

Q: Manulife is seeing an increase in claims for adults being prescribed ADHD medication.¹ Why could there be more adults being diagnosed with ADHD?

A: Dr. Steve Pomedli, Manulife Group Benefits Medical Director, Cleveland Clinic Canada: “The increased rate of diagnosis of ADHD in adults in recent years can likely be attributed to several underlying trends. First, there’s been an increased awareness within the medical community of ADHD not just being a diagnosis of childhood, and an increased understanding of the range of symptoms that can be part of an ADHD diagnosis for adults. This has helped healthcare providers better recognize different presentations of ADHD in adulthood, confirm the diagnosis, and support individuals in finding the most appropriate treatment. Second, social media has also helped many people become more aware of the condition, and has encouraged them to talk to healthcare professionals about symptoms that they are concerned about. Lastly, more recent changes around working from home and daily routines have, in some cases, brought to the surface symptoms of ADHD that were otherwise masked by more structured work environments that were previously in place.”

Q: According to Cleveland Clinic Canada, women are typically underdiagnosed.² Why is that?

A: Dr. Steve Pomedli, Manulife Group Benefits Medical Director, Cleveland Clinic Canada: “There are different subsets or presentations of ADHD symptoms, including “hyperactive-impulsive” symptoms as well as “inattentive” symptoms. And, there may be differences across genders as to which of these presentations predominates. For example, men are sometimes thought to present more often with hyperactive-impulsive symptoms. Because these symptoms have sometimes been viewed as a more “typical” presentation of ADHD, boys and men have historically been more commonly diagnosed with ADHD. However, we know that many other individuals across the gender spectrum – and in particular women – may present with the less overt set of symptoms related to inattention, rather than hyperactivity or impulsivity. And because these symptoms related to inattention may be more subtle, this seems to have led to the underdiagnosis of ADHD in girls and women, with many women not getting a diagnosis or starting appropriate treatment until well into adulthood.”

Q: Does a stigma still exist surrounding ADHD?

A: Dr. Steve Pomedli, Manulife Group Benefits Medical Director, Cleveland Clinic Canada: “Individuals with conditions that are related to mental health and mental well-being continue to face significant stigma in many environments, including in the workplace. In the case of ADHD, stigma can relate to the mis-understanding of ADHD as only a childhood illness, as well as attitudes which minimize the impact of the symptoms, and beliefs that individuals with ADHD can’t contribute to the workplace as effectively as others. As a result, many employees may not want to disclose their diagnosis or openly discuss their need for accommodations with managers or their workplace, fearing that they may be unfairly judged or that they may have knowledge of this diagnosis impact their career. Fortunately, workplaces can combat this stigma by ensuring that employees (including managers and leadership) are aware of the condition, its manifestations and impact on individuals at their organization, and ways in which accommodations and the appropriate workplace supports can go a long way in helping employees be at their best.”

Q: What distinctions, if any, are there between adult and youth symptoms of ADHD?

A: Dr. Steve Pomedli, Manulife Group Benefits Medical Director, Cleveland Clinic Canada: “While the criteria for diagnosing ADHD are similar across life stages, the symptoms can manifest themselves in different ways – and may not always cause the same degree of distress or impairment of functioning – at different stages in life. This can be in part due to differing demands or supports that may surround someone with ADHD – sometimes termed “social scaffolding” – which can change based on life stage and circumstances. For example, the presence of this social scaffolding can sometimes help individuals with ADHD compensate such that their symptoms aren’t having a significant impact in certain environments – for example,

being in a highly structured work role – while other settings that are less structured or supportive may “unmask” underlying ADHD symptoms.”

Q: What toll can ADHD take on adults at work? Can it make doing certain tasks more difficult?

A: Dr. Steve Pomedli, Manulife Group Benefits Medical Director, Cleveland Clinic Canada: “ADHD can manifest itself differently in the workplace, depending on the individual, their symptoms, and the specifics of the workplace environment. Attentional symptoms can appear as distractability and difficulty following along in meetings or conversations, or challenges with more detailed work, planning or timeliness. Hyperactivity symptoms can manifest as a need to move or change positions frequently, a drive to stay busy and multitask, or difficulty with more repetitive tasks. Impulsivity symptoms can appear as a tendency to speak out of turn, interrupt, or a low tolerance related to frustration. Despite these symptoms, however, it’s important to recognize that individuals with ADHD bring many key assets to the workplace, and are an important part of a business’ workforce. And, fortunately, many of these symptoms can be addressed through a combination of specific treatments or accommodations and a supportive workplace environment.”

Q: Why would employers want to consider accommodations for employees with ADHD? Are there any workplace accommodations an employer could consider?

A: Dr. Steve Pomedli, Manulife Group Benefits Medical Director, Cleveland Clinic Canada: “Recognizing that people with ADHD bring their unique assets and skills to the workplace, individualized accommodations at work can address specific needs and help these employees further flourish and meet their potential. These types of accommodations can include additional structure around planning, organization and time management. For example, these might include written guides for task sequences, more regular check-ins with supervisors, assistance with the prioritization of competing tasks, or flexible breaks to best support the employee’s productivity. Other modifications can help reduce or overcome distractions, such as creating quieter work spaces or allowing the use of noise-cancelling headphones, using task tracking or reminder apps, and offering the opportunity to record and review meetings. And importantly, workplaces can also strive to ensure that employees with ADHD have the benefits and coverage they need, including initial ADHD screening or diagnostic services, and the key treatments and therapies they need to address their symptoms.”

Q: Is treatment effective? Why or why not?

A: Dr. Steve Pomedli, Manulife Group Benefits Medical Director, Cleveland Clinic Canada: “Treatment for ADHD is generally quite effective in addressing the core symptoms of this condition, and can help people get back to their usual functioning, and feel more in control of their day-to-day symptoms. There are a number of different approaches to therapy for adults with ADHD, though medications are often an important component of treatment. Just like in other conditions, finding the right medication and the right dosage can take some time in order to ensure a balance of positive impacts and minimal side effects. And, while medications are usually a mainstay of treatment, other approaches can be helpful as well, such as developing self-management skills and habits to improve emotional self-regulation, and can be supported through cognitive behaviour therapy.”

¹ Manulife Group Benefits claims data, 2022

² <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/24741-adhd-in-women> , 2023