

2026

International Women's Day

A Toolkit for
Workplace Leaders



In Recognition *of* International Women's Day

International Women's Day (IWD) has always been about recognition, but in 2026, it's also about reflection and responsibility. For organisations around the world, this day invites us to pause and ask a deeper question: Are our workplaces truly designed for the full reality of women's lives or just the version that's easiest to accommodate?

Women don't leave the workforce because they lack ambition, resilience or commitment. They leave because too often, the workplace fails to acknowledge the continuum of health experiences that uniquely and disproportionately affect them; experiences that are still misunderstood, minimised or left unspoken.

Postpartum depression. Infertility and pregnancy loss. Perimenopause and menopause. Chronic pain. Hormonal shifts. These are not 'personal issues', they are human realities that intersect with performance, engagement, attendance and retention. And yet, many women continue to manage them quietly, navigating professional expectations whilst carrying physical, emotional and psychological weight that remains largely invisible at work.

Burnout in women is rarely about a single stressor. It's about pressure without permission – pressure to perform without pause, to lead without rest, to give without replenishment and to succeed without acknowledging the cost.



Dr. Kennette Thigpen Harris, LCSW

IWD is a call for organisations to move beyond symbolic support and towards structural empathy. Where flexibility is not seen as a concession but as a strategic investment. Where support systems are proactive, accessible and designed with real lives in mind. When we design systems that account for caring, health transitions and life complexity, we create environments where people can show up fully.

GIVE TO GAIN

- Give Flexibility to Gain Retention
- Give Support to Gain Performance
- Give Understanding to Gain Trust

So today, let IWD be more than a moment of celebration. Let it be a moment to give to gain. Because when women are supported across the full continuum of their lives, workplaces don't just become more equitable, they become more human – and that's a future worth building together.

Thank you



Strategic Planning

for International Women's Day

International Women's Day is an opportunity for individuals and organisations around the world to

- Celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women
- Raise awareness about gender discrimination
- Take action to forge gender parity

Here are steps to help you plan for International Women's Day.

WHEN TO OBSERVE THE DAY

IWD is officially observed on **8 March** every year. Since this day falls on a Sunday in 2026, some organisations are choosing a different date to maximise engagement. So, your first decision will be when to observe the day.

WHO TO INVOLVE IN PLANNING

Consider who you will need to involve in planning the day, including any events, activities and communication.

- Your organisation's leader – who might send out a message announcing the day and supporting its goals or be more directly involved in some of the day's activities
- Your HR leadership team – to decide on the focus of the day, key messages to communicate and important benefits or initiatives to highlight
- Your communications group – to plan and execute the strategy for reaching as many employees as possible for meaningful engagement with the day's activities
- Employee resource groups (ERGs) – for targeted communication and special activities related to their interests
- People managers – to augment communication and focus on issues of particular relevance to their teams
- Wellbeing ambassadors, if the organisation has them – to participate in planning and execution of ideas
- Your employee wellbeing programme – for tools, communications and elements of your activity plan

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PLANNING AND WAYS TO OBSERVE THE DAY

The theme for International Women's Day in 2026 is '**Give to Gain**'. As described on the [International Women's Day website](#), this is intended to encourage 'a mindset of generosity and collaboration...whether through donations, knowledge, resources, infrastructure, visibility, advocacy, education, training, mentoring or time, contributing to women's advancement helps create a more supportive and interconnected world'.

You might choose to focus on an aspect of that theme, such as collaboration, inclusion, mutual support or mentorship. You might, instead, choose a different theme for your organisation's observance of the day, using the day instead to spotlight women in leadership, for example, or create meaningful dialogue around women's contributions across your organisation.

Organisations observe IWD in many ways, depending on the organisation's size, the resources available to plan the day or pay for special communication and activities and the efforts underway at the organisation around gender equity (e.g., initiatives to support the recruitment, retention and advancement of women or to address pay inequity).

There are many options to choose from:

- Communication from the organisation's leadership in celebration of women's achievements and in support of initiatives to advance gender equity
- Special communications to draw attention to the achievements of women employees and to build awareness of relevant benefits and supports
- Special on-site or online webinars on relevant topics
- Web-based or in-person discussions on issues of special relevance to women and the men who work with them
- Town hall meetings to discuss progress in advancing gender equity, perhaps including findings from employee surveys

CREATING A PROJECT PLAN

Once you have a planning team in place or know who is available to support your planning and communication efforts, it's helpful to map out a project plan showing the details:

- What needs to be done
- By what date
- Who is responsible for each task and who will help

Pay special attention to communication plans, as the success of the day will depend on broad outreach to – and engagement with – employees.



Your employee wellbeing programme is a key resource in planning for International Women's Day and in supporting the women in your workforce throughout the year.

- The counselling, coaching, training and consulting services offered through the programme, and the educational articles and self-assessment tools on the programme's member website, can all be used and promoted as part of your organisation's observation of IWD.
- We will provide communication tools, content and other resources to support observation of the day.
- Our resources for HR and organisational leaders include consulting services and written guides, such as Building a Connected Workforce, Parental Guilt After Returning to Work, and Tackling the Burnout Problem.



EXTENDING THE IMPACT

Observing International Women's Day sends an important signal in support of the women in your organisation, but one day isn't enough to demonstrate full commitment to addressing their needs and issues.

After International Women's Day, or as part of the planning for the day, establish a group of stakeholders to plan not only your organisation's long-term strategy for advancing gender equity but also to address the wellbeing challenges women face, including burnout, mental health, caring demands and psychological safety at work in order to enhance overall culture and performance.

Encourage the team to plan activities or learning events each month or quarter on topics relevant to equity, inclusion and engagement.

Additional resources are provided below:

[International Woman's Day 2026](#)

United Nations: [International Women's Day](#)

World Economic Forum: [International Women's Day: What is it and why do we need it?](#)

ADDRESSING THE BURNOUT GAP

In 2025, women were twice as likely as men to report burnout.



THE CAUSE

- Disproportionate caring responsibilities
- Health and life-stage challenges including premenstrual syndrome, post-partum depression and menopausal symptoms
- High workplace stress

WORKPLACE IMPACT

- High absenteeism
- Reduced engagement
- Lowered productivity
- Increased mental health claims
- Loss of women talent in workplaces

A country-specific breakdown of the percentage of workers reporting burnout highlights this gap.*

	WOMEN	MEN
Belgium	62%	38%
Brazil	67%	33%
Canada	58%	42%
China	86%	14%
France	68%	32%
Germany	62%	38%
India	52%	48%
Indonesia	73%	27%
Japan	55%	45%
Mexico	60%	40%
Portugal	76%	24%
Singapore	66%	34%
United Kingdom	69%	31%
United States	70%	30%

*Source: Based on insights from our participant clinical data collected between January and December 2025, representing 5,500 burnout cases.

We help provide the following wellbeing support for reducing burnout and helping keep women engaged at work:

- Support for women with issues around childcare, eldercare and family wellbeing
- Women’s wellness trainings focused on resilience, healthy habits, and reducing stress
- Access to curated resources and tools for managing stress and preventing burnout
- Consulting experts who can advise and guide your organisation on building a holistic wellbeing programme

Connect with us to learn more about wellbeing programmes and services for your organisation.





The Organisational Impact of Women's Health

Women incur higher rates of sickness absence than men, yet the reasons behind this disparity have remained less understood. As advocacy for women's health grows, answers are beginning to emerge.



Women have a more complex and cumulative burden of disease leading to disabilities – marked by higher rates of chronic conditions as well as gynecological conditions – a self-reinforcing cycle of underfunding, inadequate research and medical bias has given rise to systemic delays in diagnosis and treatment, along with suboptimal disease management, leaving women sicker longer and less able to balance their health needs with the demands of work.

The result is not only higher absenteeism, but longer and riskier periods of leave, as women's diminished confidence in returning to work – compounded by the unintended ignorance of otherwise well-meaning employers – makes sustainable reintegration harder to achieve. **With women comprising nearly half of the global workforce, the cost of their reduced presence is impossible to ignore.** These include not only the direct costs of disability-related leave, but the \$1 trillion estimated to be lost in global economic opportunity.

The incentive for employers and insurers alike to help close the gender health gap is unmistakable. Beyond a moral obligation to support women's health, there is a mutual financial and operational benefit to taking a more active role in these efforts. For insurers, investing in add-on services that target women's health helps lower claim rates and costs, enhances client satisfaction and strengthens employer attraction and retention.

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For employers, partnering with insurers who offer these services reduces productivity losses due to sick leave, supports talent acquisition and retention and mitigates the risk of rising premiums, copayments and out-of-pocket expenses, helping to avoid further losses from turnover or unmet health needs.

Accepting this, the task then becomes identifying which solutions offer the greatest value. With that in mind, here are five key areas that merit focused investment:

1. PREVENTIVE SOLUTIONS

Remediating the disease burden caused by lapses in diagnosis and treatment means stepping in to ensure women have what they need to proactively manage their health. Many cardiovascular diseases, autoimmune disorders, cancers and other chronic conditions manifest differently in women – particularly in their earliest and most treatable stages – making the provision of educational resources and prevention-oriented services indispensable for enabling women to correctly identify and promptly address early indicators of risk.

Training programmes, counselling, life and wellness coaching and daily living assistance support can empower women to take a more active role in their health and build protective habits that reduce the risk of disease. Access to subsidised health screenings – measuring key markers like blood pressure, body mass, cholesterol and glucose levels – adds yet another layer of protection and enables earlier intervention that can shorten recovery times and reduce the likelihood of extended leave.

2. MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

With twice the risk for disorders like anxiety and depression, women account for a disproportionate share of all mental health, burnout and stress-related leave, whilst a greater susceptibility to somatic comorbidities further undermines their health, recovery and working capacity.

To combat this, investment in gender-responsive mental health support is essential. By offering women a safe, confidential space to address their emotional burden – which many otherwise feel reluctant to disclose to friends, family or employers – insurers and their client organisations can enable early identification of challenges to reduce absenteeism. This may also bolster women's resilience to manage stress and maintain wellbeing. Such support should include access to flexible, multimodal service delivery options (e.g., video, phone, text or computer-based) to help women balance higher household and caring responsibilities on top of their increased health needs.



3. CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

The higher burden of caring responsibilities is also a reason to invest in child and family wellbeing support. The impact of caring stress on women's health has been extensively researched, with studies linking it to everything from mental illnesses to heart disease, diabetes and arthritis. The sheer prevalence of postpartum health issues – both psychological and medical – further underscores the need for targeted support for female parents and carers.

As research shows, many women have a hard time returning to work after pregnancy-related health challenges due to the lack of support tailored to their needs. The inability to prioritise their own health alongside their child or dependent's care needs places them at greater risk of prolonged or recurring illness, with little opportunity for a true recovery. By offering the physical, psychological and practical support women and their families need to be well together, employers and insurers can play a decisive role in preventing these avoidable setbacks and keeping caring women in the workforce.

4. TAILORED RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAMMES

Given the breadth and complexity of conditions keeping women out of work, the reliance on one-size-fits-all return-to-work solutions is inevitably futile. What's needed instead are agile interventions that meet the specific challenges women face – whether that's providing emotional and clinical support for women recovering from cancer or coaching on how to manage symptoms and flare-ups for those adapting to life with an autoimmune disorder.

Because these conditions affect far more than women's physical health – undermining their mental and social wellbeing, eroding their sense of identity and self-efficacy and weakening their ability to sustain work-life balance – comprehensive support that addresses both the clinical and psychosocial dimensions of illness is critical. By offering tailored reintegration programmes that combine clinical oversight with counselling, coaching and practical workplace adjustments, insurers and their client organisations can help returning employees rebuild confidence, regain equilibrium and resume their professional lives safely and sustainably.

5. GYNECOLOGICAL HEALTH SUPPORT

A closer look at the economic implications for closing the women's health gap reveals that just 10 conditions drive almost half of the total impact. Four of them are gynaecological in nature: premenstrual syndrome (PMS), polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), endometriosis ('endo') and menopause. Together, these four conditions cost the global economy over \$304 billion a year in lost productivity and increased disability, highlighting a critical opportunity to improve women's health and workforce participation.

Research shows that 75 per cent of women experience a gynaecological health challenge in their lifetime – most during their working years. Yet, despite the prevalence of these conditions, many are not detected or misdiagnosed. Compounding this, many women who do receive a diagnosis – or who understand what they are experiencing – fail to seek support, either perceiving their symptoms as 'normal' or feeling ashamed or embarrassed by their situation.

To address this, investment in responsive and confidential support is crucial. This includes access to counsellors who can help women manage the psychological impact of what they're enduring as well as wellness coaches who can provide strategies for managing symptoms and maintaining balance in daily life. By supporting women through this critical dimension of their health, organisations can demonstrate that they are committed to helping women thrive at work.

BRIDGING THE GAP TO A HEALTHIER TOMORROW

Until recently, organisations have been hesitant to engage in preventive, holistic health solutions for women, questioning both their role and the return on investment. Yet, evidence clearly shows that timely investment pays off: for every dollar invested in women's health, three dollars are projected in economic growth. The cost of inaction, on the other hand, are far steeper, with far less return and far greater risk.

Delaying investment drives higher disability claims, increased absenteeism, lost productivity and greater attrition – both amongst employees and clients seeking healthier, more engaged workforces. The takeaway is clear: by investing in women's health today, insurers and employers both stand to gain from a thriving – and present – workforce tomorrow.

NEW PARENT RETURN TO WORK PROGRAMME

Helping employees and their managers develop a successful return-to-work strategy for new parents.



A Harvard Business Review study found that **43 per cent** of professional women with children end up leaving the workforce at some point in their careers.

The first few months of parenting can be a blur, both beautiful and challenging. Parents who plan to return to work following a leave of absence can face additional obstacles.

The New Parent Return to Work programme is designed to help parents and managers develop exit and re-entry strategies in advance, which can result in a smoother transition back to work.

Coaches provide practical support for parents before, during and after leave by

- Reviewing leave policies and benefits
- Guiding parents to plan work transitions and a smooth return to work
- Discussing practical and emotional return-to-work challenges
- Supporting managers in creating tailored return-to-work plans

The benefits to new parents

- Flexible support
- Reduced stress
- Expert coaching

Speak with an account representative to learn more about how the programme can support new parents returning to work at your organisation.