

Chapter 25

Saskatchewan Health Authority—Minimizing Employee Absenteeism in Kindersley and Area

1.0 MAIN POINTS

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

In 2024–25, the Authority experienced actual sick time per employee of about 101.2 hours (12.7 sick days) on a province-wide basis, as compared to 82 hours (10.25 sick days) in 2018–19—a 23% increase in sick time per employee.

By April 2025, the Authority continues to work on the three outstanding recommendations we first made in 2017 about minimizing employee absenteeism in Kindersley and surrounding areas.

While the Authority approved an Attendance Support Program and developed attendance reports to help managers work with employees with excessive absenteeism, the Authority has yet to monitor the actions taken by managers. The Authority expects to work on configuring an IT ticketing system in 2026 to help managers monitor and address employees with excessive absenteeism (i.e., sick hours greater than 10% of their scheduled hours).

The Authority is still unable to complete meaningful analysis on absenteeism trends and patterns due to data limitations. The Authority provides employees with resources, like informational packages, that outline support for reasons employees cited for absenteeism (e.g., physical health, mental health, chronic disease). The Authority has not evaluated whether the resources successfully reduce absenteeism or whether it requires additional targeted strategies.

Effective management of absenteeism enhances service delivery, reduces operational costs, and promotes employee wellbeing.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Under *The Provincial Health Authority Act*, the Saskatchewan Health Authority is responsible for the planning, organization, delivery, and evaluation of health services it provides. Employee absenteeism directly affects the delivery of health services.

Managing employee absenteeism is a key aspect to controlling the costs of delivering healthcare in Saskatchewan and supports employee wellbeing.



2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

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

We concluded, for the 12-month period ended June 30, 2017, the Saskatchewan Health Authority had effective processes for minimizing employee absenteeism in Kindersley and surrounding areas except for the areas in our five recommendations.¹ By August 2023, the Authority implemented two of the five recommendations.²

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. Authority management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our follow-up audit, we discussed actions taken with management and examined key documents (e.g., policies and procedures, reports provided to the Authority's Board of Directors, training courses) relevant to minimizing employee absenteeism. In addition, we tested a sample of employees with excessive absenteeism in Kindersley and surrounding areas.

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 April 30, 2025, and the Saskatchewan Health Authority's actions up to that date.

3.1 Employees with Excessive Absenteeism Still Not Monitored

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

The Saskatchewan Health Authority approved an Attendance Support Program in September 2025 and developed reports to help managers work with employees with excessive absenteeism, but the Authority has yet to monitor the actions taken by managers.

¹ 2017 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 25, pp. 177–191.

² 2020 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 28, pp. 263–267 and 2023 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 24, pp. 215–219.

In August 2023, the Authority established a new threshold (i.e., sick hours exceeding 10% of scheduled hours, which typically equals around two sick days per month for a full-time employee) for managers to identify and monitor employees with excessive absenteeism.³ Between April 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025, we found the Authority had 430 out of 1,711 employees (25.1%) in Kindersley and surrounding areas with sick leave exceeding the target threshold. Sick leave for these employees ranged from 64 to 554 hours.

We found the Authority provides managers with ad hoc reports (i.e., attendance reports, calendars) to monitor employees with excessive absenteeism. It expects managers to meet with employees with excessive absenteeism and document their discussions in a checklist. The checklist outlines discussion items such as issues leading to an absence (e.g., workload, physical health, mental health), resources available to the employee (e.g., Employee Family Assistance Program), and action plans with targeted completion dates.

We tested five employees' records with excessive absenteeism and found no evidence of managers monitoring or documenting discussions about excessive absenteeism. For example, one employee had 105 hours of sick leave (16% of their scheduled hours) during 2024–25, but their manager did not use the checklist or document any discussions with the employee.

The Authority's new Attendance Support Program will replace its existing attendance policies in 2026. We found the new Program appropriately includes tools for managers to identify a potential attendance concern, address absenteeism, and offer supports, along with setting out new documentation requirements for progressing employees with excessive absenteeism through the Program.

Additionally, the Authority indicated it is working toward implementing a process in 2026 for an IT ticketing system to help managers track and document actions for addressing employees with excessive absenteeism. It expects managers will document details of meetings held with employees directly in the system.

Without proper records, managers cannot demonstrate how or whether they determine the reasons for identified absences of employees with excessive absenteeism. Monitoring whether managers take appropriate and timely steps to address excessive absenteeism can help determine whether they have adequate support in their supervisory role. It can also assist in understanding significant causes for employee absenteeism.

3.2 Sufficient Analysis and Reporting of Absenteeism Needed

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—Partially Implemented

³ Prior to August 2023, the Saskatchewan Health Authority's previous threshold for monitoring employees with excessive sick time was 64 hours of sick time per year, regardless of hours scheduled.



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—Partially Implemented

The Saskatchewan Health Authority manually collects data on causes for employee absenteeism but does not analyze trends or patterns to report to the Board. The Authority has also not evaluated current strategies or implemented new targeted strategies to address significant causes of employee absenteeism.

The Authority manually collects data on reasons for employee absenteeism when managers meet with employees with excessive absenteeism. However, as noted in **Section 3.1**, these meetings are not always held and therefore, absenteeism data collected by the Authority may not be sufficiently complete. Authority management uses this data to produce annual summary reports about the primary causes for absenteeism for the Board's Human Resources and Governance Committee.

As shown in **Figure 1**, physical health, mental health, and chronic disease are the top reasons cited for absenteeism in the province in 2024. In the rural areas, which includes Kindersley and surrounding areas, employees cited physical health as the most common reason for absenteeism (54%).⁴

Figure 1—Common Reasons for Employee Absenteeism in 2024

Reason	Rural	Regina	Saskatoon	North	Total
Physical health	22	19	21	18	80
Mental health	6	15	16	20	57
Chronic disease	4	3	5	4	16
Family	3	6	6	5	20
Stress	1	0	7	1	9
Migraine	0	0	3	1	4
Addiction	3	1	0	2	6
Domestic Violence	2	0	0	0	2
Bereavement	0	0	1	3	4
Total	41	44	59	54	198

Source: Adapted from information provided by the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Since 2023, the Authority continues to offer educational resources and information packages to employees (e.g., mental health supports, healthy eating) but has not monitored whether these resources successfully reduce employee absenteeism, or whether it requires additional targeted strategies (e.g., on site fitness classes).

⁴ 54% calculated as 22 instances of physical health related reasons divided by 41 total instances.

We assessed the reports provided to the Board's Human Resources and Governance Committee in September 2023 and 2024. We found the reports contained details about the main causes of absenteeism (**Figure 1**) but did not discuss trends, patterns, or targets. Nor did the reports convey strategies the Authority is undertaking to reduce employee absenteeism.

As the Authority manually collects absenteeism information, it cannot efficiently gather absenteeism information by facility, location, or groups. The Authority indicated it is working to configure an IT ticketing system to collect more detailed information beginning in 2026. Lack of useful data limits the Authority's ability to develop targeted strategies to reduce employee absenteeism and minimize the related costs.

Collecting and analyzing necessary data on causes of absenteeism would assist in developing and evaluating attendance management strategies to reduce excessive employee absenteeism. Reporting that includes reliable data assessing key causes and strategies would help the Board understand whether the Authority is effectively reducing employee absenteeism, and whether additional changes and strategies are necessary. Excessive absenteeism increases costs, such as replacing workers (e.g., overtime pay for other employees) and administrative costs of managing absenteeism.⁵

⁵ In 2024–25, the Saskatchewan Health Authority spent \$234 million province-wide on employee overtime, including \$74 million in Kindersley and surrounding areas.

