



VIUFA Disability Management & Rehabilitation Representative

2023-24 Report

I would like to open this report with a note of gratitude to the Quw'utsun', Tla'amin, Snaw-naw-as and Xwkwwa'luxwum First Nations on whose territories we teach, learn, and research.

This has been a difficult year at VIU. For some of our local members, it has been devastating, due to layoffs and program closures. I want to begin my report by urging anyone who is affected, directly or indirectly, in ways that have damaged their health, either mental or physical, to reach out to me at dmr@viufa.ca if there is anything I can do to help. Sometimes, a bit of time away from the workplace to regroup can be a lifeline to regaining wellness, and I am happy to help anyone who needs that time to navigate the system. Knowing what to say, what not to say, and how to approach the process can make a big difference to the success of a disability claim.

I also want to remind members of the new bargained benefits, which can be reviewed [here](#), and to express my gratitude to the Bargaining Committee for their efforts to obtain these much needed improvements for us.

The good news is that this year we have had no claims denied by Manulife—at least not to my knowledge. If you or someone you know has had a claim denied, then please let me know immediately; there may be ways to reverse the decision if it is dealt with promptly.

Last year I was elected chair of the FPSE DMRC. As part of that role, I am honored to also serve as a member of the JCBA [Joint Committee on Benefits Administration]. With that committee, I help to design and program training for DMRC members sector-wide, which should be delivered every two years. It has been some time since we have been able to organize in-person training, due to COVID-19, but this year both the JCBA and the DMRC are focusing on the task. Thus, I have been involved in putting together the two-day training session which will run May 30-31.

The focus of that training is Mental Health, and my union colleagues and I on the JCBA have successfully pushed to have at least one of the workshops presented by the CMHA [Canadian Mental Health Association], rather than by the insurer or our EFAP provider. We felt it was essential to have at least one voice that was not contracted to the employer. The DMRC will sponsor the session out of our FPSE budget.

Earlier this year, we also put together a set of “basic training” webinars for new DMRC members, to ensure cross-sector knowledge of the disability process.

This year's in-person training and its focus on Mental Health seems particularly important in the wake of the pandemic, but also, more specifically at VIU, in the midst of our budgetary crisis. Again, if you or someone you know is experiencing illness or disability arising from these issues or ones that are more personal, please reach out and let me help. Statistically, claims go much better when JRC members such as myself are involved early in the process.

DMRC members from other locals continue to report that some local employers are using the AMA [Abilities Management Access Program—which used to be called the “Attendance Management Access” Program] and other Manulife services in ways that are not appropriate or in alignment with best practices:

- Some locals report that Manulife is being used as an adjudicator, deciding whether members have access to their collectively bargained 30 sick days—particularly for older members, who (if they are past 65) do not have access to LTD, and who (if they are over 70) do not have access to STD.
- Some locals report that Manulife is being used to adjudicate whether members should receive workplace accommodation.

There is a glaring problem with having the insurance carrier decide whether we have access to our collectively bargained rights. The DMRC will continue to collect details on this, and will share them as appropriate with PC [FPSE President's Council], CARC [FPSE Contract Administration Review Committee], and BCC [FPSE Bargaining Co-ordination Committee].

Fortunately, these issues are not impacting us at VIU, and our benefits team at HR continues to work hard to support our members. I am grateful to Josephine McNeilly, Dana Swartz, and Renee Brown for their collaborative approach and collegiality.

Respectfully submitted,

Anna Atkinson