

University of Alberta Attendance Management Program for Support Staff

Program Philosophy

In order for the University of Alberta (“the University”) to meet the needs of its community members and provide excellent service we depend upon the contribution of all of our employees. Regular employee attendance is an essential part of our success. The University and the Non-Academic Staff Association (“the Union”) jointly acknowledge their commitment to promoting wellness. Both parties recognize the value of employees maintaining their overall wellness and ensuring that they can attend work on a regular basis.

The University supports staff members by providing casual and general illness benefits, access to a wide range of resources and services to support recovery and return to health, and processes to accommodate the ill or injured in a timely, safe and sustainable return-to-work program.

A staff member’s inability to perform duties because of injury, illness, special leaves, or tardiness has a negative effect in the workplace: lost productivity, decreased quality of service, delays, increased workload for other staff, and possible replacement costs. The overall cost of absenteeism is high.

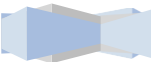
What is Attendance Management

Regular and consistent attendance on the job is a job requirement. This attendance requirement should be clearly stated by the supervisor/manager and understood by all staff. Employees are expected to attend work every day. The purpose of the Attendance Management Program is not to question the validity of the absences – this is addressed through the provision of medical evidence upon request. However, the process does bring to the staff member’s attention the fact that his/her absences are causing difficulties in the workplace.

The process is also intended to provide the staff member with support in an attempt to deal with the medical issues that may be preventing them from fulfilling the expectation of attending work on a regular and consistent basis. This Attendance Management Program should not be accessed in order to avoid dealing with performance issues that are not related to attendance. Supervisors/managers are encouraged to ask for assistance in determining the most appropriate approach where there is a combination of work related issues that cause concern.

Program Objectives

This Attendance Management Program provides the supervisor/manager and staff member with guidelines for most situations. It assists the supervisor/manager with the identification of strategies for: communicating, coaching, clarifying expectations, reviewing attendance, and addressing



issues and problems which may be affecting the staff member's ability to fulfill the expectation to attend work on a regular and consistent basis.

It assists staff by providing support and guidance to enable them to attend work as required and/or return to work as soon as possible after illness or injury.

These guidelines identify the supports available and the roles of administration and staff in taking a proactive and consultative approach to the management of attendance.

This Attendance Management Program is not the only option available to managers when dealing with attendance issues, but it is the recommended process for dealing with almost all absenteeism cases, at least initially. The process is non-disciplinary, and it provides support to managers for the vast majority of attendance issues. Occasionally, however, attendance problems arise from actions which merit discipline. **The role of the Human Resources Partner (HRP) assigned to your unit is to provide the necessary assistance and notify the Union prior to any disciplinary action being taken.**

Types of Absences

Absences that may require some type of employer intervention are identified under two distinct categories: non-culpable and culpable. It is essential that these two types of absence are differentiated, recorded separately, and resolved differently.

Non-Culpable Absenteeism

Situations in which the employee is usually absent due to disability, injury, illness or another legitimate health reason, which can be supported by medical documentation. It includes

- Sick leave (paid or unpaid), short or long term leave or other absences attributable to personal illness or injury
- Absences from work to deal with medically related family problems

The underlying premise in this process is that most absenteeism is the result of a staff members' **innocent** inability to attend work on a regular basis. Because it is **innocent absenteeism**, dealing with it should be done in a supportive and non-disciplinary manner. It addresses non-culpable behaviour which is beyond the complete control of the staff member, due to illness, injury or disability.

Employees do have an obligation to attend work on a regular basis, but the University has a corresponding obligation to provide sick leave as per the NASA/BOG Collective Agreement and to accommodate the disabled. In order to effectively deal with **innocent absenteeism**, Homewood Health (HHI) ensures that medical evidence supports the need for absence. HHI provides Organizational Development, Equity and Health (ODEH) with the restrictions and limitations that need to be considered in an accommodation. If ongoing absenteeism, due to illness or disability is the prognosis, a permanent accommodation may be required. In such cases, dealing with these situations through this process may not be appropriate.



Innocent absenteeism, if excessive, could result in the termination of the employment contract and a non-culpable blameless discharge.

Culpable Absenteeism

These are unauthorized absences which are within the employee's control and may warrant a disciplinary response. The following are situations of culpable absence:

- Failure to report to work or follow the established call in procedures
- Sick leave fraud
- Falsification of time records
- Excessive lateness
- Failure to provide medical documentation when required

This attendance management program does not address culpable absenteeism. If at any time before or during the attendance management program the Supervisor suspects that the attendance issues are culpable they will need to refer the situation to the appropriate HRP. This type of behaviour will be dealt with through progressive discipline that may ultimately culminate in termination for cause. It is important to deal with the two concepts separately.

Managing Absenteeism

Tracking and Recording absences

Identifying an absenteeism problem begins with proper monitoring of the attendance of all employees in a consistent manner. Promoting and maintaining good attendance and assisting employees to overcome attendance difficulties includes early identification of any attendance problems. It is essential that the supervisor maintain up-to-date records of employee absences and ensure that the information is accurate, current and consistent.

Promoting Regular Attendance at Work

Supervisors/managers are encouraged to introduce the Attendance Management Program to all staff at a staff meeting, prior to talking to individuals about attendance. An open discussion is the key to successful attendance management and promoting regular attendance. The supervisor should identify two things: the average rate of absenteeism for the University and the average rate of absenteeism for the unit. Absenteeism statistics are available through HR Operational Reports. Staff can identify trends, issues, and concerns which may be leading to illness or injury (for example air quality, work place stress). The supervisor should then consult with their HRP and/or ODEH for strategies to reduce overall absenteeism. The supervisor should take a proactive approach to attendance management by examining the areas of safety training, ergonomics, working conditions and schedules, and workplace health promotion/wellness programs, and seek assistance where required. Supervisors/managers can also take advantage of this opportunity to outline the preventive or proactive services available to staff members through HHI/ODEH.

Stage 1- U of A Attendance Management Program

The success of this program depends upon the consistent application of the following administrative steps. The program should be administered with flexibility and discretion in order to allow the supervisor/manager to effectively deal with the numerous types of attendance issues that may arise.

Reviewing of Absences

When reviewing an employee's absences ensure that only the following are recorded as absences:

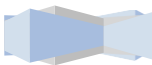
- Sick leave (paid or unpaid), short or long term leave or other absences attributable to personal illness or injury
- Compassionate leave as defined in clause 17.03 (c) Part A, clause 10.03(c) Part B, clause 14.03 (c) Part C of the NASA/BOG Collective Agreement This does not include:
 - Approved leaves- without pay
 - Disciplinary suspensions
 - Bereavement leave
 - Jury duty
 - Authorized vacation, or other authorized leaves with pay
 - Culpable absences
 - Union leave
 - WCB leave

Analysis of the Attendance Record

After collecting the appropriate data for analysis, compare the employee's total hours and frequency of non-culpable absenteeism to those of the department or University standards for a period of at least three (3) years. Should an individual exceed the department standard or display a discernible pattern of absenteeism, it would then be considered excessive and an individual meeting to review the information with the employee is required.

Initial Employee Meeting

The supervisor should reaffirm to the employee that the meeting is non-disciplinary in nature. The supervisor should review the attendance record with the employee and confirm the total number, duration and type of absences recorded. The supervisor and employee are to then engage in a discussion about attendance expectations and any mitigating circumstances surrounding the absences. It is important to explore other factors which may be impeding the employee from attending work on a regular basis. The supervisor should not request or solicit personal medical information from employees but can remind staff members they are able to access confidential services through EFAP or HHI if appropriate. Supervisors will not have access to confidential medical information, but are to utilize HHI if required to liaise between the employee, medical practitioners and themselves to gain an understanding of the attendance situation.



The employee and supervisor will discuss the expectation for regular attendance and the respective responsibilities and commitments. The employee will be informed that their attendance will be monitored over the course of the next three to six (3-6) months and that improvement is expected.

The supervisor will document the meeting and shall provide the employee a Stage 1 Meeting Recap which is a written copy summarizing the meeting points (please contact Human Resource Services for the template).

Stage 2- U of A Attendance Management Program

Reviewing of Absences

Three months after the Stage 1 meeting the Supervisor will review the employee's attendance since the Stage 1 Meeting. If improvement does occur, there should be positive feedback, and consideration for regressing the employee to an earlier stage in the program or removing them from the program.

If the employee's attendance has not been acceptable in the last three (3) months and continues to be above the department or University standard the supervisor will meet with the employee and discuss the employee's continued failure to meet attendance expectations. This step may not be appropriate if the supervisor is aware of a mitigating circumstance that resulted in one lengthy absence (e.g. recovery period following surgery).

Second Employee Meeting- Stage 2 Letter

Where a second meeting is appropriate, the supervisor should discuss the impact of lost time on the unit and co-workers, the importance of being at work, how much the employee is missed, and the relevance of his/her contributions. The supervisor should set attendance targets for the next three (3) months, confirm the staff member's understanding, and develop an agreed-upon action plan with a follow-up date. If a health condition is impacting an employee's ability to attend work the supervisor should offer support through EFAP or HHI by submitting an on-line notification (OLN) a referral to HHI for follow up. Finally, the results of the discussion should be documented; the employee should receive the Stage 2 Letter (please contact Human Resource Services for the template) which is copied to the HRP, the Manager and the Union.

Stage 3- U of A Attendance Management Program

Third Employee Meeting – Stage 3 Letter

If improvement does occur, there should be positive feedback, and consideration for regressing the employee to an earlier stage in the program or removing them from the program. However, if there is no improvement in attendance after Stage 2, a third meeting is required. This meeting will be conducted by the manager of the area.



Please contact an HRP when taking this action and they will assist you in conducting the meeting and drafting the letter. In addition the HRP will advise the Union.

The HRP and Union will be in attendance.

Submit an on-line notification (OLN) a referral to HHI for follow up with the employee. This should occur, even if no major health issues have been identified. The staff member should be given a letter summarizing the meeting, clarifying attendance expectations, and identifying a follow-up period and a list of available resources (please contact Human Resource Services for the template).

A copy of the letter will be sent to HHI, the HRP, the Supervisor and the Union. A copy of the letter will be placed on staff member's Personnel file. The supervisor should express confidence in the staff member's ability to improve his/her attendance.

Once the referral is made, HHI will then liaise with the staff member to obtain appropriate medical certification and work closely with the treating physician to assist the staff member. Where objective medical information indicates the University has an obligation to accommodate the disability of a staff member, duty of accommodation processes must be initiated and will include Organizational Development, Equity and Health (ODEH).

HHI Consultants are also responsible for maintaining regular contact with the supervisor/manager. A critical element of this process is that the staff member be given a reasonable opportunity to improve his/her attendance. Timelines for this will vary based on the individual's specific medical situation and the recommendations for supporting them in improving attendance. An appropriate timeframe could range from weeks to months, depending on the issues.

Stage 4- The Attendance Management Program

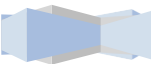
Fourth (4th) Employee Meeting – Stage 4 Letter

If improvement does occur, there should be positive feedback, and consideration for regressing the employee to an earlier stage in the program or removing them from the program. However, if there is no improvement in attendance after Stage 3, then the manager will conduct a fourth meeting.

Please contact an HRP when taking this action and they will assist you in conducting the meeting and drafting the letter. In addition the HRP will advise the Union.

The HRP and Union will be in attendance.

During the fourth meeting, the staff member will be provided with a fourth, non-disciplinary letter which does not question the validity of the absences (please contact Human Resource Services for the template).



It does, however, warn the staff member that continued absence from work may result in a **non-culpable discharge**. This letter shall be copied to the Dean/Director, the Union, and the Human Resources Partner (HRP), HHI and the Supervisor. The letter will be placed in the employee's personnel file.

The manager should establish another follow-up date. HHI should be copied to facilitate appropriate follow-up with the treating physician to determine the following.

- Is the staff member fit to attend work on a regular basis, with or without limitations?
- Given the past attendance record, what is the best possibility of improved regular attendance in the future?
- Is the staff member currently able to fulfill the work expectations?
- Steps that can be taken that can support the staff member in improving attendance.

Stage 5- U of A Attendance Management Program

Termination for Excessive Absenteeism – Stage 5 Termination Letter

Consult with your HRP

If there is a reasonable basis upon which to believe that the employee's attendance will improve to an acceptable level within the foreseeable future, the employee will repeat Stage 4. The employee will remain at Stage 4 until either it is determined that there is no longer a belief that the employee's attendance will improve or the employee's attendance does improve, and the employee begins moving backward through the program as described below in Program Details.

However, if the staff member continues to have excessive absences, consideration may be given to a termination for excessive absenteeism. The decision whether or not to terminate is made in consultation with the HRP, based on information from HHI.

The HRP and Union will be in attendance for this meeting.

This is a non-culpable discharge for innocent absenteeism, and does not call into question the validity of the absences.

This remains, at all times, different from culpable absenteeism which results in disciplinary action.



Program Details

At any stage in the above process the Supervisor, in consultation with the HRP, may exercise their discretion to extend the review period or to exclude from consideration specific absences if appropriate in the circumstances.

If an employee has shown significant and sustained improvement in their six to twelve (6-12) month attendance record they may move to the previous stage of the program. This process will continue until the employee has moved backwards through the stages until they exit the program. Employees will receive notification from management indicating their regression through the stages. Employees who exit the Attendance Management Program, through improved attendance or permanent medical accommodation will be issued a letter advising of their discontinuation in the program. An employee may re-enter the program if excessive absenteeism reoccurs.

The Supervisor, in consultation with the HRP, may at their discretion remove an employee from the program at any of the various stages (please contact Human Resource Services for the template).

If an employee has shown some improvement which does not merit removal from the program or moving backwards through the various stages, they may be held at the same stage pending further demonstrated improvement.

The attached letters and forms are suggested templates and may be altered or amended to better suit each individual situation.

The employee is encouraged at any stage of the Attendance Management Program to disclose to H H I that their excessive absenteeism is due to a medical condition that requires accommodation. The employee's absences other than those which are currently being medically accommodated may still be managed during an accommodation but with special consideration.

By employee written request, Attendance Management Program letters more than two years old will be cleared from the employee's Personnel File if no further Attendance Management Program letters have been submitted.



Appendix 1

Stakeholder Responsibilities

The responsibility for, and commitment to the University of Alberta Attendance Management Program, exists at all levels of the organization. Successful attendance management is dependent upon the commitment of all stakeholders. Outlined below are the key responsibilities of the various stakeholders who will impact the success of the process.

Employee:

- To attend work on time and regularly
- To attend to personal affairs and obligations outside of regular working hours.
- To facilitate early notification of absences(s) and to follow absence reporting procedures in accordance with the collective agreement and standard operating procedures.
- To provide medical documentation as required supporting the absence from work, the return to work and any request for accommodation.
- To maintain regular contact with the supervisor and/or manager during absence.

Management/ Supervisor:

- Foster a positive working environment.
- Acknowledge those employees with good attendance.
- Ensure that all employees are aware of the requirements and expectations of the attendance management program.
- Be well versed in the Attendance Management Program and how to manage work and non-work related illness and injury situations.
- To monitor absenteeism in their department and be held accountable for attendance levels within their department.
- Follow appropriate reporting and management guidelines for excessive absenteeism.
- To identify accommodation opportunities within the department. Work collaboratively with HHI and ODEH to identify and plan modified work options or accommodation.

Human Resources Partner (HRP)

- To provide advice and expertise to supervisors concerning matters related to attendance management.
- To assist supervisors in carrying out the various steps of the Attendance Management Program, and attend employee meetings when requested to do so.
- To assist management in determining the applicable standard of attendance.

Homewood Health (HHI)

- Liaise with the staff member to obtain appropriate medical documentation regarding the absence from work and work closely with the treating physician in assisting the staff member to attend work on a regular basis



- Maintain regular contact with the supervisor/department administrator and provide him/her with updates and information pertaining to any restrictions or limitations that may be preventing a staff member from attending work on a regular basis.
- Serve as a confidential custodian of employee medical information.

Organizational Development, Equity and Health (ODEH)

- Liaise with HHI to ensure that limitations and restrictions are documented, and are incorporated in a return to work plan.
- Support supervisors/managers in dealing with workplace factors that may present a barrier to return to work, introduce strategies and approaches to ensure a timely and sustained return to work, and if necessary, assistance in determining an appropriate message to be conveyed to other staff about absence(s).
- Implement and support work accommodation plans for employees at work and returning to work

