

# Better Workplaces for People with Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis in Canada

In recognition of World Psoriasis Day on October 29 2022, the Canadian Psoriasis Network, the Canadian Association of Psoriasis Patients and Unmasking Psoriasis propose changes to federal benefit programs to improve the lives of people in Canada with psoriatic disease.

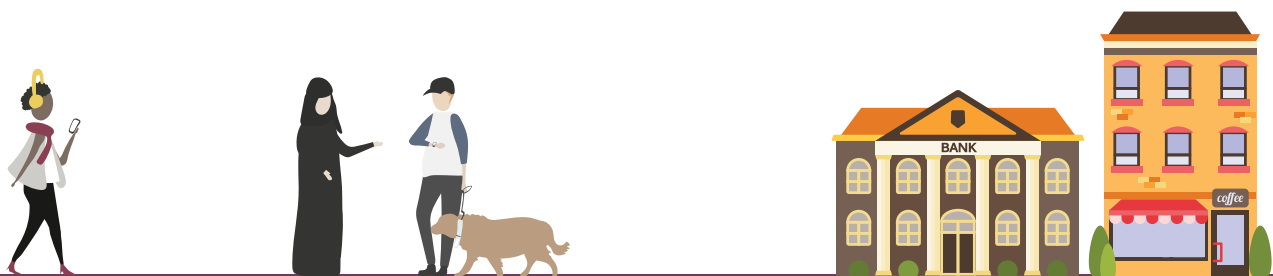
## Context

- Psoriasis is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that causes itchiness, pain, and discomfort. It is not contagious.
- Approximately 30% of people with psoriasis live with psoriatic arthritis (PsA), a chronic, autoimmune form of arthritis that causes joint inflammation, pain, and stiffness in the joints and can cause irreversible joint damage.
- People also often live with comorbidities, including depression, anxiety, diabetes, cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, causing further stigma and discrimination. These conditions are increasingly being known as psoriatic disease – recognizing the holistic impact of these conditions.

## Challenges with employment and income

- Often people with psoriatic disease are in their prime working years. They experience many challenges that can cause disability and prevent them from participating fully in social and economic life, including in the workplace.
- The episodic nature of the disease means that workplace and financial supports are needed.
- Psoriatic disease is episodic (with periods of “flares”) and progressive, often worsening over time.
- Our *Working It Out* report shone a light on the workplace experience of Canadians with psoriatic disease. More than half of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that psoriatic disease had a negative impact on them at work:
  - They worried about how the condition will affect their ability to stay employed.
  - They may experience ongoing threats to their financial security because of medication costs and the diseases’ impact on their ability to work.
  - The pandemic made this worse: 1 in 4 people said they worried about their finances and keeping their job or their business operating.

**Better programs can improve psoriatic disease patients’ ability to get and stay employed, and reduce disability.**



## Key Area 1: Provide financial security through income support programs, sickness benefits, and employment insurance programs

- Change the criteria for the Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefit (CPP DB) and Disability Tax Credit (DTC) to recognize episodic disability and ensure it is defined in a way that relates to the challenges, seriousness, and impacts of living with psoriatic disease
  - The current criteria for CPP DB and DTC make it difficult for people with psoriatic disease to identify how their restrictions and limitations relate to program eligibility criteria. These programs only recognize a permanent disability, not an episodic disability that may fluctuate and include periods of health followed by significant periods of disability.
- Establish national standards for sick leave and job protection
  - Employment supports like paid sick leave are essential for people with psoriatic disease to have the time and support to address their health situation.
  - Although we recognize that improvements have been made to the *Canada Labour Code* to provide for three days of sick leave and up to ten days of sick leave in a year, this needs to be available to everyone in Canada.
- Create a single, streamlined application process for income support and other disability support programs
  - There are a wide variety of programs available to people with psoriatic disease and disabilities, however it can be challenging to navigate and apply to these programs.

## Key Area 2: Reimburse additional costs such as prescription drugs and equipment

- Provide a minimum disability benefit that reflects the costs of living with a disability and the cost of prescription drugs & assistive devices
  - A new disability benefit that provides direct financial support is needed instead of the current suite of specialized tax credits and deductions, which evidence suggests provide less benefit to people with low incomes.

## Key Area 3: Improve workforce participation by supporting employers and workers

- Provide early and direct support to keep people with psoriatic disease and disabilities able to work
  - Many people accessing disability programs often worry about losing the minimal amount of financial security offered by the program. We propose to shift the paradigm to focus on early support and intervention to keep people with psoriatic disease and disabilities at work.
- Provide direct support to businesses that support their efforts to recruit and retain people with psoriatic disease and disabilities
  - There are a range of excellent resources to support businesses and employers in recruiting and retaining people with psoriatic disease and disabilities, such as the *Working It Out* Accommodation Tools, Canadian Association of Supported Employment and Hire for Talent. However, it can be challenging for employers to find this information when needed.