

Breaking Assumptions

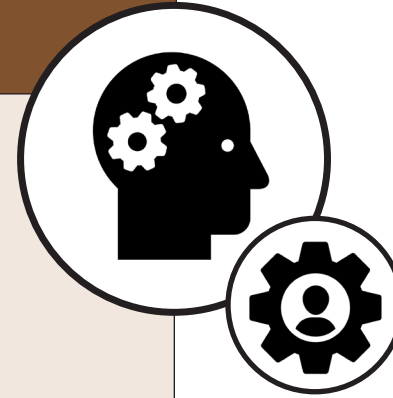


A **Manager's Tool Kit** for Empowering
and Accommodating Colleagues with **Disabilities**

February 2020



1) Purpose



Mass General Brigham recognizes that each individual's disability, whether visible or invisible, is unique.

Managers are often a point of initial contact for an employee's request for an accommodation. Our Manager's Tool Kit is a resource that lays out **best practices** and **guidelines** for the interactive accommodations process that recognize individual circumstances and facilitate interactive dialogue around an **employee's accommodation request**.

The **Manager's Tool Kit*** serves to:

- **Educate** about disability and disability inclusion.
- **Outline the process** for an employee who requests an accommodation.
- **Provide guidelines** for managers to support their employees with disabilities.

Note: This Toolkit is not an employment policy, nor do its contents constitute required steps in the accommodation request process.

Breaking Assumptions

A **Manager's Tool Kit** for Empowering and Accommodating Colleagues with **Disabilities**

- 1) Purpose
- 2) Introduction to Disability
- 3) Our Commitment to Employees With Disabilities
- 4) Process Flow Chart for Accommodation Requests
- 5) Supporting and Implementing Accommodations



* Please also review our companion [Employee's Tool Kit](#) to learn more about these disability-related issues:

- Conceptualizing disability as an important element of diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Emphasizing the importance of disability inclusion in the workplace for the Mass General Brigham System.
- Sharing internal and external disability resources.

Special Acknowledgments

Mass General Brigham *Breaking Assumptions: A Tool Kit for Empowering and Accommodating Colleagues with Disabilities* Steering Committee

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2) Introduction: What is a **Disability**?

What is a Disability?

You may feel that you cannot define disability, but you know it when you see it. That is not always the case. There may be visual clues, such as a wheel-chair, guide dog, or cane. However, some disabilities are not immediately apparent or observable. Certain chronic illnesses, low vision, speech impairment, intellectual impairments, or mental health diagnoses may qualify as disabilities even if not immediately apparent.

“**Disability**” is a broad term that can be used to encompass a wide range of conditions that may occur at any time across the life span:

Physical disabilities like mobility impairments often come to mind first, but other less visible disabilities include intellectual and sensory disability, or those related to chronic illness or trauma.

Mental health disabilities are less visible, often intermittent and episodic, but no less disabling.

Intellectual disabilities occur with varying levels of severity on a spectrum.

Blindness and low vision or deafness also occur on a spectrum and may be complete or partial.

Chronic illness can fluctuate and be very debilitating, as with chronic pain.



It is important to note that “disability” is a defined legal term and that not all medical conditions or impairments constitute a “disability” under laws providing protection for individuals (i.e. the Massachusetts Fair Employment Practices Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, Fair Housing Act, or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). Whether a person’s medical condition or impairment constitutes a “disability” under law is an individualized assessment.

What is **Disability Inclusion**?

According to the CDC, Disability Inclusion is “the full integration of people with disabilities into everyday activities.” It involves practices and policies designed to identify and remove barriers—physical, communication, and attitudinal—that hamper an individual’s ability to participate fully in society.

Why is Disability Inclusion so Important?

The inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace spans several areas. It may include working with our internal colleagues with disabilities, but also recognizing that employees may be caring for a family member with a disability. It is important to recognize that all of these aspects help us to conduct business as a disability-friendly organization^{1,2}.

At Mass General Brigham and its affiliated institutions, we are committed to ensuring that all employees are treated with dignity and respect. We recognize that one critical aspect of diversity is disability in all its various forms. Therefore, Mass General Brigham is dedicated to ensuring that staff with disabilities are treated fairly, by providing reasonable accommodations where possible and educating employees around this important aspect of diversity.

Mass General Brigham constantly works to create an environment that embraces diversity and inclusion. Our lived experiences and inherited characteristics not only shape our per-

spectives but provide Mass General Brigham with unique insights to better serve our patients with similar backgrounds. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 3 Americans living with a disability do not have a usual healthcare provider. From cost, lack of adequate services, inaccessible physical spaces, and lack of health worker cultural competence, people with disabilities face additional barriers to receiving quality healthcare compared to people without disabilities. Employees with disabilities bring a fuller understanding of what living with a disability or chronic condition means for a patient and how it shapes their health. When valued and utilized, these unique perspectives of staff with disabilities allow us all to provide better care to our patients.

¹Okoro, C., Hollis, N., Cyrus, Al., & Griffin-Blake, S. (2018). “Prevalence of Disabilities and Health Care Access by Disability Status and Type among Adults – United States, 2016.” MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 67(32), 882-887.

²Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Albarico, M., Mortaji, N., & Karon, L. (2018). “A Systematic Review of the Benefits of Hiring People With Disabilities.” Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 28(4), 634-655.



2) Disability in the **Workplace** and at **Home**

“Americans with disabilities are active and contributing members of our society, and they must have the opportunity to develop the skills they need to compete and obtain jobs in the 21st-century workforce. By reducing physical barriers and false perceptions, our country meets our commitment to millions of Americans with disabilities, and benefits from their talents, creativity and hard work.”

– President George W. Bush, October 2004, National Disability Employment Awareness Month Announcement Proclamation; Washington, D.C.



Disability in the Workplace

While the world is not always a welcoming place for people with disabilities and stigma still exists, we can work to reverse that stigma. People who do things differently are resilient, creative and persistent. These qualities are all highly sought after in the job market. It is a business imperative to be knowledgeable and comfortable working with colleagues with disabilities as more organizations realize the importance of hiring this underrepresented group.

Benefits of Inclusion

In addition to being the right thing to do, including people with disabilities in the workplace provides a business advantage in multiple ways:

- Expanding the talent pool
- Diversifying the employee base
- Creating an inclusive culture
- Retaining current employees
- Developing innovative goods and services
- Expanding the customer base
- Enhancing the company’s brand
- Improve quality and outcomes
- Improving market share
- Garnering community and political support
- Enhancing productivity
- Satisfying accreditation standards
- Qualifying for grants/funding
- Complying with federal regulation

Disability at Home

Many of our colleagues have a family member with a disability, which they may or may not disclose at work. Managing work and home responsibilities can be challenging with the onset or flare up of symptoms. Further along in this document is a resource guide of local organizations to provide guidance, expertise, advice etc. Managers and employees are encouraged to read and bookmark these pages as they will be very helpful should assistance be needed.

The Mass General Brigham Employee Assistance Program (EAP)



The Mass General Brigham Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides connections in situations where employees are also caregivers. EAP can help employees find community services, counseling, respite care, legal and financial assistance, and caregiver support groups as well as exploring flexible work arrangements.



3) Our **Commitment** to Employees with Disabilities

Mass General Brigham endeavors to ensure that employees with disabilities are supported at work and enjoy the same benefits and opportunities as all our employees.



An employee is not required to disclose specific information to their manager, such as a diagnosis, when requesting an accommodation.

Employees should understand the range of assistance provided by their manager, Occupational Health Services (OHS), Human Resources (HR), the Mass General Brigham Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and colleagues.

This section reviews: self-disclosure, confidentiality, and how an employee with a disability that affects their ability to perform their job can request an accommodation.

Disclosing a Disability

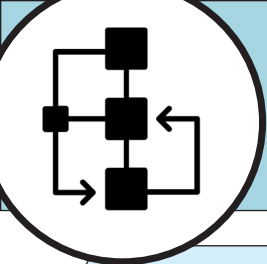
Deciding how, when, and if an employee discloses their disability to others is not just a professional consideration, it is a deeply personal choice. For some, it can be a struggle, especially if a person is recently diagnosed, has a non-visible impairment, a disability that may have a stigma associated with it, or if they have faced discrimination in the past. All employees within the Mass General Brigham System are encouraged to access OHS and HR if they have a concern that an accommodation may be needed to fulfill their work-related responsibilities.

An employee is not required to disclose specific information to their manager, such as a diagnosis, when requesting an accommodation. However, the employee should specify that a medical

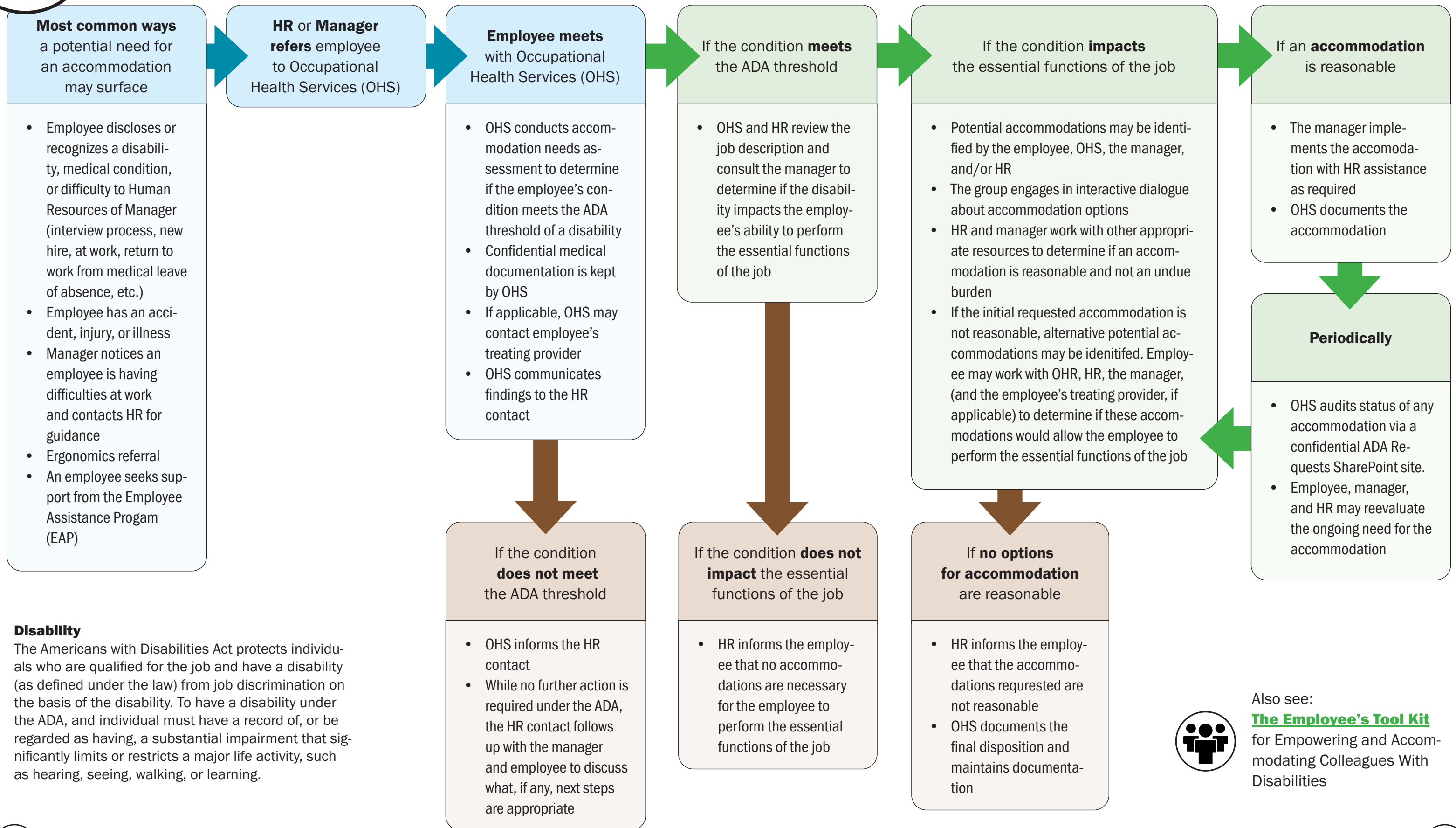
condition is affecting their job performance. If the employee believes they need an accommodation, they should contact OHS directly or work with their manager or their assigned HR Business Partner to contact OHS. OHS will meet with an employee and discuss the process of requesting an accommodation.

Prior to employment, most employees who work at entities within Mass General Brigham have an Occupational Health screening where OHS staff will ask the person if they have a disability which requires an accommodation at work. Mass General Brigham employees and Partner Community Physician Organization employees may not have OHS screenings, so Human Resources should be contacted if an accommodation is requested.

Human Resources should refer the employee to OHS if needed. Additionally, with large onboarding employee groups, like Medical Residents, occupational health screening may be done remotely. Adequate services, inaccessible physical spaces, and lack of health worker cultural competence, people with disabilities face additional barriers to receiving quality healthcare compared to people without disabilities. Employees with disabilities bring a fuller understanding of what living with a disability or chronic condition means for a patient and how it shapes their health. When valued and utilized, these unique perspectives of staff with disabilities allow us all to provide better care to our patients.



4) Process Flow Chart for Processing Accommodation Requests



Disability
The Americans with Disabilities Act protects individuals who are qualified for the job and have a disability (as defined under the law) from job discrimination on the basis of the disability. To have a disability under the ADA, and individual must have a record of, or be regarded as having, a substantial impairment that significantly limits or restricts a major life activity, such as hearing, seeing, walking, or learning.



Also see: [**The Employee's Tool Kit**](#) for Empowering and Accommodating Colleagues With Disabilities



5) **Supporting** and **Implementing** Accommodations



Over the span of a career, it is **likely** that a manager will supervise an employee who has a disability due to injury, illness or a medical condition.

The Role of the Manager

Onboarding

- If an employee requests an accommodation or discloses a disability during the onboarding process, the manager should refer the person to Occupational Health Services (OHS) and notify their HR Business Partner.
- If the manager has not already done so, they should share the job description/ requirements of the position with the employee. This will allow the employee to work with OHS to determine whether or not the person needs an accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of the job.
- If OHS determines that there is a need for an accommodation, the manager and HR Business Partner will determine whether the department is able to provide adaptations to the position or terms and conditions of work.

The implementation of a reasonable accommodation should be done under the guidance of OHS and Human Resources.

During Employment

Over the span of a career, it is likely that a manager will supervise an employee who has a disability due to injury, illness or a medical condition.

- If an employee requests an accommodation or discloses a disability during their employment, the manager should refer them to OHS and notify their HR Business Partner.
- If OHS determines that there is need for an accommodation, the manager and HR Business Partner will work to provide any adaptations that are reasonable and needed for the employee to perform their job.
- If an employee's disability is disclosed to the manager, the manager should not ask the employee with the disability to educate the manager or their colleagues about their condition.



The **Employee's Tool Kit** contains **Resource** and **Etiquette** sections that serve as a starting point for finding resources and guidelines on how to respectfully engage with any person with a disability. If needed, **OHS** and **HR** can provide education in how best to support the employee.





5) **Supporting** and **Implementing** Accommodations



The Role of Occupational Health Services

OHS is the primary conduit for employees with disabilities who seek an accommodation in the workplace. An employee seeking an accommodation should be connected to OHS by their manager or HR. OHS meets with the employee to determine if the employee's condition meets the ADA's definition of a disability. OHS may request the employee provide supporting medical documentation. If needed, and with permission from the employee, OHS may reach out directly to the employee's physician/service provider to understand the nature of the disability and what accommodations are needed for the employee. OHS communicates the employee's capability to perform the essential functions of the position to the HR Business Partner and the employee's manager.

Throughout the process, OHS confidentially maintains all medical documentation concerning the case from initial request through final disposition. OHS collaborates with the employee, their manager and the HR Business Partner to find a reasonable accommodation, if feasible.



The Role of Human Resources

The HR Business Partner should work with Occupational Health Services (OHS), the employee and their supervisor to develop a reasonable accommodation, if feasible, for the person to successfully complete their job. It is important to expeditiously implement approved accommodations. The HR Business Partner will stay in contact with OHS and the manager to offer continuing support for the employee.



For Additional Support

At any point during their employment, an employee with a disability or the employee's manager may request additional support from:

- Vice President or Director of Human Resources or their designee
- Occupational Health Services
- Employee Resource Group
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- The Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



5) **Supporting** and **Implementing** Accommodations



Confidentiality

An employee's medical and disability information should be shared with staff on a "need to know" basis. For example:

- If an employee's disability is an impairment which requires specific changes in schedule or work space, a supervisor may need to be aware that accommodations are required for that employee. However, the manager does not need to know the employee's specific impairment or condition.
- If the impairment is a medical condition which would necessitate staff training or an in-work care plan, a supervisor may need to know the specific disability and how to best provide assistance. However, this does not mean that everyone on the person's team or department "needs to know" about the person's disability.

OHS, HR, and the employee may discuss who "needs to know" prior to any disclosures of an accommodation or disability to a supervisor or colleague(s) so that employee remains aware of who knows about their disability.



The Role of Colleagues

Employees often develop personal friendships at work and may share information about their disability with others. Disclosing a disability to a colleague is a personal decision that indicates a person trusts their co-worker(s). When a person shares that they have a disability, this does not mean they want that information shared with others. If and when a person shares that they have a disability, a colleague may want to ask them if they have shared this information with the team, department or the organization. This will prevent someone from inadvertently sharing this information without the other person's consent.

Our **Employee's Tool Kit** is an important companion resource for learning about disability and disability-related issues, including:



- Conceptualizing disability as an important element of diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Emphasizing the importance of disability inclusion in the workplace for the Mass General Brigham System.
- Sharing internal and external disability resources.

Mass General Brigham
OFFICE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

