



**HGPI** Health and Global  
Policy Institute

Health and Global Policy Institute's (HGPI) Women's Health Project  
Discussion Points

**“Understanding Menopausal Women’s Health as a Social Issue”  
Roundtable Discussion**

April 2025

Health and Global Policy Institute

## Table of Contents

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I	Background to these Discussion Points.....	1
II	Executive Summary .....	2
III	Detailed summary of discussion points .....	4
	Perspective 1 Surveys .....	4
	Perspective 2 Education and awareness-raising.....	4
	Perspective 3 Environment .....	5
	Perspective 4 Occupational health .....	8
	Perspective 5 Communities and society .....	9
IV	Acknowledgement .....	10

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# I Background to these Discussion Points



In the past, policies for women's health in Japan were advanced under the premise, "Women can become pregnant and give birth, and they face different health concerns than men throughout the life cycle," and the aim of such policies was to achieve gender equality in society. Momentum for the health of women in the workplace and for women's health in general rose sharply in 2018, and since then, there has been rapid progress, especially in support for menstruation management, pregnancy, and childbirth. However, there is still room for progress in social recognition, understanding, and measures for menopause-related health concerns, which can cause serious issues for women from around age 45 to age 55.

In 2022, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) conducted its first survey on menopause, titled the ["Awareness Survey on Menopausal Symptoms and Disorders."](#) It found that 80% to 90% of citizens had no knowledge of menopause and that many respondents had never visited a medical institution to seek treatment for menopause. Not only do symptoms specific to menopause significantly reduce quality of life (QOL), over a three-year period, they forced approx. 460,000 women to leave the workforce. Those who do not leave the workforce still face difficulties talking about menopause in the workplace due to stigma or a lack of understanding toward age or gender. There have also been reports in which women received lower evaluations or faced other negative impacts because their performance fell while they endured their condition in silence. According to a 2024 estimate of total economic losses due to women-specific health concerns from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the total national economic losses due to the symptoms of menopause amount to approx. 1.9 trillion yen<sup>1</sup>. This is over half of all of society's economic losses due to women's health concerns, showing the great impact of this issue. While society's expectations for women's contributions in the workforce continue to grow, the ["Basic Policy on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women"](#) presented in June 2023 included a plan to increase the ratio of female executives in companies listed in the Tokyo Stock Exchange's Prime market to 30% or more. As the generation of executives with key roles in society and the workforce are also those who face menopause-related health concerns, this has become a problem that must not go overlooked.

Based on these circumstances, in FY2023, Health and Global Policy Institute (HGPI) gathered the voices of people living with menopause, hosted expert meetings with representatives of industry, government, academia, and civil society, and conducted a survey of innovative efforts in this area from Japan and overseas with the intent of strengthening measures for menopause. After identifying issues through these efforts, we compiled recommendations on necessary future measures in ["Promoting Menopausal Women's Health as a Social Issue for Multi-Stakeholders."](#)

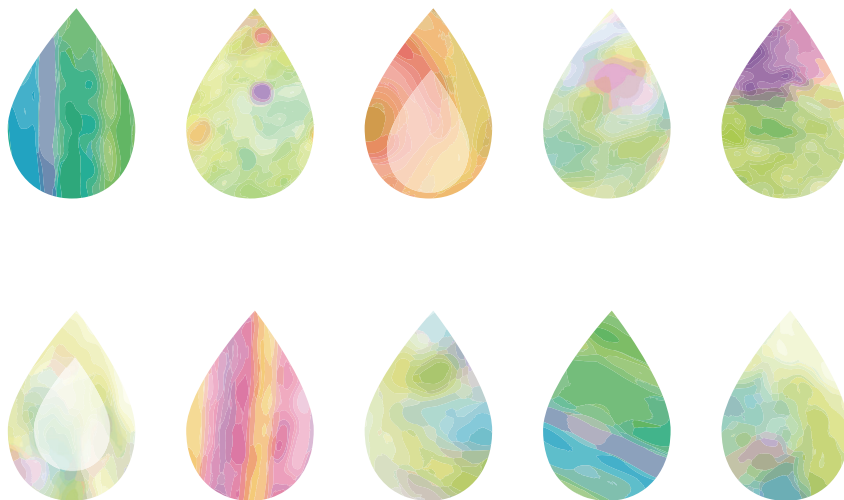
In November 2024, we hosted a roundtable discussion focusing on menopausal measures for working women which aimed to promote measures for menopause in the workplace and drive further progress in national and local policies. It brought together executive staff or managers from companies, government agencies, and medical institutions that have an awareness of issues related to measures for menopause or the promotion of women's health or that have already implemented measures in these areas. It also featured representatives of academia and experts in healthcare. This meeting was centered on the five necessary perspectives for promoting menopausal measures in the workplace crystallized through HGPI's 2023 activities, namely: (1) surveys; (2) education and awareness-raising; (3) the environment; (4) occupational health, and (5) communities and society. We also considered which proposals were both the most feasible and most likely to be adopted by employers. Issues and measures for each perspective are compiled below in "II. Executive Summary" and "III. Detailed summary of discussion points."

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<sup>1</sup> METI. "Estimation of Economic Losses Due to Women-Specific Health Concerns and the Need for Health and Productivity Management." Last retrieved on April 14, 2025.

## II Executive Summary

Advancing measures under five perspectives will be essential for addressing menopause-related issues in the workplace. They are (1) surveys to grasp current circumstances and to identify issues; (2) education and awareness-raising for people living with menopause, managers and executive staff, and all other employees; (3) creating workplace environments or atmospheres that facilitate measures for menopause and building systems for their advancement; (4) occupational health, which involves implementing an approach to health promotion within the framework of the Industrial Safety and Health Act; and (5) communities and society, which refers to the need for measures and understanding that extend beyond the workplace and achieve integration with local communities and society. While it is gradually becoming clearer which content should be included in measures for menopause, there are a number of lingering hurdles to their implementation due to the varying nature of circumstances at each employer in terms of size, industry, funds available for investment, personnel, and other factors. These factors have resulted in many issues that hinder efforts to achieve equity in measures for menopause. Discussions at this meeting were held with private sector representatives from companies of various sizes and from various industries and took into account the unique characteristics and differences of each organization. Below, we have compiled issues and potential solutions for the advancement of menopause measures centered on discussion points crystallized during that discussion. The following table “Table 1: Five necessary perspectives on menopause measures for employers and challenges and solutions for their advancement (Summary)” summarizes the key details, which are further explained in “III. Detailed summary of discussion points.”



**Table 1: Five necessary perspectives on menopause measures for employers and challenges and solutions for their advancement (Summary) Created by HGPI**

Created by HGPI

Five Necessary Perspectives for Better Menopause Response Among Employers	(1) Surveys	(2) Education and awareness-raising	(3) Environment	(4) Occupational health	(5) Communities and society
<b>Details of five perspectives</b> <b>To Do</b> Details of five perspectives <b>Background</b> Reasons this perspective needs attention	<b>To Do</b> Identify needs of affected parties, grasp real-world circumstances <b>Background</b> Understanding circumstances surrounding the needs and opinions of women in each workplace while taking industry characteristics and working practices into account is the first step when considering menopause measures.	<b>To Do</b> Provide all employees with high-quality educational opportunities and raise awareness <b>Background</b> Promoting menopause measures requires understanding from all employees.	<b>To Do</b> Build systems enabling affected parties to work sustainably; provide educational opportunities for all employees, including leaders <b>Background</b> Helping menopause measures take root, enabling affected parties to utilize systems with peace of mind, and discussing problems with other employees requires creating an environment for an organization culture of understanding and acceptance from surrounding parties.	<b>To Do</b> Obtain commitment to menopause in occupational health; establish systems (to provide recommendations for visits to health institutions, advice on life/employment, etc. through health checkups or consultations) <b>Background</b> Support provided by industrial physicians and nurses from a professional standpoint and collaboration/coordination with employers will be necessary for affected parties to be able to continue working in a manner that is true to themselves.	<b>To Do</b> Promote understanding throughout society; establish regional collaboration <b>Background</b> Menopause does not only impact women in the workplace; it also impacts their lives with their families and in their communities. Measures must not be restricted to workplaces, must include raising awareness and promoting policies in communities and throughout society, and must involve all generations.
<b>Challenges for promotion</b>	<b>Insufficient resources and large burdens</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities like creating new surveys, gathering voices from affected parties, and analyzing results create large burdens for employers</li> <li>Conducting surveys creates high hurdles, especially for SMEs</li> </ul>	<b>Insufficient resources and large burdens</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not easy for employers to develop educational materials/training programs that are of sufficient quality on their own</li> </ul>	<b>Hesitation among affected parties and those around them</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affected parties may feel hesitant to talk about menopause, and surrounding parties may not know how to best accommodate affected parties</li> </ul> <b>Lack of commitment from management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership and commitment from management are important for creating a suitable atmosphere, but obtaining understanding from executives/managers is difficult</li> </ul>	<b>Low priority</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given the history of occupational health, focus tends to be placed on ensuring safety through measures like preventing overwork or workplace accidents. Relatively low priority is given to health promotion including for women's health, so best practices and effective measures are not implemented in a uniform manner.</li> </ul> <b>Response capacity at SMEs is limited</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Industrial Safety and Health Act does not obligate companies of a certain size to have industrial physicians and nurses on staff, so they do not.</li> </ul>	<b>Lack of regional collaboration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When advancing health promotion measures in regions, depending on the disease in question, systems for regular collaboration among employers, local governments, and local medical institutions may be rare. Such systems are exceedingly rare in measures for menopause.</li> </ul>
<b>Problem-solving strategies</b>	<b>Address resource shortages and large burdens</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refer to survey findings from MHLW, academia, and other public organizations</li> <li>Utilize existing surveys and tools developed by other organizations to grasp current circumstances</li> <li>Utilize health checkup system to grasp current circumstances</li> </ul>	<b>Address resource shortages and large burdens</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refer to survey findings from MHLW, academia, and other public organizations</li> <li>Utilize existing surveys and tools developed by other organizations to grasp current circumstances</li> <li>Utilize health checkup system to grasp current circumstances</li> </ul>	<b>Relieve hesitation among affected parties and those around them</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educate/inform female executives/managers and define their roles as workplace consultants</li> <li>Promote diversity and inclusion through management leadership</li> <li>Introduce tools for workplace dialogues while keeping in mind the feelings of affected parties and hesitancy among surrounding parties</li> <li>Establish workplace environments that are comfortable for all employees, not only those experiencing menopause, and build easy-to-use systems</li> </ul> <b>Raise awareness among management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilize national government certification systems and similar systems</li> <li>Promote understanding that promoting health management (including for women's health) and establishing a comfortable working environment are linked to improving corporate brand value, attracting talent, and fostering corporate growth</li> </ul>	<b>Elevate priority, strengthen measures, and spread best practices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Against the backdrop of women's social advancement, create and disseminate evidence of the need to promote health measures for women in the workplace</li> <li>Promote health management through the national Government</li> <li>Strengthen collaboration among industrial health specialists and business operators (in human resources and administration) to enhance support systems, create lists and inform employees of gynecologists near workplaces, and develop and share best practices within academic societies, businesses, industry associations, etc.</li> </ul>	<b>Build and strengthen regional cooperation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote women's health, menopause measures, and policies through all-of-society action including from businesses, medical institutions, insurers, and professional associations under leadership from national and local authorities</li> <li>Have regular collaboration among SMEs and local health institutions to promote employee and resident health and to build healthy cities</li> </ul>

### III Detailed summary of discussion points

#### Perspective 1 Surveys

While grasping real-world circumstances in terms of women's voices and considering workplace characteristics like job type or working practices (if a position involves clerical duties, standing work, an environment that keeps people at a desk, night work, etc.) will be vital elements of effectively promote measures for menopause, some employers face high hurdles to conducting independent surveys, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). To overcome these hurdles, steps should be taken to generalize and share survey forms and analysis templates that have already been developed. Public institutions or other relevant bodies should also conduct large-scale surveys of general trends to cover circumstances in which it is difficult for employers to conduct independent workplace surveys with existing tools. General health checkups may also provide opportunities to grasp real-world circumstances.

##### ▶ Utilizing existing survey tools to grasp real-world circumstances

To consider measures for menopause, it will be important to understand the status of menopause issues for affected parties in terms of their job descriptions or workplace environments. However, developing new survey forms, collecting the voices of affected parties, and analyzing findings can lead to heavy burdens for businesses. To avoid that, steps should be taken to ascertain circumstances by referring to or utilizing surveys and tools that have already been developed by other companies, government agencies, academia, or similar parties. For example, there are cases in which presenteeism (working while unwell) was easily measured using the [Single-Item Presenteeism Question \(SPQ\)](#) developed by the University of Tokyo. In another example, employee voices were collected using the bulletin board function of a business chat program. Further steps should be taken to develop highly versatile survey forms and to distribute analysis tools that are accessible to anyone, regardless of the size of the organization to which they belong.

##### ▶ Use of public survey findings

One realistic option for examining workplace measures for menopause may be to utilize findings from existing public surveys like HGPI's "[Survey on Health Promotion of Working Women 2018](#)" or the MHLW's "[Awareness Survey on Menopausal Symptoms and Disorder](#)." Because the findings of such surveys can be utilized in this manner, it is desirable that they continue to be conducted and that their findings continue to be disseminated to society.

##### ▶ Utilizing systems that are based on the Industrial Safety and Health Act

Article 66-10 of the Industrial Safety and Health Act allows employers to add items to stress check tests. As menopausal symptoms include psychological symptoms, to grasp circumstances surrounding menopausal symptoms among employees, one option may be to include menopausal symptoms to the list of multiple-choice items on stress checks.

- As of April 2025, discussions on the addition of items related to menopausal symptoms are being held at the MHLW's "[Study Group on Items Included in General Health Checkups Conducted under the Industrial Safety and Health Act](#)." Adding such items to health checkup questionnaires would make it possible to identify more women who face high menopause-related risks from among those enrolled in employees' health insurance schemes, as well as to propose appropriate interventions for more women. One issue being discussed at the Study Group is if consent of the person in question should be required for disclosure to their employer.<sup>2</sup> If responses to menopause-related health checkup items were disclosed to employers, it may enable employers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of actual circumstances, facilitating the introduction of measures for menopause.

#### Perspective 2 Education and awareness-raising

High-quality, evidence-based content and effective efforts to disseminate that content will be vital for educating people and raising awareness of menopause. However, it is difficult for businesses to develop reference materials or programs for menopause education and awareness on their own due to limits on the financial, time, and human resources they can invest. To overcome this, it is recommended that employers make use of existing educational materials from public institutions and other trustworthy organizations as well as menopause prevention programs for employers offered by some local governments. Employees should also take part in advancing educational and awareness-raising activities in their workplaces, as doing so will help to ensure those activities are tailored to workplaces. It will also be necessary to establish in-house systems and provide leadership to ensure staff can refer to and make full use of existing reference materials or initiatives from outside parties.

<sup>2</sup> Here, "employer" refers to a corporation when it is a company and the business operator when it is a solo proprietorship.

Reference: MHLW and the Japan Industrial Health and Safety Association, "Risk Assessment Manual for the Building Maintenance Industry," p7. <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/bunya/roudoukijun/anzenisei14/081001-1.html>. Last retrieved on March 27, 2025.

▶ **Utilizing existing resources from external organizations (public agencies, other businesses, etc.) and ensuring educational materials are high quality**

Materials that are high quality and based on evidence should be used to ensure educational and awareness-raising efforts for menopause are effective. However, employers have limited resources to develop their own materials, so it will be necessary to establish a system that provides employers with access to reliable materials from public organizations and that enables them to make effective use of those materials. For example, some companies use an MHLW website titled, “[Mental and Physical Health Support for Working Women](#),” which is a source of high-quality education and awareness-raising materials. Employers should disseminate this information through in-house information sharing systems and other such tools as well as build systems that make it possible to provide training and or hold seminars.

▶ **Engaging employees in sharing information to achieve effective education and awareness-raising activities tailored to workplace conditions**

If employees proactively share personal experiences of health issues with those in the workplace and take part in educational and awareness-raising activities, it is likely to help colleagues consider those health issues as more familiar topics, to contribute to building correct understanding, and to help eliminate stigma. Such employee involvement is also likely to help advance educational and awareness-raising activities on themes or issues specific to their respective workplaces and that cannot be covered by materials or initiatives from public agencies and other organizations. Efforts to create and share health-related seminars and video content are starting to emerge at some companies, with occupational health nurses serving as in-house video content creators. However, health issues related to menopause are highly personal and vary a great amount among individuals. It will be necessary to be considerate of the recipients of this information and appropriately incorporate third-party educational content in educational and awareness-raising activities.

▶ **Collaboration among local governments and businesses to optimize support for menopausal measures and spread best practices**

Examples have emerged in which support for menopause measures from local governments are creating opportunities for businesses to adopt such measures. For example, Tottori Prefecture’s [Menopausal Disorder Consultation and Support Center](#) is targeting employers with efforts to raise awareness of menopause support and is introducing specific case studies. Moving forward, we hope to see other local governments establish centers for menopause support in each region centered on the government, public medical institutions, or other public institutions, and that they work to expand menopause education and awareness-raising activities through seminars and other programs as part of that support. To facilitate the effective use of menopause support from local governments among employers, systems for collaboration between centers for menopause support and businesses must be established.

### Perspective 3 Environment .....

Many people feel hesitant to mention health issues if they are related to menopause or women’s health. There are also times when surrounding parties find it difficult to find the right words to approach someone who is unwell due to these health concerns. This means organizations must foster an internal culture that allows people with menopausal symptoms or disorder to feel comfortable consulting others about physical or mental issues based on an accurate understanding of health issues, and to reform internal rules and systems to support such a culture. In addition to educating employees and raising awareness toward menopause, another important step will be to strengthen leadership from executive staff and managers. It will be necessary to implement policies that encourage the development of this leadership, that enhance understanding of menopause, and that build momentum throughout society.

▶ **Leadership from men in executive or management roles in building environments that foster education and awareness about menopausal symptoms or disorder**

Leadership from executives and managers will be essential for promoting menopause education and awareness in organizations. Currently, approximately 80% of managers at the assistant manager level or above are men.<sup>3</sup> Some women living with menopause-related health concerns may feel hesitant or anxious about including men in conversations about those concerns when they had previously been treated as unmentionable in the workplace. Against this backdrop, it will be important for male executives and managers to take part in menopause support while demonstrating consideration and understanding and to serve as leaders in creating inclusive and supportive workplace environments and atmospheres. At the same time, it will also be necessary to provide social support including policies that assist activities of male leaders. There are also high expectations for male executives and managers to demonstrate understanding toward andropause and to play key roles in educating and raising awareness of the topic among male employees.

3 MHLW. “FY2023 Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management,” Summary of enterprise survey findings. <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/list/dl/71-r05/02.pdf>. Last retrieved on March 21, 2025.

- ▶ **Creating cultures where people living with menopause-related health concerns can make full use of in-house systems**
  - **Educating and raising awareness among female executives and managers, and their roles as consultants in the workplace**

Even if companies have already created in-house systems for affected parties, a persistent lack of awareness toward women's health concerns or lack of environments in which affected parties can speak openly about such topics with peace of mind may be preventing the utilization of those systems. It can be particularly difficult for female employees in their 40s and 50s to talk about women-specific health concerns with men because of gender-based stigma as well as age.

To alleviate such issues, there are high expectations for female executives and managers to take on the role of consultants that employees can have everyday conversations with regarding menopause and other women-specific health concerns. If female executives and managers also share their personal experiences, it will promote understanding of menopausal symptoms, help create safe spaces, and foster a workplace environment where people can talk about menopause with peace of mind.

However, even female executives and managers do not always possess sufficient knowledge on this theme. In many cases, understanding is insufficient due to the presence of mental hurdles for speaking about personal experiences in an objective or systematic manner, or because symptoms vary among women. Addressing this will require collaborating with third-party experts to provide female executives and managers with educational and awareness-raising programs that prioritize and focus on literacy while also staying close to their own thoughts and feelings. At the same time, it will also be necessary to elevate understanding among male executives and managers because most leadership positions are currently held by men. In fact, certain employers<sup>4</sup> have made it mandatory for managers to pass a test provided by an external organization active in menopause and women's health, and those employers are taking steps to establish in-house working groups to help employees learn about these topics.
  - **A dialogue-based approach for the workplace that is accommodating for affected parties**

When someone is experiencing menopausal symptoms or disorder, it can be difficult for them to recognize menopause as the cause of their poor condition. Among people who do recognize it, there are cases in which they are hesitant to accept that it is the cause of their symptoms. This means that it is not always the right choice for surrounding parties to actively approach employees who may be experiencing menopausal symptoms or disorder to offer words of encouragement. At times like that, people must choose their words carefully while keeping the other person's feelings in mind, and sufficient care must be taken when encouraging someone to make use of in-house consultation systems or to visit a medical institution. Managers and employees must be provided with the training needed to respond correctly when someone seeks advice so they can be guided to consultation services, encouraged to consult an industrial physician, or encouraged to seek a consultation with a gynecology clinic.
  - **Devising communication methods in workplaces that overcome hesitancy toward talking about women's health-related topics**

Menstrual leave systems provide a prime example of a type of workplace policy that exists on paper but are often underutilized. The two main reasons menstrual leave systems go unused are hesitancy to discuss the issue with male managers and hesitancy to apply for leave among female employees. Some companies are attempting to address this by giving menstrual leave new names like "F leave" or "wellness leave," or by expanding eligibility to include other needs like male infertility treatment or the need to provide long-term care. Devising better methods of workplace communication may also help address this issue.

In one example of a communication strategy related to the themes of diversity and inclusion that can provide a point of reference for women's health and measures for menopause, a company has created a worksheet that allows employees to share the characteristics of their disability to help employees living with disabilities communicate with others. This information is only disclosed to the other person when the affected party wants to share it. The worksheets serve as a form of indirect communication among people living with health concerns and their bosses or coworkers. Similar systems using worksheets to control the scope of information disclosed in accordance with the needs or desires of those most affected might be useful as measures for menopause, as well.
  - **Establishing worker-friendly environments and easy-to-use systems for everyone**

It is important to promote the use of all systems that make it easier to work for women, men, people living with disabilities, and all employees. This not only applies to those for health concerns but also to other concerns or obligations such as child-rearing or long-term care provision. Doing so contributes to the workplace environment and organizational culture and climate. Instead of focusing entirely on measures for women's health or measures for menopause, it will be important to build fair and broad-reaching systems



and to encourage the proactive use of those systems through organization-wide efforts. This will help build mutual understanding and make it easier to develop and adopt individual measures.

In fact, some companies have reported that the COVID-19 pandemic created opportunities for more male employees to increase their involvement in child-rearing and long-term care, which helped to foster workplace cultures of mutual support for child-rearing or housework and deeper understanding for people in different positions and circumstances. For example, Tottori Prefecture established a [special leave system](#) for employees of all genders who are affected or may be affected by menopausal disorder, and it reported that 9 men and 16 women used the system in 2023. To elevate understanding throughout workplaces, efforts to enhance similar systems which can be utilized by both men and women hold promise for the future.

► **Policies and attitudes for promoting health and productivity management, women's health measures, and measures for menopause among executive staff**

- **Promoting health and productivity management through national and local government policies**  
METI's "[Certified Health & Productivity Management Outstanding Organizations Recognition Program](#)" and "[Health and Productivity Stock Selection](#)" program have proven to be effective in communicating the importance of health and productivity management to executive staff. In particular, there has been growing interest in health and productivity management at the executive level since the 2015 launch of the Health and Productivity Stock Selection system. Furthermore, efforts to acquire the MHLW's [Kurumin Mark Certification](#) which recognizes parent-friendly companies based on the Act on Advancement of Measures to Support Raising Next-Generation Children or to endorse the joint declaration of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's "[Tokyo Network for the Advancement of Women Business Leaders](#)" provide executive staff and entire companies opportunities to demonstrate their proactive involvement in this area in-house and to third parties, and are effective methods of reforming organizational cultures while raising awareness at companies.
- **The significance of promoting measures for women's health in enhancing corporate brand value**  
As reinforcing support systems for women's health can help a company build a trustworthy reputation among external parties, executive staff and managers must understand that such measures should be examined from the perspective of elevating corporate brand value. They should take the initiative in launching such efforts at their own companies rather than waiting for competitors to act first.  
There has been high interest in initiatives for diversity from investors in recent years, making efforts for women's health essential from the perspective of human capital. One method of meeting this demand may be to include information on initiatives for menopause support among recommended items for information disclosed in accordance with the [Human Capital Visualization Guidelines](#) presented by the Cabinet Secretariat's Study Group on Visualizing Non-Financial Information. Visualizing and presenting how one's company is addressing menopause as part of efforts for the promotion of health and productivity management and well-being will help communicate corporate value to investors.
- **Establishing health and productivity management practices and worker-friendly environments to secure human resources and achieve organizational growth**  
Students entering the workforce have tended to place more focus on worker-friendly environments in recent years and are paying attention to health and productivity management initiatives at the organizations to which they apply. Many students pay particularly close attention to signs that an employer pursues women's advancement in the workplace such as by acquiring Health & Productivity Management Outstanding Organizations Recognition certification, being chosen for the Health and Productivity Stock Selection, or acquiring Eruboshi Certification. One company actually faced a business continuity crisis due to its inability to attract talent or secure human resources because of its culture of long working hours. By focusing on reforming their workplace environment and company culture, they were able to begin attracting a stable supply of human resources and improve the health of the company. For companies that want to attract top talent or are struggling with labor shortages, implementing health and productivity management and establishing employee-friendly workplace environments are becoming all the more important.  
This is not only the case for workplaces<sup>5</sup> in major urban centers; SMEs in rural areas also face similar circumstances. Additionally, SMEs in rural areas are often more deeply rooted in their communities than large companies in major urban centers, so creating environments that provide community members places they can work with peace of mind helps to revitalize both workplaces and communities. There are examples of rural areas where turnover rates for women decreased or applications from potential employees increased after SMEs established more employee-friendly workplace environments for women by introducing leave systems, more flexible working schedules, or initiatives to strengthen health support programs for employees. These examples demonstrate that such initiatives not only spur economic growth for organizations but also can help to develop or revitalize local communities.

5 Here, "workplaces" refers any entity where a work is performed continuously at a fixed location under a corresponding organization. MHLW. "Enforcement of the Industrial Safety and Health Act," [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/web/t\\_doc?dataId=00tb2042&dataTyoe=1&pageNo=1](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/web/t_doc?dataId=00tb2042&dataTyoe=1&pageNo=1). Last retrieved on March 27, 2025.

## Perspective 4 Occupational health

As the main focus of occupational health has been ensuring safety and preventing work-related health problems, measures for menopause and other women's health topics were not prioritized in the past. However, activities in the area of occupational health have diversified in recent years, and the promotion of health and productivity management and the advancement of women in the workforce have led to progress in initiatives in support of women's health. There are high expectations for even more support for women's health from the area of occupational health in the future, including establishing consultation services, improving workplace environments through collaboration among occupational health specialists and employers, providing referrals from occupational health providers to medical institutions, and creating reference materials showing where gynecologists can be found near workplaces.

### ▶ The significance of strengthening measures for menopause and other women's health concerns in occupational health

The main objectives of occupational health activities are to prevent health problems related to working conditions and the work environment, to maintain and promote the health of employees, and to improve worker welfare.<sup>6</sup> As issues have diversified and needs have changed, activities in the area of occupational health have expanded beyond measures for past priority items like overwork or workplace accidents to also include measures to address mental health concerns impacted by work or follow-up measures to improve daily habits through lifestyle guidance based on health checkups results.<sup>7</sup> In the past, measures for menopause and other women's health issues were assigned low priority in occupational health. This meant items like subsidies for breast cancer screening and other women-specific items for cancer screening were considered on a limited basis and were treated like perks included in benefits packages from individual organizations. Recent progress in efforts for the advancement of women in the workplace have elevated awareness that measures for women's health provide the foundation for active engagement from employees, addressing presenteeism, and enhancing productivity. This has built momentum for women's health efforts in health and productivity management. Menopause is characterized by the wide range of symptoms that make it difficult for affected parties to recognize their condition or to access medical institutions. While advancing measures to improve workplace environments and address mental health concerns, addressing needs related to menopause will require activities in occupational health to provide early detection and steady guidance to health facilities. The topic of menopause-related health issues should be examined in the context of occupational health, including for health checkups, and consideration should be given to how to best provide integrated support in the future.

### ▶ Strengthening systems that support affected parties

#### • Devising methods to improve workplace consultation environments

Consultations from industrial physicians and occupational nursing professionals<sup>8</sup> should create environments providing physical and mental safety so they are easy for employees to use. These professionals should be sincere in hearing about employees' concerns and provide concrete guidance to better health, such as by providing recommendations to specialists or by providing follow-up later on.

### ▶ Strengthening collaboration among occupational health teams (industrial physicians, occupational nursing professionals, etc.) and human resources and general affairs departments to expand support systems

In the field of occupational health, it is generally considered best to form multidisciplinary occupational health teams (with industrial physicians, occupational nursing professionals, psychologists, health supervisors, etc.), and measures for menopause are no exception. To connect employees experiencing menopause-related health concerns to appropriate support in a timely manner, in their capacity as members of occupational health teams, it is important for human resources and general affairs departments to share information or expertise on menopause and to cooperate on establishing methods of collaboration. For example, it will be necessary for them to utilize past experience accumulated through individual support methods (such as by establishing employee consultation services, as discussed above) in response measures that are jointly implemented with employers. Rather than accumulating opinions gathered at the consultation service only in occupational health departments, that information should be used as reference materials in joint efforts with human resources and general affairs departments to consider how to best assign duties or establish workplace environments in order to build support systems or advance similar efforts. When doing so, rules for handling private personal information should be kept in mind and followed. In particular, at organizations that do not have industrial physicians on staff, routine consultations are often provided by occupational nursing professionals, human resources, or general affairs departments. To rapidly respond to employee

6 Japan Society for Occupational Health. "Ethical Guidelines for Occupational Health Professionals." <https://www.sanei.or.jp/oh/guideline/index.html>. Last retrieved on March 21, 2025.

7 MHLW. "Reference Materials on Current Circumstances and Issues in Occupational Health," First Meeting of the Study Group on the Ideal Structure of Occupational Health, <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11201250/001001488.pdf>. Last retrieved on March 21, 2025.

8 Based on the Japan Academy of Occupational Health Nursing definition of "occupational health nursing," in this document, nursing professionals in occupational health (namely, occupational health nurses and occupational nurses) are collectively referred to as "occupational nursing professionals." Japan Academy of Occupational Health Nursing, "Definition of Occupational Health Nursing." <https://www.jaohn.com/definition>. Last retrieved on March 21, 2025.

health concerns, it will be necessary for such organizations to build frameworks that guide people to appropriate specialists regardless of who handles their consultation and that enable timely interventions. In addition, the opinions and issues gathered through such systems should be communicated to executive staff to build recognition toward issues and to bring about effective efforts with a top-down approach.

- **Creating and disseminating lists or maps that show where to find gynecologists that provide menopause care**

Another challenge is guiding affected parties to medical institutions even if they attend a consultation with an industrial physician, occupational nursing professional, or similar party. Few OB-GYNs specialize in treating menopause, so occupational health professionals often encounter difficulties when trying to refer employees to specialists.

Addressing this will require creating and disseminating lists of gynecologists and maps of clinics near workplaces so industrial physicians and occupational nursing professionals can refer employees that require menopause care to those who provide it. As for information resources they should utilize, the Japan Society for Menopause and Women's Health has compiled [a list of medical specialists in women's health by prefecture](#), and the Women's Healthcare Awareness & Menopause Network Society has compiled a [list clinics providing outpatient menopause care by prefecture](#). One company is working to facilitate employee access to health facilities by creating a "Hospital Consultation Map" with information on nearby clinics and user reviews.

## Perspective 5 Communities and society

In addition to efforts from occupational health and employers, communities and society as a whole should also take action that involves all generations and that aims to address the health concerns of menopausal women. Those actions should contribute to better literacy from children to adults and include the provision of opportunities to learn about menopause during school education and to provide information at seminars in communities. Furthermore, we hope to see an effective support system providing comprehensive coverage for both insured people and their dependents through the maximal use of the [regional and occupational collaboration](#) framework (in which community and workplace health services are jointly implemented) in measures for menopause. In addition, to supplement limited internal resources at SMEs, systems for collaboration with local medical institutions that contribute to in-house awareness-raising or guiding employees to medical examinations can be established to streamline and optimize those measures. Such systems will not only provide a foundation for measures for menopause; they are also likely to support women's health over the life course.

- ▶ **The significance of building knowledge and understanding of menopause among all generations through initiatives involving communities and all of society**

Currently, about 2.3 million people in Japan are thought to be experiencing menopausal disorder,<sup>9</sup> many of whom are supervisors or subordinates in the workplace as well as family members or friends. In other words, menopause-related issues are close at hand in the lives of many people. In the U.K., opportunities to learn about menopause are provided during middle school. Providing learning opportunities to younger generations in addition to educational and awareness-raising opportunities to working-age adults is likely to help understanding and awareness toward menopause spread more broadly throughout society.

- ▶ **Uniting communities including businesses, medical institutions, and insurers in efforts for women's health and menopause**

There is value in implementing initiatives for women's health through collaboration among local medical institutions and SMEs. For example, one SME sends employees to a free monthly health seminar hosted by a local major hospital during working hours. Those employees then relay key learnings from the seminar to their colleagues. This allows them to advance information gathering and local collaboration efforts in parallel. Having employees participate in such seminars or public lectures as part of routine work duties is likely to help start a virtuous cycle in which the company grows more productive as employee health literacy improves. In addition, having local physicians provide the lectures can help establish face-to-face relationships among medical institutions and other organizations that allow them to provide employees with health consultations or referrals for medical care in the future.

Centered on Councils for the Promotion of Regional and Occupational Coordination, regional and occupational health departments should share the knowledge that they have accumulated with each other, and frameworks for regional and occupational collaboration (which aim to promote measures reflecting real-world conditions in each region) should be utilized,<sup>10</sup> as doing so is likely to effectively promote health support for all working-age women including both insured people and dependents. Such efforts will allow communities and workplaces to unite and create systems that provide seamless support from healthcare to health services. In particular, when it is difficult for employers to implement measures on their own, such as at SMEs, or when there are few employees eligible for support, collaborating with local governments to provide education on women's health or sharing information regarding health consultations on menopause or menopausal symptoms or disorder will allow them to control the costs of their measures while making full use of local resources to efficiently expand initiatives for health.

9 HGPI. <https://hgpi.org/en/events/dmb-wh-20241210.html>. Last retrieved on March 21, 2025.

10 MHLW. "Guidelines for the Promotion of Regional and Occupational Collaboration." [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/chiikishokuwikiportal/common/pdf/pdf\\_chiikishokuguideline.pdf](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/chiikishokuwikiportal/common/pdf/pdf_chiikishokuguideline.pdf). Last retrieved on April 8, 2025.

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\*In no particular order; titles omitted. Please note that positions listed are current as of the day of the meeting.

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