Often, because of the nature of these diseases, people with psoriasis or PsA live with comorbidities such as diabetes, depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular disease, causing further stigma and discrimination. These health conditions are episodic in nature – meaning people can experience periods of low disease activity followed by a flare or exacerbation of disease.

Earlier this year, we launched a survey to learn about the experiences of people living with psoriasis and PsA and identify priorities and needs relating to accommodation in the workplace, occupational health and safety during the pandemic, and the impact of workplace experiences on health. Close to 200 people participated in the survey and they represented a variety of workplace experiences including working in large and small organizations, unionized and non-unionized environments and those working in the gig economy. We summarized the key survey findings in ***Working it Out: A Report on the Experiences of People with Psoriatic Disease in the Canadian Workplace***.

More than half of the participants noted that psoriasis or PsA had a negative impact on them at work. They had difficulty performing physical tasks, such as standing for long periods of time, and staying focused due to fatigue. Stress and worries that psoriasis and/or PsA will affect their employment, personal finances and long-term financial situation were significant (63%) and unfortunately only worsened by the pandemic. Approximately half of participants said the pandemic affected their employment or business.

When reflecting on the work environment, only a third of participants feel their supervisor and colleagues understand the episodic nature of psoriasis and/or PsA and others felt they were treated differently because of their disability. Feeling able to speak up in a psychologically safe work environment is an important aspect of occupational health and safety and the pandemic has worsened working conditions for this already vulnerable group. People with psoriasis and PsA also noted a number of concerns relating to occupational health and safety:

- Close to two thirds of participants worked in an environment where they could be exposed to COVID-19.
- About 50% of survey participants felt worried about their job exposure to COVID-19.
- Almost three quarters of participants can access the necessary tools, like Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), to carry out their job or work safely, however 15% felt they couldn’t access appropriate workplace equipment.
- About a third of participants are worried about returning physically to the office once the pandemic is over.

To address the needs of the community, we developed a number of resources to support the participation of people living with psoriasis and/or PsA in the workplace:

- Demystifying Workplace Accommodation: A guide for people with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis
- Employee Tool for Requesting Doctors to Prepare Medical Notes, Accommodation Forms, and Disability Benefits Application Forms
- Legal Rights and Obligations for Employees and Employers Around Workplace Accommodation for Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis

Through your organization's role of setting policy, conducting compliance and enforcement, and providing education, you can play an important role in creating inclusive employment and safety standards and programs. Our report highlighted the following relevant recommendations:

- *Policy makers and patient organizations should educate employers and other organizations about episodic disability, psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis and support them in designing inclusive workplace policies.*

- *Employers or policy makers should provide direct support to people with disabilities to navigate workplace situations (including those working in small organizations, the gig economy or in non-unionized environments), such as advice from an independent human resources specialist and employee assistance programs.*
- *Policy makers can provide or increase the sick leave available in employment standards and conduct compliance activities to help people with psoriasis and PsA manage their health and contribute at work. We are supportive of your government's proposed changes to sick leave.*
- *Employers and policy makers must ensure that employees' personal information is protected by clearly outlining who has access to what type of information when developing accommodation plans.*

We welcome the opportunity to work with your office to support the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace. Please review our report and workplace tools, and consider sharing with the broader community (e.g., add to your website). We will reach out to your office to request a meeting in the coming weeks to further discuss the report and how we can support the psoriatic disease community in Canada.

Sincerely,

Antonella

Antonella Scali
Executive Director
Canadian Psoriasis Network

Rachael Manion
Executive Director
Canadian Association of Psoriasis Patients

Margaret Peters
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Unmasking Psoriasis