

# Supporting staff with Endometriosis and Chronic Pelvic Pain in the workplace



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# Introduction

University is committed to supporting policies and practices that promote equal opportunity in employment and education while delivering the best health, safety, and wellbeing outcomes. This includes providing support for employees with a diagnosis of chronic pelvic pain and related chronic illnesses such as (but not limited to) endometriosis, adenomyosis, and polycystic ovarian syndrome.

# University recognised the need for a toolkit to support staff with endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain.

This toolkit was developed to enable people with endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain to engage fully and productively in work while also supporting their own wellbeing.

- **one in ten** people with endometriosis will lose their employment due to managing the disease.
- **one in three** will be overlooked for a promotion.
- **70%** need to take unpaid time off work to manage symptoms.

Our recent research demonstrated those with endometriosis who gain and keep jobs attribute their success to flexible and reasonable workplaces, understanding and empathic managers and colleagues.

**These employees are significantly more productive and take fewer sick days.**

This toolkit is a practical resource to assist staff on processes and support offered at University to support staff with chronic pelvic pain and endometriosis in the workplace. This initiative is grounded in evidence that has demonstrated improvement in productivity and wellbeing for staff and their workplaces.

The intention of the toolkit is to meet the needs of the employer and support employees with endometriosis. The proposed guidelines and processes are to complement existing internal policies; and introduce new tools, language, and education specific to people with chronic pelvic pain and endometriosis living and working at University.

The Toolkit for Supervisors is underpinned by the:

- [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#) (DD Act)
- [Fair Work Act 2009](#) (Cth)
- [Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Act 2011 \(NSW\)](#)

## Why does University consider this condition fall within disability?

University recognises chronic pelvic pain (CPP) and endometriosis as a disability under the DD Act for the purposes of protection against unlawful discrimination.

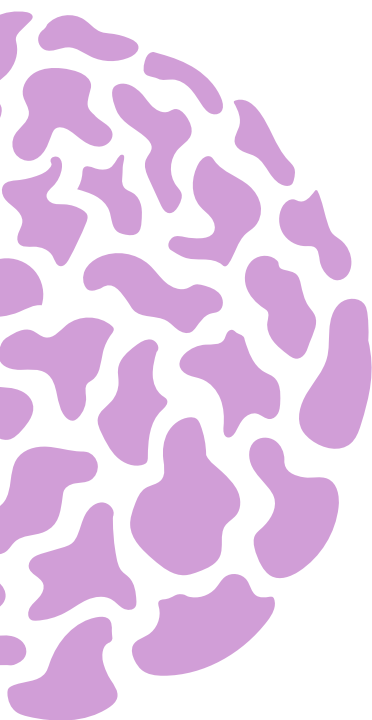
It is important to note that the meaning of disability in the DD Act is not confined to the present existence of a disability, but extends to disabilities that previously existed, may exist in the future, or is imputed to the person. Applying this to CPP and endometriosis, the definition of disability extends to where a person is not presently experiencing the symptoms of CPP/endometriosis, if they had CPP/endometriosis symptoms in the past, or if they are believed to have CPP/endometriosis by a GP or Health practitioner.

Employers are generally prohibited under the DD Act from engaging in direct or indirect discrimination against employees (including prospective employees) because of the employee's disability. Workplace discrimination under the DD Act includes a failure to make reasonable adjustments to the working arrangements of the employee with the disability, where the failure to make those adjustments would result in the employee with the disability being treated less favourably than a person without the disability in circumstances not materially different.

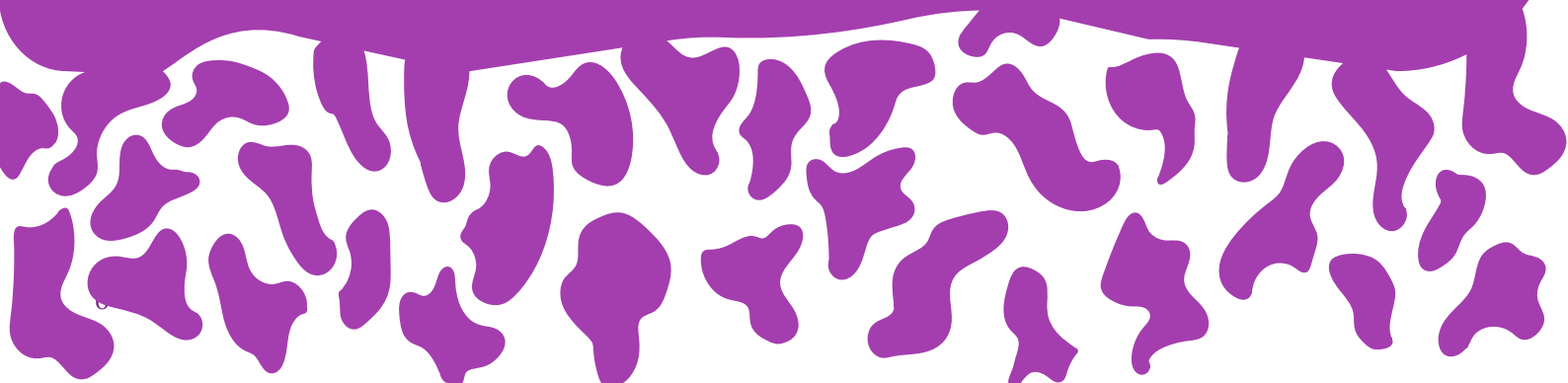
Such reasonable adjustments could include, for instance, access to flexible work, access to appropriate workplace amenities or modification of specific task demands. In addition, under the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) a person with a disability may be eligible to request a flexible work arrangement from their employer.

University has used the above legislation to make internal policies which should be read with this toolkit, including:

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# Who is covered under the guidelines (Definitions & Eligibility)



This policy is designed to provide opportunities for manageable working conditions and self-care for employees with a diagnosis of chronic pelvic pain and/or endometriosis.

An employee is required to provide a medical certificate or other documentation from a medical provider which advises of your diagnosis / condition and how this impacts undertaking the inherent requirements of their role. This documentation is to be provided to theHR or Chronic Pelvic Pain Coordinator. This documentation is required only once to confirm diagnosis.  
Link to office

## Chronic Pelvic Pain

Chronic pelvic pain (CPP) is recognised as one of the top five health issues affecting girls, women and those presumed female at birth in Australia, and is highlighted as a [National Women's Health Priority in a Federal government report](#).

Chronic pelvic pain is characterized by persistent pain lasting longer than 6 months or recurrent episodes of abdominal/pelvic pain, hypersensitivity or discomfort often associated with elimination changes, and sexual dysfunction often in the absence of organic etiology. Some people have no demonstrated pathology despite detailed surgical investigation or imaging, leading to a diagnosis of Chronic Pelvic Pain Syndrome.

There are a variety of causes for CPP including (but not limited to):

- Endometriosis
- Adenomyosis
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
- Chronic infection
- Vulvodynia
- Irritable bowel syndrome or Bladder pain syndrome.

## Endometriosis

Endometriosis is the most common cause of CPP, accounting for 24-40% of all CPP diagnoses and has a prevalence between 11-14% in Australia.

### Diagnosis definition of Endometriosis:

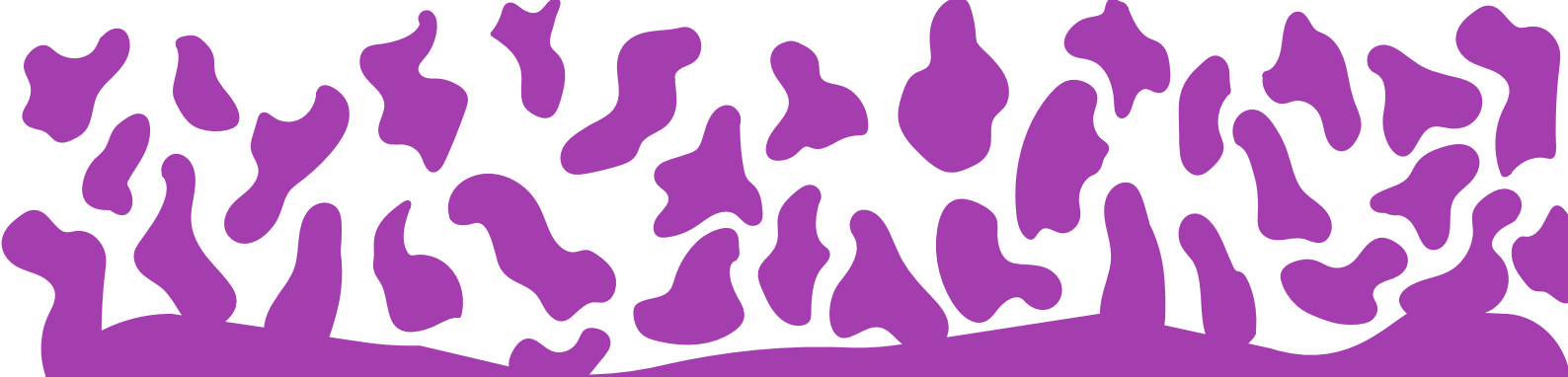
**A surgical diagnosis** is made through laparoscopic identification of endometriotic lesions with histological verification.

**A clinical diagnosis** is made when a GP, gynaecologist or other health professional has identified symptoms of endometriosis.

**An imaging diagnosis** is when clinicians use imaging [Transvaginal ultrasound (TVUS) or Magnetic Resonance imaging (MRI)] in the diagnostic work-up for endometriosis.

<sup>1</sup> Doggweiler R, Whitmore KE, Meijink JM, Drake MJ, Frawley H, Nordling J, Hanno P, Fraser MO, Homma Y, Garrido G, Gomes MJ, Elneil S, van de Merwe JP, Lin ATL, Tomoe H. A standard for terminology in chronic pelvic pain syndromes: A report from the chronic pelvic pain working group of the International Continence Society. *Neurourol Urodyn* 2017, 4:984-1008.

<sup>2</sup> See [ESHRE Guideline Endometriosis](#) for more information around diagnosis and caring for people with endometriosis.



# Guidance on Disclosure

## Sharing your experience... it's your choice

You are not required to inform University about your condition, but open communication can be beneficial for managing it. Consider whether your symptoms are affecting your job performance or if workplace stress is worsening your symptoms.

## Who to speak to

At University, there is the opportunity for staff to choose to disclose information regarding their CPP or endometriosis to theHR, the information gained will be kept confidential in accordance to the Chronic Pelvic Pain and Endometriosis Guidelines and Disability Policy. Also the Chronic Pelvic Pain Coordinator at each School/Institute/ can help inform supervisors and staff on support available for staff with chronic pelvic pain and/or endometriosis.

New staff at University have the opportunity to disclose their information during the interview process or onboarding paperwork.



## Tips for discussing CPP and endometriosis

- Start the conversation: Decide who you feel comfortable discussing your condition with. You can reach out to the HR , your **Chronic Pelvic Pain Coordinator** at each School/Institute/ or your supervisor.

Suggested conversation starters:

*I have CPP/endometriosis, which can impact me in the following ways...*

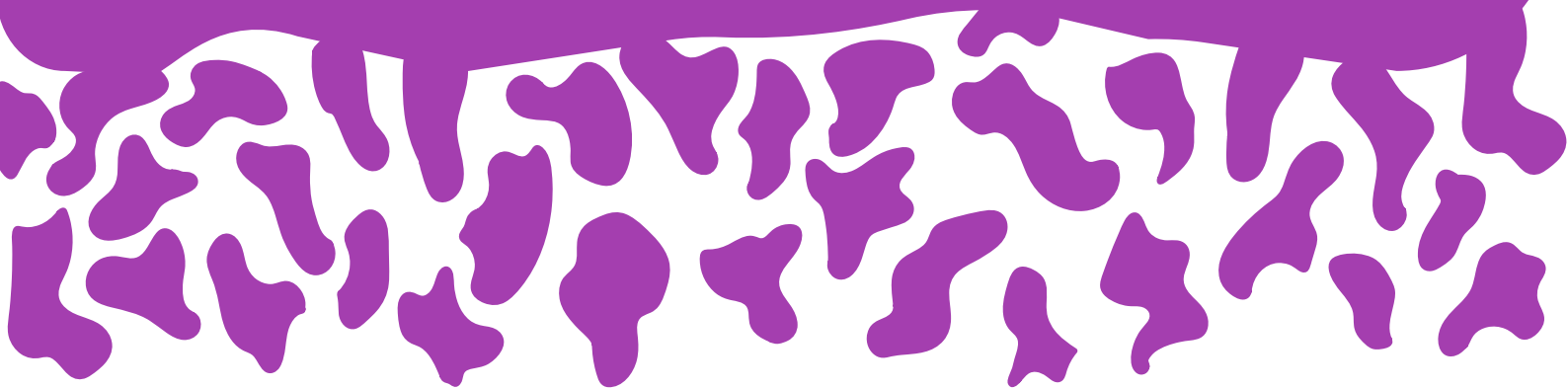
*I am being evaluated for CPP/endometriosis by a medical professional, and my symptoms can affect me in the following ways...*

*I manage CPP/endometriosis and would like to discuss how you might support me to perform my job effectively.*

- Respond openly and honestly to questions, but share only what you're comfortable with.
- Focus on symptoms or concerns that directly affect your job.
- Discuss how your condition might impact your work performance and the key challenges you face.
- Be prepared to explore potential solutions offered in Reasonable Adjustment plans and CPP and endometriosis Guidelines if your performance is affected by endometriosis.
- Connect with colleagues or Chronic Pelvic Pain Coordinator who understand your condition and can offer advice and encouragement.

By preparing thoroughly and communicating clearly, you can effectively advocate for yourself and ensure that you receive the support you need to succeed in your role.

# Reasonable Adjustments



## What are reasonable adjustments or work-related adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments are essential for employers to avoid direct and indirect discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) as it is important to put in place actions to help ensure equal opportunity for people with a disability (encompassing people with chronic pelvic pain and endometriosis) and those caring for someone who has a disability. At University, these actions are commonly referred to as “reasonable adjustments” or “work-related adjustments”.

The legislation does not specify the types of adjustments required to avoid discrimination. Each case needs to be considered in its own circumstance.

Examples of reasonable adjustments and work-related adjustments may include:

- Changes in the physical environment, such as modified workstations
- Provisions of equipment
- Flexibility around hours of work and/or breaks
- Alternative working locations

## Informal Arrangements

Informal arrangements can be made between a supervisor and staff without the involvement of the University. However, a Chronic Pelvic Pain Coordinator can be present at these meetings by request of either supervisor or employee.

Examples of informal arrangements can include:

- Flexible working arrangements e.g. starting times or remote working within the provisions of redacted
- Timetabling adjustments e.g. room allocation or starting time
- Small or inexpensive equipment e.g. reusable heat packs
- Prearranged flexible hours e.g. leaving early for an appointment

## Flexible Work

Flexible work arrangements are available for staff whether they have CPP and/or endometriosis or not. University recognised that being able to balance our work and personal priorities matters. Research shows flexible workplaces have considerable benefits for the performance of organisations at large. All staff at Western can apply to work flexibly as per the flexible work measures outlined in the relevant Staff Agreements and University policy.

Providing flexible working options at our University plays an integral role in developing opportunities for increased staff satisfaction, retention, engagement, and sustained organisational knowledge. A flexible workplace is one that recognises the competing demands of its employees in balancing work commitments with personal priorities. Our university has many options available for staff who require flexible working arrangements, and I encourage staff to discuss these options with their Manager or HR Advisor. When properly managed flexible working arrangements serve to benefit the overall productivity of our University.

We encourage you to look at the following information:

Internal Information:

External Information

- [Fair Work Flexible Work Options](#)
- [Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

## Reasonable Adjustment Plans and Staff Workplace Adjustment Fund

University is committed to creating an equitable and inclusive environment for all staff including those with a disability, medical condition or chronic health condition. For staff with CPP and/or endometriosis, this definition of disability extends to where a person is not presently experiencing the symptoms of CPP/endometriosis, if they had CPP/endometriosis symptoms in the past, or if they are believed to have CPP/endometriosis by a GP or Health practitioner. Staff with diagnosed CPP and/or endometriosis are entitled to reasonable adjustments to help accommodate their needs in the work environment in order to meet the inherent requirements of the role. Inherent requirements of the role may include time availability, location, and task specific. Staff who require adjustments should discuss these with their supervisor or HR and/or Chronic Pelvic Pain Coordinator from their School/Institute/.

The University provides a Reasonable Adjustment Plan where a staff member with disability requires formal workplace adjustments to accommodate their disability-related needs, in accordance with its legal responsibilities under the [Disability Discrimination Act](#). A RAP outlines the specific workplace adjustments the University commits to undertake in order to help enable staff to make their fullest workplace contribution while maintaining health, safety and wellbeing. This arrangement is similar to the Academic Integration Plans (AIPs) used for our students with a disability.

The HR can assist supervisors with understanding their obligations as [redacted](#) and discuss available options. Some staff have requirements for adjustments, however, may not meet the eligibility criteria for a RAP and therefore may benefit from engaging in a flexible working arrangement put in place by you as their supervisor.

The University also has a centralised fund which is dedicated to funding services and equipment needed for staff with disability with a RAP in place. The RAP process and SWAF is administered by the HHR

All equipment purchased by HR remains the property of HR for exclusive use of the staff member being supported. The staff member is responsible for returning equipment or for larger items advising HR so that a removal can be arranged.

A RAP can vary in time frame depending on the individual requirements. Flexible working arrangements tend to be shorter time frames to allow for negotiation and changes in operational needs. RAPs which provide for adjusted equipment tend to be for longer time frames. The policy provides for a period of up to 2 years before review.



## Unjustifiable hardship

The university is committed to developing and supporting an inclusive and diverse environment which provides equal opportunity for all staff with disabilities to access, participate and enjoy the benefits of employment.

As a public funded institution, the university has a pool of resources available to support and make reasonable adjustments to the working conditions of its staff with disabilities. However, in some circumstances, the adjustment requested may not be possible. For example, where the university is likely to experience unjustifiable hardship because of the adjustment.

As outlined in the university's disability policy, unjustifiable hardship is defined as;

An exception that allows an organisation to refuse to make an adjustment because the cost involved and the impact on the organisation and/or other people would be too great. In determining whether an adjustment would involve unjustifiable hardship, all relevant circumstances of the situation must be considered. The organisation must prove that an adjustment would cause it unjustifiable hardship, taking into account:

- The benefits of disadvantages that would be caused by making the reasonable adjustment
- The effect of the disability of the student or staff member
- The costs of making the reasonable adjustment in the context of the organisation's financial situation

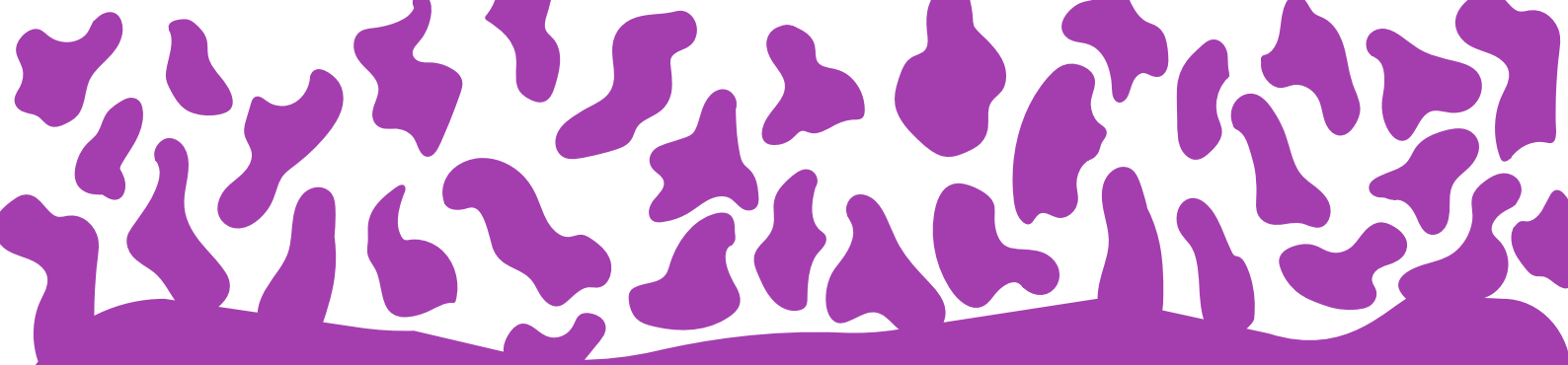
If this is the case, the university has a responsibility to suggest a more viable alternative arrangement and discuss this with the staff member with disability. Where you believe that an adjustment requested may pose an unjustifiable hardship or is otherwise unreasonable, it is important that as a supervisor you seek advice from HR





## Process of applying for a Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP)

- **Contact HR**  
Our office is located
- **The staff with disability is to obtain documentation from a medical provider which advises of the disability, medical condition, or injury and how this impact on them undertaking the inherent requirements of their role.**  
The necessary documentation to be completed in part by the medical practitioner  
Once completed it is to be provided to HR and will be treated confidentially.
- **A conversation will occur with staff with disability, the supervisor, and HR (where needed). This discussion may include:**
  - the adjustments/supports which may be required
  - recommended equipment where necessary
  - if complex assessments is required, relevant communication wfor necessary equipment if required
  - A conversation related to flexible working arrangements
- **HR will work with the staff with disability, you as their supervisor, their medical and/or health practitioner, HR to design and document a set of reasonable adjustments to be implemented within the workplace** which meet the inherent requirements of the role and do not meet the clause of undue hardship.



# Roles and Responsibilities

## Supervisor's Obligations

- **Work with** the HR team to work out the feasibility of suggested adjustments
- **Implement agreed adjustments** in a timely manner.
- **Work collaboratively** to implement agreed adjustments (this helps the individual feel supported).
- **Conduct a handover** where possible if there is a change of supervisor.
- **Sign off on the RAP** (you are agreeing to the terms of the RAP on behalf of the university).
- **Ensure** leave requests & workload agreements reflect the adjustments outlined in the RAP when authorising a staff member's timesheet.
- **Contact** HR for advice.
- **Contact the Office f**

## Staff member's Obligations

- **Contact your** Chronic Pelvic Pain Coordinator
- **and/or**
- **Contact** HR
- **Make a request** for reasonable adjustment
- **Request** from your treating doctor **documentation** which outline diagnosis and any recommendations for adjustments to be made in the workplace, provide a copy to H&S.
- **Work collaboratively** to implement agreed adjustments
- **Advise your supervisor** and the HR if circumstances change and the existing RAP no longer meets your needs.
- **Advise**

## HR Obligations

- Meet with staff at an agreed time in person or via Zoom.
- Arrange a specialist assessment if required.
- Consider the medical advice and adjustments of the treating doctor.
- Facilitate an ergonomic assessment if required.
- Liaise with supervisors regarding recommendations and reasonable adjustments.
- Liaise with other university units.
- Arrange the purchase and delivery of equipment.
- Advise the university and staff regarding reasonability of adjustments requested.

# Frequently Asked Questions



## Who can make a referral for a Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP)?

Referrals for a RAP can be made by the staff member themselves, the supervisor, colleague, OHR

## How long does a RAP last for?

A RAP can last from anywhere **from 2 weeks up to 2 years** in accordance with University policy. Although, the RAP can be reviewed in the case of significant work or disability-related changes, or the adjustments are no longer effective.

## Who is aware that a staff member has a RAP?

The supervisor who is supervising the staff member with a RAP and, where necessary the HR is aware that the staff member has a RAP in place. But **people outside the HR are not privy** to the details of the diagnosis or condition, unless the staff member expressly allows this information (or specific details) to be shared. The employee will be contacted for consent to share the information if this is ever necessary. To maintain confidentiality, the HR has on file the nominated staff members who are aware of the disabilities. Of course, where there is a serious and/or imminent risk HR may need to share relevant details with necessary contacts. If this is required, only the absolutely essential information will be disclosed and to only those vital to managing the urgent situation.

## Does a RAP cover temporary disability/health condition?

**Yes**, staff can submit a request for a RAP if they have a disability or health condition of a temporary nature which impacts their ability to perform the required duties of their role. For example, a staff member has broken their leg and needs their office temporarily relocated to help with mobility onto and around campus.

## Where are the documents provided to support a RAP stored?

Any medical documentation provided by a staff member to obtain a RAP will be kept confidential by the HR

## Can staff with a RAP undertake work related travel?

**Yes, however** if they are required to travel as a part of their job their RAP must be incorporate the requirements associated with travel. A risk assessment may be required prior to travel and this may include consultation with tHR

## How can I help a staff member to work flexibly?

### 1. Maintain clear expectations

- Establish and negotiate outputs and deadlines with the staff member as you would normally do. As a supervisor you should clearly and explicitly communicate what you expect from the person working flexibly, but remember to check in and ask what they need and want from you.
- An effective way to maintain expectations is for supervisors to have the staff member update them on the progress of longer-term projects. For example, as a supervisor you may have the staff member send a daily/weekly email with a list of projects that have progressed. This may be useful during the initial trial period of a flexible work arrangement, to be ascertain whether the arrangements in place are effective or need adjusting.

### 2. Encourage staff to stay connected

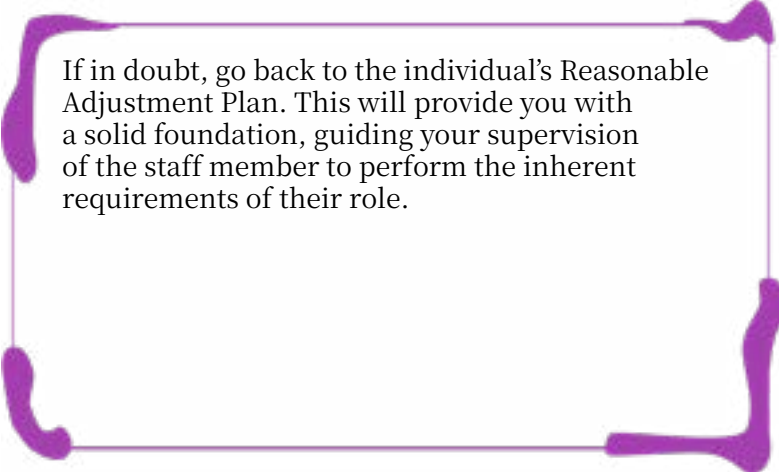
- When working from home some staff members will value a Zoom call on a regular basis to touch base, share and problem-solve, whilst others will view this as micro-management. A regular, optional Zoom catch up may cater well to most working styles. This strategy can be effective between the supervisor and staff or peer to peer, between the staff member working remotely and a workplace buddy or trusted colleague.
- Where a person is working away from the office, prioritise returning their calls and emails and show them that you are present, and just a quick Zoom chat or a phone call away.
- When staff are working different or less hours than usual, it is important that as a supervisor allow plenty of opportunity for those team members to stay connected with you and other colleagues. For example, consider when team meetings are scheduled to help include as many part-time staff or those who adjust their hours around caring responsibilities, disability needs, etc.
- Consider sharing Microsoft calendars so availabilities can be seen to assist scheduling meetings and synchronising other workplace activities.

### 3. Build and extend trust with staff

- Research has shown that trust is the most important leadership skill and the most highly valued quality by staff. Trust and good communication can actually result in increased engagement and productivity. In most cases, staff who have been performing members in the 'physical' office are very likely to remain strong performers in the 'virtual' office when working from home.
- Take time for informal conversations - although you are not working in the same physical location or on different work patterns, it remains important to maintain informal channels of communication that you would enter into in the staff lunchroom, hallways, or around the photocopier.

### 4. Be aware of your WHS obligations

- If working from home, liaise with the staff member to ensure that they have appropriate equipment & workspace in order to meet the inherent requirement of the role. If the person is starting or finishing later in the day, make sure that the workspace is safe at those times of day.
- An employer's duty of care under WHS laws apply to mental health too. Psychosocial hazards are anything in the design or management of work that cause stress. Stress is the reaction a person has when they perceive the demands of their work exceed their abilities or resources. At times, staff working flexibly can work beyond reasonable expectations and/or not disclose if they are struggling to cope with workload. This can be from fear or worry that they may be perceived as underperforming and therefore lose their flexible arrangements.



If in doubt, go back to the individual's Reasonable Adjustment Plan. This will provide you with a solid foundation, guiding your supervision of the staff member to perform the inherent requirements of their role.

