

# Partners in Workplace Inclusion



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FOR WORKPLACE HEALTH SCIENCES

## Common Ground

Issue 01 | June 2026

A bimonthly newsletter for NIDMAR and PCU-WHS's community of employers, workers, and partners

## Opening Note

It has been a milestone few weeks for our community, with the launch of the CDMP-E designation, a new partnership with WSIB, a ceremony in Belgium, and MBA convocation for one of our own. Each of these moments reflects what this organization has always been working toward: a field that is taken seriously, practitioners who are recognized, and people who stay connected to work because someone showed up for them.

We're grateful for everything you bring to this work.

— Wolfgang Zimmermann, OBC



## FEATURE

### A New Standard for Leadership in Disability Management

*On May 25, 2026, a new designation was awarded for the first time. Here's what it meant to the people who received it, and the community that helped build it.*

On a Monday afternoon in Vancouver, eight people became the first to hold a credential that didn't exist two years ago.

The Certified Disability Management Professional Executive designation — CDMP-E — was officially recognized on May 25, 2026. Certificates were presented by NIDMAR Board of Directors Co-Chair Sari Sairanen with Prof. Dr. Lorne Sulsky, the psychometric architect of the designation, as witness.

Five recipients received their certificates in person: Leslie Allan-Reed, Rebecca Chow, Lani deHek, Bill Dyer, and Shanna Ramm. Three more — Lorraine Evans, Denyse McFadden, and Dianna St-Pierre — were also recognized.

It was, by any measure, a small ceremony. But for a field that has spent decades building its credibility in the shadow of larger HR designations, it felt like something bigger.

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## What the CDMP-E actually is

In the field of disability management, the CDMP-E is a new capstone.

To be eligible, candidates must already hold the CDMP and have maintained it for at least five years. They need at least two years of senior leadership experience during the last five years under their belt. By the time someone sits for this designation, they've already built a career overseeing staff, managing programs, and contributing to organizational policy and strategy.

Which is exactly why the assessment doesn't look like a typical exam. There are no multiple choice questions. Instead, candidates sit through a structured interview — one that puts them in leadership scenarios drawn from the real domains of DM practice and asks: what would you do?

Lorne Sulsky, who led the psychometric design of the process, spent years getting it right alongside Wolfgang Zimmermann. They ran mock interviews. Tested the scoring. Refined the rubrics. "Wolfgang and I did the pilot testing together," Sulsky says. "We did six or seven mock interviews, and our reliability was off the charts."

The interview format wasn't an accident. "The individuals applying for this designation are going to be leaders," Sulsky explains. "They're going to be individuals who probably haven't written an exam in years. We wanted to give them a different experience... one that gets at how they think about leadership in different situations."

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## What it meant to get it

For Leslie, Director of Disability Management Services at Fraser Health (one of the largest health authorities in Western Canada) the CDMP-E offered something she'd been looking for in her field for a long time: credibility on par with other professional designations.

"HR professionals have the CPHR," she says. "Having a similar designation from a disability management point of view lends credibility to what we do. It highlights that there are individuals doing this work, and that the work is as important."

She has led Fraser Health's DM program since its inception in 2001, building it from the ground up across three merged health organizations. She was also part of the subject matter expert group that helped develop the CDMP-E itself. "Being involved in the creation, and then actually being one of the first to receive it — that was validating," she says. "I mean, for me, it's exciting to see similar credentialing in [disability management] as its own entity."

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Lani deHek, who works in disability management from the union side of healthcare, was initially hesitant to put her name forward. "When they first asked, it didn't work for me," she says. "And then I got a call from Wolfgang" — whose reputation of being particularly persuasive held up. "I was like, all right, I'll do it."

She describes the exam itself as unexpectedly reflective. "The exam had me do that — really reflect on how I got here. What is my experience that I bring, and what value? And what am I doing with that now, and how am I leading?" She pauses. "I don't think I reflect on that a lot. You just get busy *doing*."

For Sari Sairanen, NIDMAR Co-Chair and one of the people who presented the certificates, the day carried its own significance. "It validates the vision that Wolfgang has, and the recognition from the Board as well," she said. "This is one area where we are true change makers in societal attitude, and meaningful workplace culture change."

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## What comes next

For Sulsky, the ceremony was just the beginning. The test bank will grow over time as the field evolves. Mental health claims are outpacing physical ones, AI is part of the workplace, long-term COVID is a real disability category now. The CDMP-E will have to keep up.

There's already international interest. Malaysia's Social Security Organization has been watching the designation closely, and a version tailored to their context is in the works. "They're getting the questions, they're getting the benchmarks, and they're getting the training," Sulsky says. "They should be off to the races."

And the first eight recipients? They might not stay on just one side of this process for long. Sulsky sees them as a natural pipeline for something else: assessors. "You're not only creating a new designation," he says, "but you're simultaneously creating a pipeline for what comes next."



L-to-R: Sari Sairanen with Leslie, Rebecca, Lani, Bill, and Shanna receiving their CDMP-E certificates in Vancouver.

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## NEWS & UPDATES

**WSIB Partnership Launched.** NIDMAR has formally launched a new partnership with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board of Ontario (WSIB), scheduled to run to 2030. The agreement includes funded workplace assessments and continuing education credits through Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences (PCU-WHS). The partnership is focused on helping Ontario workplaces reduce the financial and human cost of disability.

**RPI Presented to BC Presidents Group.** On June 4, Wolfgang Zimmermann, Bill Dyer, and Shane Simpson presented NIDMAR's Reducing Poverty Initiative to the BC Presidents Group — a consortium of more than two dozen employers representing all sectors of BC's economy, operating under the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Minister Sheila Malcolmson and Parliamentary Secretary Dana Lajeunesse were in attendance. The ministry provided both the WDA and RPI grants that support this initiative.

**Belgium Reaches 175 Certified Professionals.** In early May, Belgium's official awarding ceremony for DM certificates saw 57 of 86 candidates successfully complete their exams — 32 earning the CRTWC and 25 the CDMP. Belgium now has 175 active certificate holders, a milestone that reflects the continued strength of the country's disability management program.

**AI in Disability Management — Now in Its Fifth Offering.** DMCS 740, PCU-WHS's three-week course on leveraging AI in disability management, has now run five times — including a recent offering in Australia for personal injury administration professionals. The 36-hour, three-module course is designed for DM practitioners who want practical skills, not just theory: how to use AI tools to manage notes, documents, workflows, and follow-up more efficiently. If you missed the last cohort, watch for the next offering at [pcu-whs.ca](http://pcu-whs.ca).

**New Course: Managing Grief at Work.** DMCS 630 is a new course designed for DM professionals supporting workers through loss. Grief in the workplace is under-addressed, and its impacts on attendance, performance, and recovery are real. This course gives practitioners the tools to recognize and respond to grief as a factor in workplace disability. Details at [pcu-whs.ca](http://pcu-whs.ca).

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## SECTOR SPOTLIGHT

### The Real Cost of Disability Leave

Numbers like this have a way of cutting through abstraction: the City of Edmonton spent just under \$22 million on disability replacement costs in a single year — the cost of backfilling roles while employees were off on disability leave.

That figure doesn't include treatment, rehabilitation, or long-term benefit costs. It's just the cost of keeping the lights on while someone is away.

It's a useful number to have in your back pocket, because the case for disability management still needs to be made in many organizations. DM isn't just a human resources function or a compliance obligation — it's a cost containment strategy, a workforce sustainability strategy, and, at its best, a health equity intervention.

When people have access to early, coordinated support after an injury or illness, they return to work faster, recover more fully, and cost their employers less. The challenge is that those benefits are distributed over time and across departments, while the costs of doing nothing show up on a single line item.

The Edmonton figure is a useful reminder of what that line item can look like.

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## Coming Up

**IFDM 2026 — Edinburgh, Scotland.** The International Forum on Disability Management takes place September 22–23, 2026. More information at [ifdm2026.com](http://ifdm2026.com).

**PCU-WHS Fall Intake — BC Scholarship Deadline Extended (Final Extension).** Scholarship opportunities for BC residents applying to the Bachelor of Disability Management program are available for the Fall 2026 intake. The deadline has been extended one final time to July 15, 2026. If you or someone you know has been waiting, now is the time. Visit [www.pcu-whs.ca](http://www.pcu-whs.ca) to apply.

**DM Solutions Platform — Coming Soon.** PCU-WHS is in the final stages of rolling out the DM Solutions Platform: an AI-powered tool built on real-world case studies contributed by CDMPs. The platform grew out of the WDA grant and is designed to give practitioners fast access to the kind of accumulated practice knowledge that normally lives only in people's heads. To contribute a case study, you'll need to hold your CDMP — which means the knowledge base stays grounded in the people who've actually done this work. More details coming soon.

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*NIDMAR and PCU-WHS respectfully acknowledge that their offices are located on the traditional and unceded territories of the Hupačasath and Tseshah First Nations of western Vancouver Island.*

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## Questions or story ideas?

Contact us at [nidmar@nidmar.ca](mailto:nidmar@nidmar.ca) or at [info@pcu-whs.ca](mailto:info@pcu-whs.ca)

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