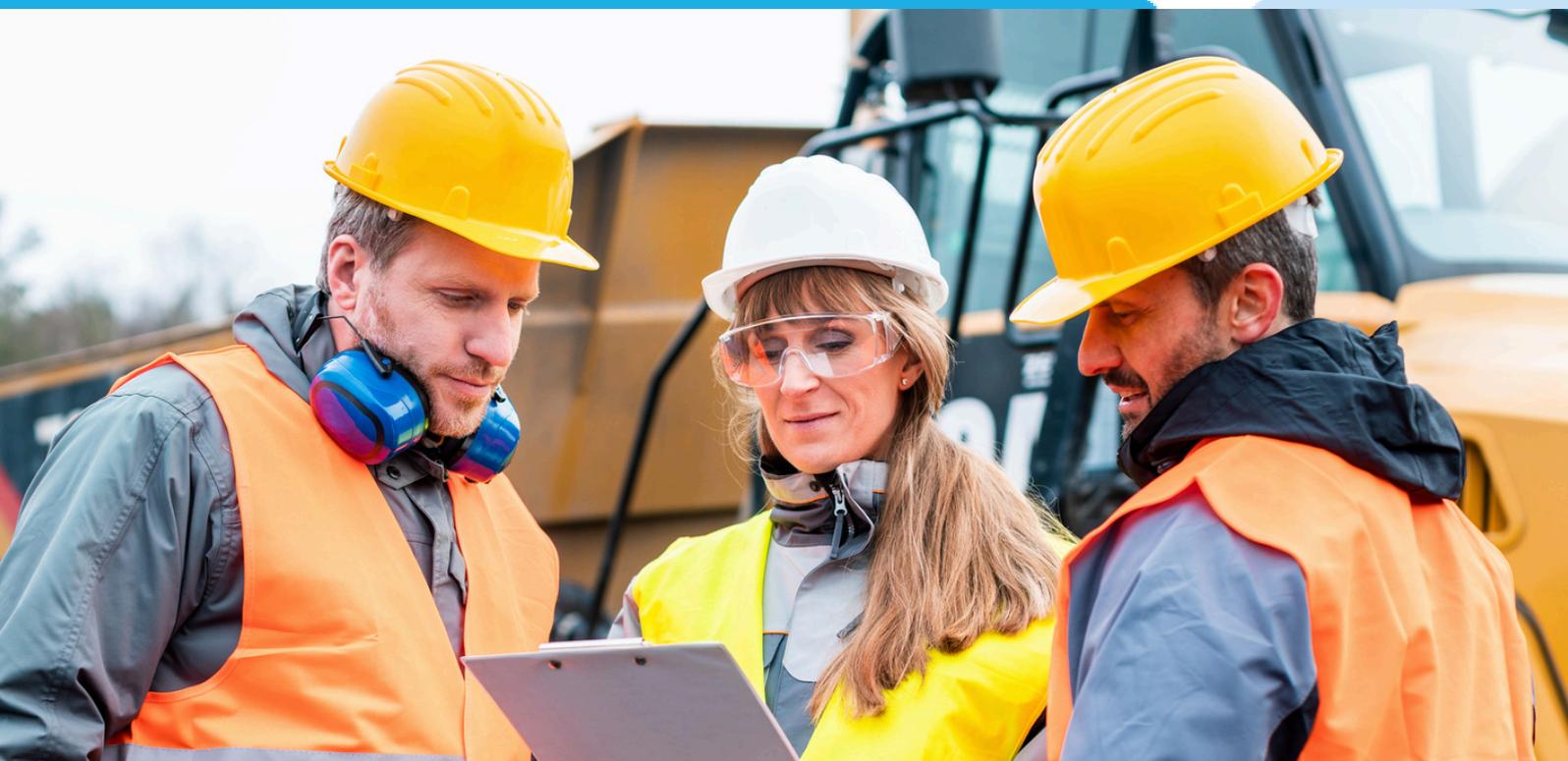


# Employment and Cancer



## Employment and Cancer: Navigating work during and after cancer

For many people, work is more than just a job – it provides purpose, routine, social connection, financial independence, and a sense of identity. When you're diagnosed with cancer, it's natural to feel uncertain about how this might affect your career, your role, or your ability to continue working during treatment.

### Early conversations can make a difference.

It's important to speak with your medical team early about how your treatment might impact your ability to work. These discussions can help you understand what to expect and prepare you for any conversations you may choose to have with your employer. Knowing your potential limitations – or your capacity – can empower you to make informed decisions about your job.



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## Your rights in the workplace

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In Australia, it is illegal for employers to discriminate against you because of a cancer diagnosis.

This includes:

- Unfair dismissal
- Demotion
- Adverse treatment
- Refusal to make reasonable adjustments or offer flexible work arrangements

Telling your employer is a personal decision. Take the time you need to process and decide what's right for you. If you do choose to disclose your diagnosis, your employer is legally required to keep this information confidential unless you consent otherwise.

## Coping with Change

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Cancer can bring emotional challenges beyond the physical. You might grieve changes to your role, feel a loss of identity, or worry about being excluded at work. These feelings are normal and valid – and addressing them early can prevent added stress or anxiety.



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## Deciding what and when to share

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Each person has a different relationship with their employer and coworkers. You may feel comfortable sharing your diagnosis openly – or prefer to keep it private.

However, if your job is physically or mentally demanding, or if your energy levels change, it may become necessary to disclose your situation.

Sharing your diagnosis can also help build a supportive network at your workplace. If you're unsure how much to share, consider starting with a small amount of information, when you feel comfortable.

## Planning ahead: Managing work and treatment

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Depending on your treatment plan, you might need to consider:

- Taking sick leave
- Reducing your hours
- Requesting flexible work arrangements
- Taking extended leave
- Planning a return to work or, in some cases, considering retirement

Having these conversations early with your employer can help reduce stress and uncertainty, giving you more control over your situation.



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## General tips for talking with your employer

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### 1. Understand your needs

Speak with your treating doctor to learn how treatment may affect your work.

### 2. Make a plan

Outline the topics you want to discuss with your employer. Remember, this can be a series of conversations – not just one.

### 3. Know your options

Think about whether you'll continue working, need adjustments, take extended leave, or plan a return to work.

### 4. Practice the conversation

Role-play with someone you trust, to gain confidence.

### 5. Choose the right setting

Find a quiet time and place for the discussion.

### 6. Bring support

A trusted friend or support person can attend the meeting with you.

### 7. Keep records

Take notes during meetings or ask to record the conversation (with consent).

### 8. Know your rights

Seek guidance from Australian organisations that specialise in workplace rights and cancer support.

### 9. Reach out for help

Talk to your medical team, GP, nurses, counsellors or social workers for advice or referrals.

### 10. Use workplace resources

Some employers offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) to support you through health challenges.



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## Staying connected to what matters

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While cancer may temporarily shift your priorities, work can still be a source of stability and strength. Beyond financial security, employment can provide:

- Social connection
- A sense of identity
- Skill development and learning
- Routine and structure
- Creative and meaningful experiences
- A sense of accomplishment

These aspects can be especially valuable during a time of vulnerability and change.



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