

PROPOSED REVISIONS TO SICK LEAVE POLICY

The denominational sick leave policy was originally developed by the Board of Ministry and adopted by the General Assembly in 1982 (A&P 1982, p. 391). It was last revised in 2011 and approved by the Assembly Council. (A&P 2011, p. 215)

The proposed revisions below are in italics. They include changing “disability” in section (a) to “sick leave”, changing “sick leave” to “sickness” in section (b) to reflect government terminology and the addition of the words “if eligible” to section (b) because not all professional church workers covered by the policy will be eligible for EI sickness benefits (for instance, a retired minister appointed to a stated supply ministry agreement would not be eligible). In response to questions for clarification frequently asked by presbyteries, three footnotes and a new section on the process for beginning and ending a sick leave have been added. The proposed revisions were made in consultation with the Clerks of Assembly and the Pension and Benefits office.

Sick Leave Policy

The Presbyterian Church in Canada sick leave provision for professional church workers is that:

- (a) During the first three months of *sick leave*, the congregation is to be responsible for continuing all regular payments to their professional church worker as well as paying for pulpit supply.¹
- (b) Starting with the fourth month and continuing to the end of the seventh month, the congregation is to be responsible for the housing allowance or manse accommodation and the professional church worker, *if eligible*, will apply to receive federal Employment Insurance *sickness* benefits.
- (c) If it seems that the professional church worker will not be able to return to their duties by the end of the seventh month, *they* should contact the Pension and Benefits office to discuss a claim for long term disability benefits.²

For a sick leave to take place, the following is required:

Any absence from work likely to be longer than three weeks will be accompanied by a medical note from a physician or other qualified medical practitioner certifying the inability to work. (The presbytery may choose to require a medical note for shorter durations of absence).

The medical note should include the following information:

- *The medical practitioner’s letterhead or stamp;*
- *The employee’s name;*
- *The date the employee was seen by the medical practitioner;*
- *The start date (understood as the first day of absence from work due to illness or injury);*
- *The expected duration (if known) of the absence;*
- *The medical practitioner’s signature and date signed.*

The medical note will be presented to the clerk of presbytery who will arrange for pastoral care and a motion to presbytery noting the professional church worker is placed on sick leave commencing on the start date indicated in the medical note.

In order to return to work, a subsequent medical note indicating the professional church worker is able to return to work must be presented to the clerk of presbytery. The medical note should indicate if the professional church worker is able to return to full duties and responsibilities performed prior to their sick leave or if there should be a gradual return to work with an estimate of when they will be able to resume full duties and responsibilities or if they are able to return to work with functional restrictions or limitations requiring accommodation. The clerk of presbytery will arrange for a motion to presbytery that the sick leave ends on the date specified in the note.³

The above requirements are minimum requirements. Presbyteries and congregations are free to provide beyond the policy to give compassionate consideration to the minister and the minister’s family.

The Sick Leave Policy was adopted by the 1982 General Assembly. (A&P 1982, p. 391; A&P 1986, p. 390–91; A&P 1990, p. 438; see also A&P 2011, p. 215)

Endnotes

¹ The Presbyterian Church in Canada provides a pulpit supply insurance plan to congregations where a full-time or part-time minister/clergy position has been established by its presbytery. Part-time positions must be a minimum of 50 percent full-time hours to qualify. The cost of this insurance plan is included in the member's Extended Health and Dental Insurance Plan premium. The maximum period of benefit is seventeen (17) Sundays. Claims can be made using the downloadable form available through the Pension and Benefits page on the national church website <https://presbyterian.ca/pensionandbenefits/treasurers>.

² In order to apply for long-term disability benefits the professional church worker must have been on sick leave for 210 consecutive days commencing with the first day of absence from work due to illness or injury.

³ Where a professional church worker who has returned to work after a sick leave of 30 continuous days or more subsequently goes on another sick leave due to the same condition of illness or injury within 30 days after returning to work, it will be considered an extension of the original sick leave; otherwise, it will be considered the start of a new sick leave.