

Abstract of advisory report:

[Work: it's important to everyone – An advisory report on managing chronic illness at work]

[(Werk: van belang voor iedereen – Een advies over werken met een chronische ziekte, 16/02)]

Keeping people with chronic illness in work by improving knowledge and prevention and by providing suitable support.

18 March 2016 – The number of people with a chronic illness is set to increase over the next few years. A large proportion of them are in work and many of them are doing well, but the question is how to keep them in work. It appears to be essential to respond to chronic health issues as early as possible. The SER believes that the solution does not lie in imposing additional rules, but in increasing awareness of the existing rules and maintaining a dialogue in the workplace. The SER also recommends improving support for people in work with a chronic illness and doing more to prevent barriers to employment being created as a result of these illnesses.

Within the work situation, the recommendations are mainly directed at employees, employers and company doctors, but it is also up to the social partners, occupational and regular health care, research centres, patients' associations, implementing organisations and the government to put these recommendations into practice.

Increase awareness and improve the dialogue

Awareness of health and safety rules and existing subsidy schemes has to improve so that the rules are complied with in full and facilities for adapting the workplace are used more frequently. Employers and employees need to be more aware of chronic illnesses and their impact on work. The SER sees a role for research centres and patients' organisations in this process and recommends establishing a central information desk. To improve dialogue between employees and employers in the work situation, the SER lists a number of guidelines. The company doctor should have a supporting role in the dialogue.

Put prevention into practice

More measures in the workplace are needed to prevent chronic illness from causing sickness presenteeism and (long-term) absenteeism. The SER is in favour of making better use of existing tools which are frequently employed to identify occupational risks and health issues and combining them with tools for measuring employees' work capacity.

Provide support based on healthcare

The SER believes that company doctors must have a more visible presence. The company doctor and other health and safety professionals can increase their visibility by offering walk-in consultation hours and spending more time on prevention. The prevention role must be set out in the company doctor's job profile

and training programme. General practitioners and other professionals in the regular healthcare system must cooperate better with the occupational healthcare system. To this end, it is important that the regular healthcare system should integrate employment as a factor in its work by including it in training programmes and medical guidelines.

A large proportion of people with chronic illness are in work.

The number of people with a chronic illness is set to increase: from 5.3 million in 2011 to 7 million in 2030. Already, about one in five people in the labour force has one or more chronic illnesses. This will increase in the years to come, partly because an ever-growing number of people are continuing to work for longer. Many people with a chronic illness are in work. Some people require workplace adaptations so that they can continue to work. It is essential to reduce long-term absenteeism related to chronic illness, as returning to work with a chronic illness is not always easy. The core of the policy must therefore focus on taking measures at an early stage to prevent barriers and absences.

Current situation

The advisory report *Werk: van belang voor iedereen – Een advies over werken met een chronische ziekte* [Work: it's important to everyone – An advisory report on managing chronic illness at work] has been prepared by a committee under the chairmanship of Crown member Louise Gunning. The advisory report primarily consists of recommendations for keeping people with a chronic illness in work but also contains proposals for getting people into work.

The advisory report was adopted at the Council meeting on 18 March 2016 and is a response to a request for advice from the Ministers of Public Health, Welfare and Sport and of Social Affairs and Employment of 3 July 2015. Input from professionals, experts and stakeholders was used in the compilation of the report. For example, the committee organised a workshop on 15 December 2015, which was attended by people with a chronic illness, employers, company doctors and recovery and reintegration specialists.