



E-book

# Navigating invisible disabilities in the workplace

Actionable strategies for HR professionals to support employees with invisible disabilities





## Understanding invisible disabilities

Invisible disabilities can encompass a wide range of physical, mental, and neurological challenges that may not be immediately apparent to the naked eye. Picture this: a person may be grappling with a condition that affects their movements, senses, or activities, yet on the surface, they may appear perfectly "normal."

From mental health conditions to neurological disorders and autoimmune disorders, the spectrum of invisible disabilities is as diverse as the individuals who silently struggle with them daily. Some examples include:

- Autism, a unique way of perceiving the world
- Diabetes, a constant balancing act of blood sugar levels
- ADD/ADHD, a whirlwind of thoughts and hyperactivity
- Dyslexia, a learning disability to manage
- Chronic pain, a persistent and exhausting challenge

Too often, individuals with invisible disabilities find themselves battling not only their conditions but also the misunderstandings, false perceptions, and unfair judgments around their conditions. It's important that employers understand how to effectively support neurodivergent individuals and learn how those with unique traits can become an asset to the organization. By gaining a deeper understanding, HR professionals can lay the foundation for a more inclusive workplace environment where all employees feel safe and supported.

<sup>1</sup><https://qz.com/work/1981466/neurodiverse-applicants-are-revolutionizing-the-hiring-process>

<sup>2</sup>[https://auticon.com/us/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2023/04/auticon-impact-report-2022-FINAL\\_EN.pdf](https://auticon.com/us/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2023/04/auticon-impact-report-2022-FINAL_EN.pdf)



### Autism in the workplace

Autistic professionals can be up to **140%** more productive when they are properly matched to jobs<sup>1</sup>.

About **70%** of autistic employees have discussed their condition with a manager, whereas only 30% have felt comfortable disclosing their autism to HR<sup>2</sup>.

## Including people with invisible disabilities at work

Using inclusive language is key towards creating a supportive workplace culture where individuals with invisible disabilities feel seen, respected, and valued. It involves choosing words and phrases that prioritize the person over their disability, shifting the focus towards their strengths and potential. By adopting this approach, HR professionals can foster an environment where employees feel acknowledged for their unique abilities, talents, and perspectives instead of feeling stigmatized.

### Strategies

- **Review and update policies:** ensure company policies are inclusive, incorporating language such as “people with impairments” vs “disabled”, and provisions that address accommodations, accessibility, disclosure, and non-discrimination.
- **Accommodations and accessibility:** eliminate barriers by implementing reasonable accommodations and flexible work arrangements to ensure accessibility in the workplace.
- **Mental health support:** prioritize [mental health](#) by offering confidential counseling services, therapy programs, and employee assistance programs in your wellness programs, ensuring that individuals receive the emotional support they need to navigate their well-being.
- **Open communication channels:** foster trust and understanding through open and transparent communication, providing employees with platforms to voluntarily disclose their invisible disabilities, seek accommodations, and express concerns without fear of judgment.



## Cultivating awareness and empathy

Supporting employees with invisible disabilities goes far beyond ticking compliance checkboxes. It requires a proactive and comprehensive approach that permeates the workplace culture. HR professionals need to be equipped with tools to reduce stigma, engage knowledgeable healthcare professionals, train senior leadership about the nuances of these conditions, and foster informal support networks.

### Strategies

- **Guest speaker series:** Organize guest speaker sessions featuring individuals who have personal experiences with invisible disabilities. These individuals can share their stories, insights, and strategies for overcoming challenges.
- **Disability awareness campaigns:** Launch targeted disability awareness campaigns within the organization to educate HR professionals and employees about the realities of living with invisible disabilities.
- **Collaborate with disability advocacy organizations:** Establish partnerships to gain insights, access resources, and receive guidance on best practices for supporting individuals with invisible disabilities. Collaborating with these organizations can help HR teams stay updated on the latest research, legal requirements, and innovative approaches to inclusivity.



## Supporting holistic well-being of employees with invisible disabilities

As HR professionals, you have the control to empower employees with invisible disabilities to prioritize their well-being and thrive in the workplace. By implementing tailored wellness initiatives and fostering a holistic approach to employee health, such as promoting self-care practices and physical activities, you can create an environment that supports the unique needs of all individuals.

### Strategies

- **Customized wellness programs:** develop wellness programs specifically tailored to the unique needs of employees. These programs can include targeted workshops, coaching sessions, and resources focusing on stress management, self-care techniques, mindfulness practices, and strategies for maintaining well-being.
- **Health assessments:** conduct [health assessments](#) specifically designed for employees with invisible disabilities. These assessments can encompass physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects of well-being. By understanding the unique needs and challenges of each individual, you can develop personalized wellness plans and provide targeted support.
- **Well-being resource hub:** offer a resource hub accessible on one [centralized well-being platform](#) that provides a wide range of resources including educational materials, self-help tools, recommended apps, and information about available benefits and accommodations.





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