

NATIONAL DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE ON LONG COVID AS AN EPISODIC DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

Long COVID is an episodically disabling condition and as more people are returning to workplaces, **Realize** hosted a National Deliberative Dialogue to highlight the impact that Long COVID has on people and their work. We also wanted to explore the effects of Long COVID on workplaces, accommodation, and employers.

This was a hybrid event held on September 23, 2022.

WHAT WE LEARNED

- Long COVID is multidimensional and episodic – symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath, cognitive dysfunction, muscle aches can all have an impact on everyday function
- 70% of people living with Long COVID have reduced work hours or are not working
- Language matters! Using the term “brain fog” under-represents its severity and the impairment caused by cognitive dysfunction
- No single accommodation fits all scenarios
- Accommodation may look like:
 - Employee vaccination & treatment plans
 - Duties revised to reduce respiratory impact
 - Working from home
- Modified work tasks may not return to pre-COVID levels
- Stigma and mistrust of employees are barriers to disclosure and effective accommodation
- COVID and thusly Long COVID, has disproportionately impacted people living with disabilities

WHAT WE HEARD

"A lot of people believe that COVID has gone away and is no longer a problem and it is 'business as usual'. There is a parallel belief that Long COVID has also gone away. This false belief amplifies the need for education & awareness raising of Long COVID, as a real condition and one that can be episodically disabling."

"We must value the work of people with diverse abilities. We can do this by remembering:

- Small things can make a difference
- Integrate accommodation from the top-down
- Reduce barriers to accommodation
- Revisit and reflect on organizational culture"

"Return to work is facilitated through conversations between everyone involved that focus on abilities, collaboration, with flexible and creative approaches."

"There should be greater inclusion of people with living experience of Long COVID as we build new policies & programs."

"We must be empathetic in our approaches, accommodations, and responses when working with people experiencing Long COVID."

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

To continue the work of acknowledging Long COVID as an episodically disabling condition, we identified the following as next steps:

- Develop resources for, and by, people living with Long COVID that support their success
- Create opportunities to determine the workplace accommodations that demonstrate positive impact
- Increase education about Long COVID across sectors
- Share knowledge of Long COVID as an episodic disability widely

Realize thanks everyone who participated in the National Deliberative Dialogue on Long COVID as an Episodic Disability and Employment.

We are especially grateful to those living with Long COVID who contributed to this important event.