

Chapter 28

Saskatchewan Health Authority—Minimizing Employee Absenteeism

1.0 MAIN POINTS

Excessive employee absenteeism prevents the Saskatchewan Health Authority from delivering cost-effective healthcare services.

Sick leave accounts for the bulk of the Authority's employee absenteeism. In 2018-19, the Authority experienced actual sick time per employee of about 82 hours (10.25 sick days) on a province-wide basis.

Since the 2017 audit, the Authority was transitioning to its provincial structure and determining its resourcing needs for its employee attendance support program. In 2020-21, the Authority planned to implement a new electronic case management system to better support attendance management.

By November 2019, the Authority had implemented checklists for managers in Kindersley and surrounding area to use in meetings with employees who have excessive absenteeism. The Authority still needed to:

- Identify the role human resources should play in addressing employee absenteeism
- Consistently document discussions and actions with employees who have excessive absenteeism
- Analyze significant causes of employee absenteeism, and report how it is addressing those causes

Effectively managing absenteeism contributes to quality service delivery to the public, minimizes costs, and supports the well-being of employees.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes our first follow-up of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2017.

Our *2017 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 25, concluded that for the year ended June 30, 2017, other than for the five recommendations made, the Authority had effective processes to minimize employee absenteeism in Kindersley and surrounding area.¹

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Authority's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Authority's management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

¹ Our reports are available at auditor.sk.ca/publications/public-reports.



To complete this audit we focused on actions taken to address employee absenteeism in healthcare facilities in Kindersley and surrounding area. We met with Authority management and staff who support managers in this area, discussed progress to date, and sampled files. We also reviewed the Authority's strategies to address absenteeism and reports provided to the Authority's Board of Directors.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at November 30, 2019, and the Authority's actions up to that date.

3.1 Reassessment of Human Resources Role Ongoing

We recommended the Saskatchewan Health Authority reassess the role of human resources in promoting employee attendance to enable more timely resolution of issues causing employee absenteeism. (2017 Report – Volume 2, p. 187, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 26, 2019)

Status—Partially Implemented

The Authority is in the early stages of expanding the role of human resources staff in promoting employee attendance.

Since the 2017 audit, the Authority has been determining its resourcing needs for its employee attendance support program. The Authority hired a new Director of Accommodations and Attendance Support in October 2018.

At November 2019, the Authority also continued to employ one Ability Management Coordinator (the same number as at the time of our original audit) who supports managers with employee absenteeism issues in healthcare facilities in Kindersley and surrounding area. When the Coordinator took a leave of absence in 2018, the Coordinator's duties were not completed for a portion of the leave.

The Coordinator primarily takes a coordination and support role. The Coordinator continues to provide monthly reports to managers on employees whose sick time exceeded the average. The Coordinator manually generates the list of employees exceeding the established sick leave threshold, which is cumbersome and time-consuming.

Authority management indicated it planned to implement a new electronic case management system in 2020-21 that would generate better reports to promote improved monitoring of employee absenteeism, and reduce the administrative effort required by coordinators.

The Coordinator also monitors that attendance management meetings occur with employees who have excessive absenteeism.

We found the Coordinator has limited capacity to provide timely support to all managers (e.g., join attendance support meetings and play a larger role in case management), given the large number of employees with excessive absenteeism. At October 31, 2019, approximately 480 employees (out of about 1900 employees in Kindersley and surrounding area) exceeded the sick leave target of 64 hours per full-time equivalent (FTE).

The Authority has a sick leave target of 64 hours per FTE, which has remained the same since 2015. This target determines the number of employees with excessive absenteeism. Authority management indicated it would be relooking at the sick leave target to better align with other western Canadian healthcare organizations. The Authority found other western Canadian healthcare organization averaged in 2017-18 paid sick leave of 86.9 hours per FTE.

Involving human resources personnel is a way to reduce the workload for managers responsible for managing staff attendance. Human resources personnel can provide more timely absenteeism management particularly when a large number of employees have excessive absenteeism. However, the capacity of human resources personnel must be reasonable to provide necessary support. The key is for the Authority to find an approach to improve employee attendance at work because excessive employee absenteeism is costly.

3.2 Standard Checklists Developed for Employee Meetings

We recommended the Saskatchewan Health Authority implement standard detailed checklists to aid in conducting and documenting meetings with employees who have excessive absenteeism. (2017 Report – Volume 2, p. 188, Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 26, 2019)

Status—Implemented

The Authority developed standard detailed checklists to aid managers in Kindersley and surrounding area in conducting meetings with employees with excessive absenteeism. The Authority is considering expanding the use of these (or similar) checklists across the entire Authority.

Starting February 2018, the Authority established three checklists to assist facility managers in Kindersley and surrounding area during meetings with employees who have excessive absenteeism. One checklist guides managers during meetings when only the manager and employee are present, while the other two checklists are for use during meetings with staff, union representatives, and management. At the end of the meeting, both the manager and employee are to sign and date the document showing the meeting occurred.

We found the checklists clearly outline discussion items such as, issues leading to the absence and resources available to the individual (e.g., the Employee Family Assistance Program). The checklists also provide the option to establish an action plan, as well as a target date for completion of the action plan. We found the checklists provide sufficient detail to aid managers in conducting meetings with employees.



Having documentation (e.g., checklists) provides the basis of justification for future actions, including suspensions and terminations (if warranted), and facilitates supervision.

3.3 Checklists Not Used for Employee Meetings

We recommended the Saskatchewan Health Authority monitor that those responsible for employee attendance management document discussions and actions with employees who have excessive absenteeism. (2017 Report – Volume 2, p. 188, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 26, 2019)

Status—Partially Implemented

Managers in healthcare facilities in Kindersley and surrounding area are not consistently documenting meetings with employees who have excessive absenteeism.

We note the Ability Management Coordinator for Kindersley and surrounding area is responsible for monitoring whether managers hold meetings with employees who have excessive absenteeism, but has a large workload given the large number of staff in the area exceeding the sick leave target of 64 hours per FTE. The Coordinator is responsible for preparing excessive employee absenteeism reports, distributing the reports to managers, and monitoring the results of the meetings (i.e., whether meeting checklists and action plans are utilized). We found the Coordinator maintained a tracking sheet for monitoring actions taken by managers.

For each of the seven employees in the Kindersley and surrounding area with excessive absenteeism tested, the related manager did not complete a meeting checklist (or alternate form of documentation) to document discussions with or actions taken to address the absence. The Coordinator indicated certain of these employees did not have a completed checklist or discussion documentation because a meeting did not occur. The Coordinator also noted the Authority did not always have such a manager in place.

Without proper records, managers cannot show if and how they were addressing the reasons for identified absences of employees with excessive absenteeism. The new electronic case management system should promote more efficient monitoring of employees with excessive absenteeism and actions taken. Monitoring whether supervisory managers take appropriate and timely steps to address excessive employee absenteeism can help determine if they have adequate support in their supervisory role. It can also assist in understanding and addressing the causes for employee absenteeism.

3.4 Better Absenteeism Analysis and Reporting Required

We recommended the Saskatchewan Health Authority analyze significant causes of its employees' absenteeism and implement targeted strategies to address them. (2017 Report – Volume 2, p. 190, Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 26, 2019)

Status—Not Implemented

We recommended the Saskatchewan Health Authority give the Board periodic reports on the progress of attendance management strategies in reducing employee absenteeism and related costs. (2017 Report – Volume 2, p. 190, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 26, 2019)

Status—Not Implemented

Analysis and reporting on employee absenteeism remains virtually unchanged since our original 2017 audit.

The Authority continues to assess and work to address sick time per FTE. At March 31, 2019, the Authority's average sick time hours per FTE was approximately 82 hours per FTE (84 hours per FTE at time of original 2017 audit). As noted in **Section 3.1**, the Authority continues to use an outdated sick leave target of 64 hours per FTE.

The manual system in place does not collect sufficient data to complete adequate analysis. The Authority has not yet gathered more information or performed analysis to enable periodic reports of its actions and progress on addressing the causes of employee absenteeism. In 2020-21, the Authority expects to implement a new electronic case management system to better support attendance management (e.g., improved tracking of those with excessive absenteeism and actions taken to address them, and better reporting to identify where further work is needed).

A Board report provided in August 2019 indicated the Authority experienced an increase in sick time usage compared to the prior year. It did not contain analysis or details.

Other Board reports reviewed did not include reasons for not meeting the sick leave target or progress of any attendance management strategies.

Collecting necessary data and analyzing causes of absences would assist in the development of strategies to reduce employee absenteeism. Reporting of key causes and strategies would help the Board understand whether the Authority is effectively reducing employee absenteeism, and whether changes are necessary. Excessive absenteeism increases costs to replace workers (e.g., overtime pay for other employees) and administrative costs of managing absenteeism.