

Major Brands, Big Pharma Pledge to End Cancer Stigma at Work

Working With Cancer aims to create more supportive work environments for employees living with cancer and those serving as caregivers.

January 25, 2023 By Laura Schmidt

The new international initiative “Working With Cancer,” launched by the [Publicis Foundation](#) on January 17 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, pledges to eliminate [stigma](#) and insecurity surrounding cancer in the workplace. The initiative employs support from a coalition of 40 companies, including pharmaceutical giants and leading cancer organizations, such as Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Created by the advertising agency [Publicis Groupe](#), [Working With Cancer](#) is backed by consumer brand companies such as Bank of America, PepsiCo, Toyota, Google, Marriott and L’Oréal as well as drugmakers AbbVie, Merck and Sanofi.

About half of all people who get cancer are afraid to tell their employers, notes a Working With Cancer video, which you can view at the top of this article and [on YouTube](#). Working With Cancer aims to establish best practices regarding employees’ disclosure of a cancer diagnosis in the workplace and eliminate fear and stigma for employees with cancer as well as employees [caring for](#) loved ones.

“Awareness has been heightened around stigma and disenfranchisement around many groups of employees, and companies have taken responsibility for making sure people feel a sense of belonging and inclusion,” Alexandra von Plato, the CEO of Publicis Health, said in an [Endpoints News article](#) on the initiative. “And with this idea of inclusion, there is also stigma around illness and certainly around cancer.”

When Publicis Groupe CEO Arthur Sadoun publicly announced that he had been diagnosed and treated for [head and neck cancer](#) last year, he said many Publicis employees shared their personal cancer stories. Many noted how transparency and support in the workplace helped get them through.

“It is a tough reality, but whether directly or indirectly, every one of us will have to confront cancer in our lives and in our workplaces. Companies have a key role to play in that,” Sadoun said in a

[Publicis Groupe press statement](#). “Working With Cancer is an increasingly important initiative, on a front that many businesses are already invested in. By making their existing efforts more accessible and visible, together we can reduce the anxiety and stigma of cancer in the workplace and positively impact our people’s health. Through a truly collaborative approach, a light lift from everyone becomes deep and lasting impact for cancer patients at work.”

The Working With Cancer pledge will be heavily promoted on World Cancer Day, February 4, thanks to \$100 million in media donated by partners around the world.

While many companies do offer programs to support employees diagnosed with cancer, people are often afraid to inquire about them.

“One of the insights that came out was that when you’re confronted with the diagnosis of cancer, you’re afraid for your life,” von Plato said. “And then shortly thereafter, in the chaos of coming to terms with what that means, almost everybody becomes somewhat fearful for their livelihood,” she said. “Sometimes that doesn’t mean ‘Am I going to get fired?’ but ‘How am I going to do my job? Is my team going to need more than I can give? Am I going to let people down?’”