

# The ACED Primer

ACED stands for Accommodating and Communicating about Episodic Disabilities. It is the name of a five-year Canadian research project, led by the Institute for Work & Health in Toronto, Canada, that brings together academic researchers and community partners to develop workplace tools, resources and training to support the sustained employment of people with episodic disabilities.

Episodic disabilities are long-term health conditions that are characterized by periods of good health interrupted by periods of poor health. These periods of illness and disability may vary in severity, length and predictability. Episodic disabilities may also be invisible to others.

Some examples of episodic disabilities include depression, anxiety disorders, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, Crohn's, colitis, hepatitis C, chronic fatigue syndrome, migraines, chronic pain and some forms of cancer.

Many of the most common chronic diseases in Canada and other developed countries can be characterized as episodic disabilities. Taken together, episodic disabilities are among the most common and costly conditions in Canada.

## Why is ACED needed?

Because episodic conditions are often unpredictable and invisible to others, with symptoms that fluctuate over time, they create unique challenges in managing workplace disabilities. In particular, episodic disabilities present challenges to workers, supervisors, disability managers and human resources personnel in balancing:

- workplace health communication and the protection of worker privacy; and
- worker needs for support or accommodations and workplace productivity.

Given how common episodic disabilities are, workplaces are becoming increasingly aware of the need to support employees with these conditions in order to ensure they can productively remain in the workforce. Canadian workplaces are seeking knowledge and understanding of the ways in which they can communicate with employees with episodic disabilities and best support them in managing their disabilities while working and remaining productive.

In turn, workers with episodic conditions are also seeking guidance. They want to know if, how and when they should communicate their need for workplace supports, without fear of being stigmatized, losing their privacy or jeopardizing their job.

ACED aims to provide the knowledge, understanding and guidance sought by workplaces and people with episodic disabilities alike.

## What does ACED hope to achieve?

This project aims to develop a toolkit made up of tools, resources and training that are practical, easy-to access, evidence-based, interactive and personalized. The toolkit will protect privacy and facilitate communication and accommodation planning among workers, supervisors and other workplace parties.



The toolkit will address three facets of episodic disabilities and work:

- communication decision-making, including personalized decision tools that consider privacy preferences and that help workers and organizations make decisions on whether, when and how to communicate needs in the workplace;
- job demands and accommodation planning needs, including an interactive job analysis tool with accommodation examples and a module on monitoring changes in needs over time; and
- skills training and coaching workshops for workplaces.

To create this toolkit, the research team will first consolidate and enhance existing research evidence on communicating about and accommodating episodic disabilities in the workplace. The team will also pilot test and evaluate the toolkit's various components in a wide range of workplaces, as well as do a cost analysis on the toolkit's implementation in the workplace.

### **Who are the people and organizations behind ACED?**

The ACED project is led by Dr. Monique Gignac, an associate scientific director and a senior scientist at the Institute for Work & Health. She is also a professor in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto and an affiliate scientist at the Krembil Research Institute, part of the University Health Network.

Gignac leads a team made up of representatives from a wide range of organizations serving people with episodic disabilities and/or employers. These include Arthritis Society,

Canada Life Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, Canadian Mental Health Association, Crohn's & Colitis Canada, Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, Realize, Mindful Employer Canada and Ontario Ministry of Labour.

The team also includes fellow academics, researchers and project support staff from the Institute for Work & Health, McMaster University, University of Connecticut Health Center, University of Toronto and WorkSafeBC.

### **Who is funding the ACED project?**

This research partnership is funded as part of the Healthy and Productive Work initiative, a joint initiative of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The Healthy and Productive Work initiative aims to bring together researchers and stakeholders across sectors to develop, implement and evaluate evidence-informed solutions to improve the health and productivity of Canada's diverse workforce. The University of Toronto is the host organization for the project.

### **How can I keep up with ACED's progress?**

The best way to keep up on ACED is through its website. The website contains information on how to get involved, how to contact the project, the latest findings and news, how to access and use the tools emerging from the ACED partnership, and much more: [aced.iwh.on.ca](http://aced.iwh.on.ca)

From the website, you can also sign up for the ACED newsletter: [aced.iwh.on.ca/subscribe](http://aced.iwh.on.ca/subscribe)

