

Perspectives on living with chronic conditions

An annual community
impact report

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The one in three you don't see

A call for connection and compassion in chronic care

Did you know that one in three people around the world are currently living with a hidden condition? That means millions are navigating health challenges that deeply affect their emotional, physical, and social well-being, often without others even knowing.

Many of these challenges stem from physical chronic conditions involving the digestive or urinary systems, which may require ostomy or continence care. These conditions can be life-altering, but with the right support, they don't have to be life-limiting. Whether through surgical interventions like stoma formation or ongoing continence management, clinical care can dramatically improve quality of life, helping people avoid discomfort, pain, and serious complications.

But treatment is just the beginning. While clinical care lays the foundation, the real journey unfolds in the everyday moments that follow: the questions, the adjustments, and the quiet vulnerabilities. This is where healing continues, and where connection and support truly matter.

This report, *Perspectives on living with chronic conditions*, explores what comes next. Drawing on insights from a wide-reaching international survey, it highlights a central truth: human connection plays a critical role in long-term well-being. And it's how we live up to Convatec's promise of *Forever Caring*.

The findings shared within this report reveal both the complexity and resilience of life with physical chronic conditions. From the

impact of stigma and isolation to the importance of education, empathy, and peer support, the voices in this report speak candidly and powerfully. The data in this report reminds us to see the whole person. Not just their diagnosis or treatment.

We've timed the release of this data to coincide with Ostomy Awareness Month, recognising that this movement is part of a broader effort to reduce stigma and foster inclusivity for all people living with chronic conditions. *Perspectives on living with chronic conditions* reflects a shared commitment, among patients, providers, carers, and advocates, to lead with heart.

With compassion and respect for all members of the global chronic condition community,

Bruno Pinheiro
*President &
Chief Operating Officer,
Ostomy Care
Convatec*



**1 in 3 people globally are
diagnosed with a physical
chronic condition.**



The perception gap

What 10,000 voices reveal about physical chronic conditions

Exploring the disconnect between public assumptions and lived realities

Living with a physical chronic condition often means walking a delicate line between visibility and autonomy. Many people express a desire to be seen as more than their condition, to be recognised for their full humanity, talents, and experiences. At the same time, there's a deep need for the condition to be *acknowledged*, not ignored or minimised but understood as a meaningful part of their journey.

This duality reflects the complexity of identity: wanting the freedom to define oneself beyond a diagnosis, while also honouring the truth of what that diagnosis has shaped. It's not contradiction; it's nuance.

But what does this look like in real life? What is life really like for someone living with a chronic condition?

Convatec set out to explore the lived experiences of individuals with physical chronic conditions, contrasting them with how the general public perceives those experiences. We surveyed more than 10,000 respondents across multiple countries who live with heart disease, Long COVID, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Crohn's disease, incontinence, diabetes, cancer, asthma, and more. Collectively, these conditions account for six of the ten leading causes of death globally.

We've uncovered a powerful narrative of resilience, misalignment between public perception and lived reality, and the urgent need for greater awareness.

Convatec set out to explore the lived experiences of individuals with physical chronic conditions, contrasting them with how the general public perceives those experiences.

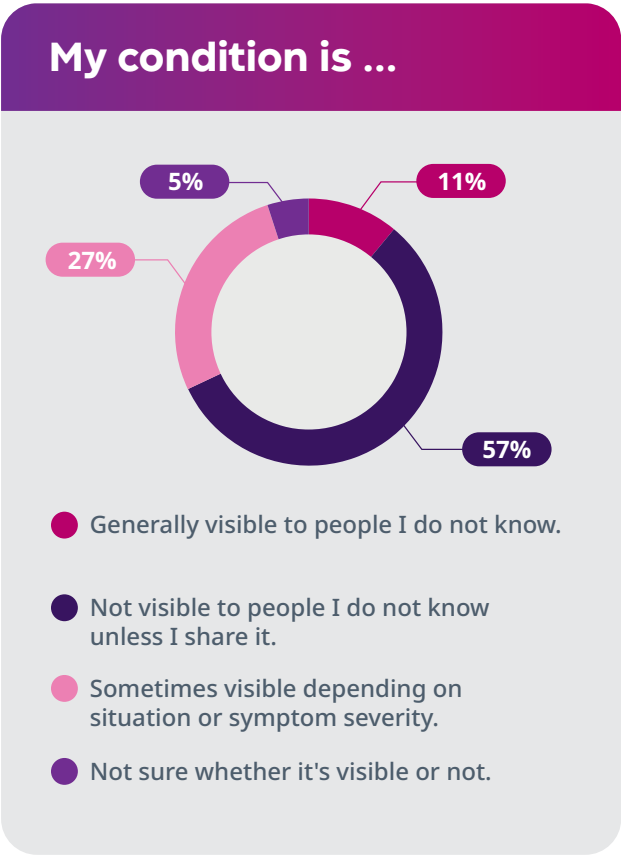
Hidden in plain sight

How the invisibility of chronic conditions contributes to stigma and silence

Even though one in three people globally are diagnosed with a physical chronic condition, public awareness still lags behind. Perhaps this is because 84% of these conditions are either not visible to others (57%) or only sometimes visible (27%), depending on the situation or symptom severity. This makes them easy to overlook or misunderstand.

Awareness gaps are especially stark when it comes to lesser-known conditions. While 71% of the general population say they know “at least a little” about physical chronic conditions overall, that number drops significantly for specific diagnoses. For example, 91% report some familiarity with cancer, but only 49% say the same about ostomy or continence conditions.

This data underscores a critical truth: chronic conditions are more prevalent than many people think. Recognising their prevalence is the first step towards reducing stigma, improving care, and building systems that support people with dignity and understanding.



Overall, 11% of respondents have visible conditions while 84% have hidden conditions.

More capable than you think

The reality of work, independence, and resilience among people with physical chronic conditions

When it comes to physical chronic conditions, public perception may paint a more grim picture than the lived reality. Our data reveals a striking disconnect.

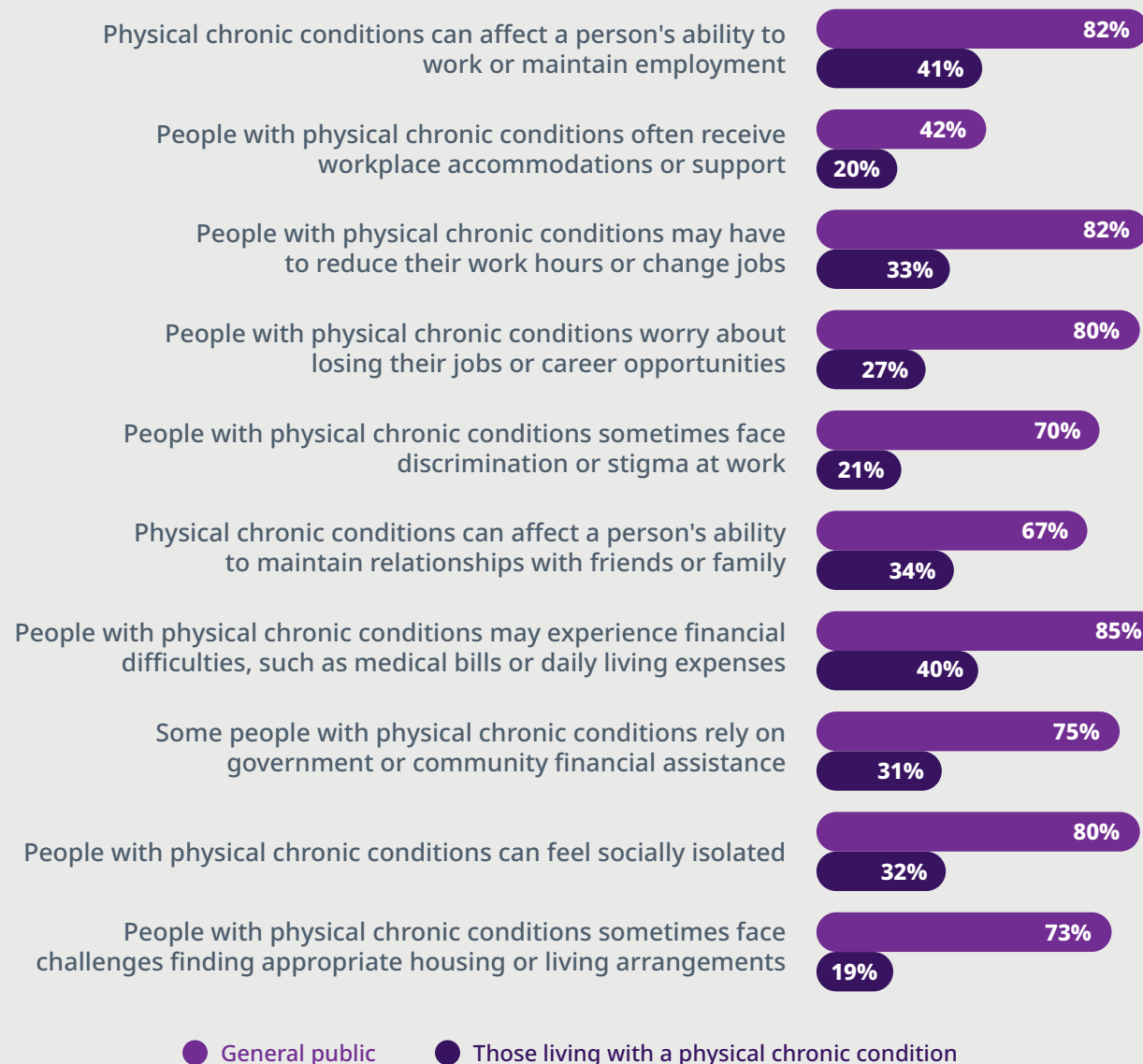
This gap in understanding has real consequences. For instance, while 82% of the general public believes physical chronic conditions significantly impact a person's ability to work, only 41% of those living with such conditions say their health has affected their employment.

These mismatched perceptions shape how society views people with chronic conditions, often reinforcing stigma, evoking pity, or fuelling misconceptions about their capabilities. In reality, most individuals with physical chronic conditions lead full, productive lives, successfully managing their health while thriving in their careers, relationships, and communities.

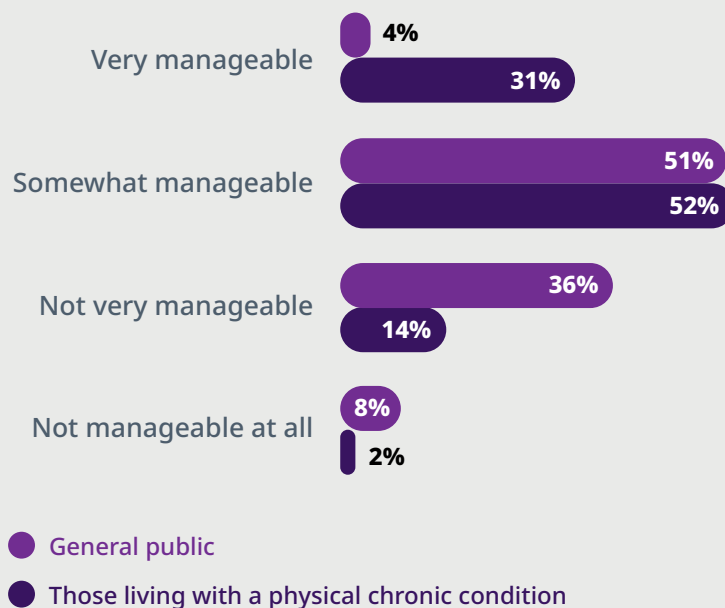


The general public overestimates the challenges facing people with physical chronic conditions by as much as 300%.

Perception versus reality about physical chronic conditions



How manageable is your physical chronic condition(s) on a daily basis?



Overestimating the negative impact of chronic conditions can influence policy decisions, workplace adjustments, and social support systems. When assumptions drive these choices, they risk overlooking the nuanced realities and strengths of those living with chronic conditions.

To shift this narrative, we must centre real experiences and amplify authentic voices. Physical chronic conditions don't diminish potential. They're part of life that millions navigate with resilience, adaptability, and purpose.



Overall, only 55% of the general public believes that living with a physical chronic condition is manageable versus 83% of those actually living with a physical chronic condition themselves.





Understanding the emotional landscape

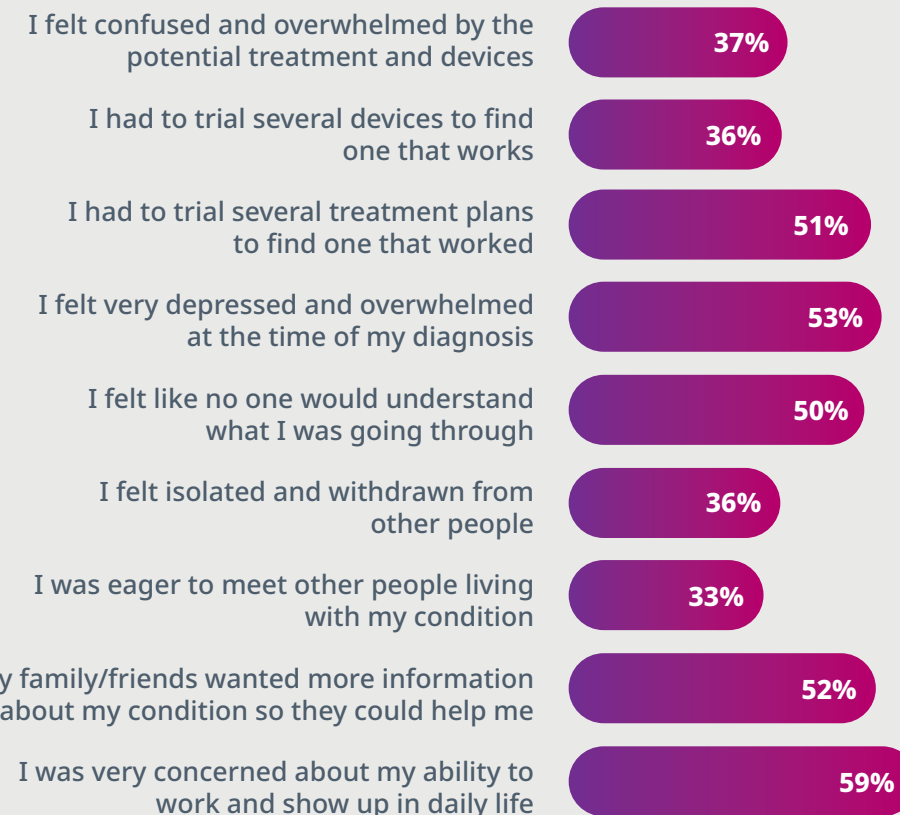
The emotional reality of living with a physical chronic condition in a world that doesn't always get it

Being diagnosed with a physical chronic condition is more than a medical moment. It's an emotional turning point. More than half of our survey participants (53%) said they felt depressed or overwhelmed at the time of diagnosis. And these feelings don't simply fade. Even after adjusting to life with their condition, 40% still feel misunderstood, revealing a persistent emotional toll.

Support from others can make a meaningful difference. Participants pointed to three key sources of emotional support in the first couple of years after diagnosis:

- **Healthcare professionals (70%)** who treated them with care and empathy and took time to answer their questions
- **Peer support (62%)** that connects individuals with others who've walked a similar path, easing isolation and building resilience and community
- **Family and friends (58%)** who remain actively informed about their condition, and whose presence and understanding make a profound difference

In the first couple of years after your diagnosis, to what extent did you agree with the following statements?



Survey insights

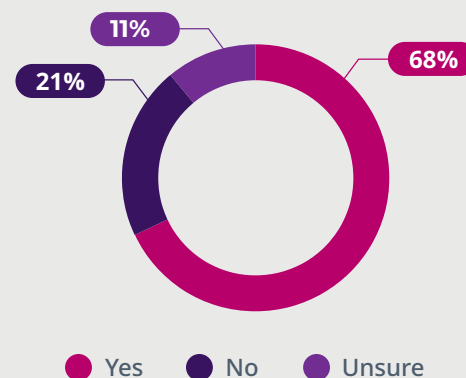
When asked where they currently turn for support, participants cited multiple options, leading with family (52%), healthcare professionals (44%), and friends (37%).

But even with these support systems in place, many still carry a quiet fear: *What will others think?* The stigma surrounding physical chronic conditions remains strong. People worry about being judged, pitied, or misunderstood especially when their condition isn't visible.

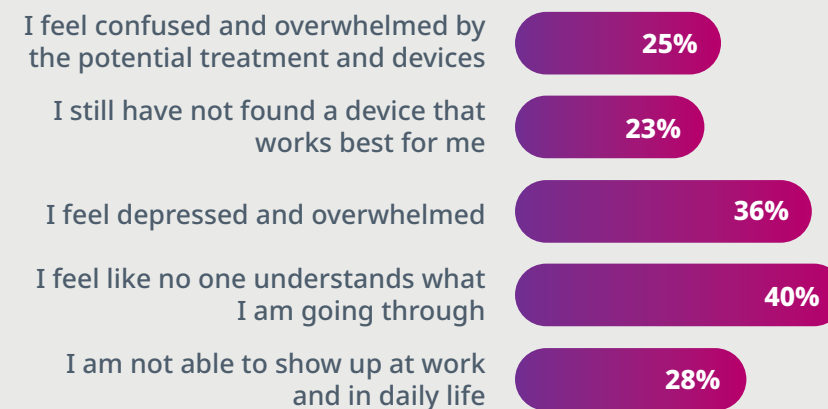
That's why three in four people with chronic conditions say they wish there was greater public awareness. This number climbs to 80% among those living with an ostomy or using intermittent catheters.



Do you feel emotionally supported by those around you?



At present, to what extent do you agree with each of the following?



You're not alone

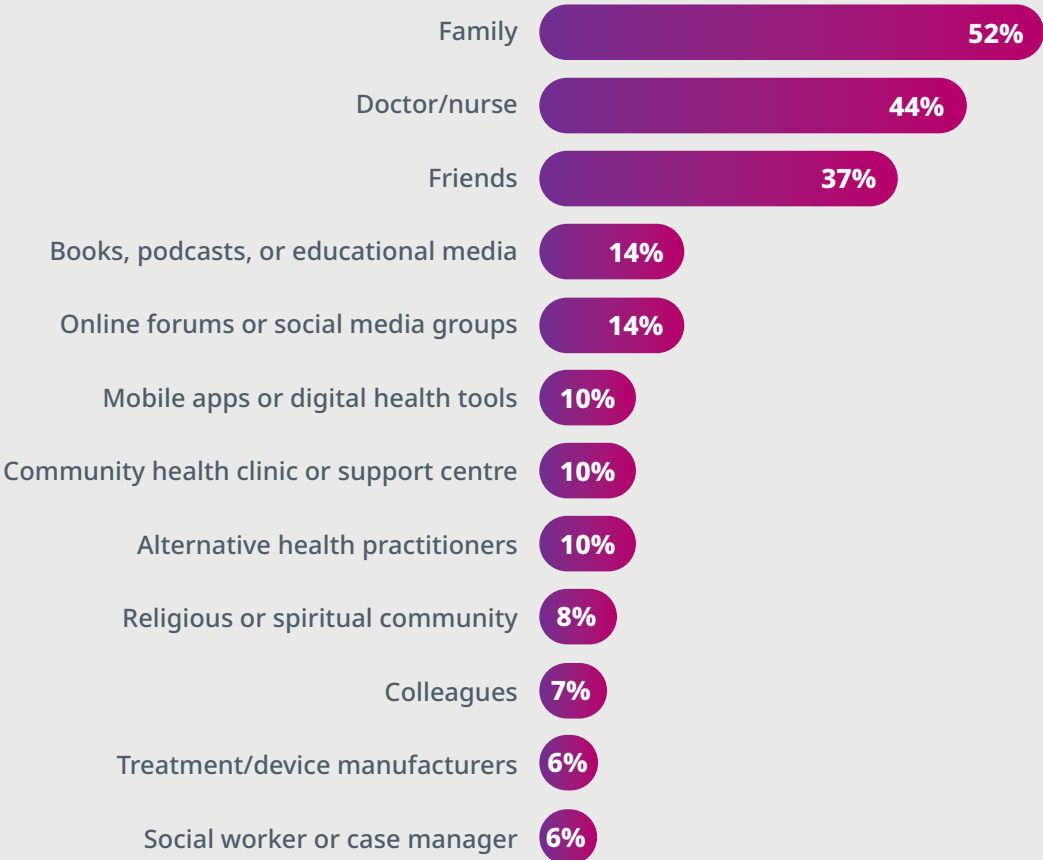
Following diagnosis, here are some common experiences across people newly living with a chronic condition:

50%
felt like no one would understand what they were going through.

51%
had to trial several treatment plans to find one that worked.

59%
were concerned about their ability to work and show up to daily life.

Where do you turn for support?



The cost of mismatched understanding

How stigma shapes lives and silences the truth of physical chronic conditions



Stigma remains one of the most persistent barriers faced by people living with physical chronic conditions. Survey data reveals a clear disconnect between public perception and lived experience; the general public often assumes that individuals with physical chronic conditions are more dependent and limited than they actually are. In fact, 70% of respondents said the average person doesn't understand what it's like to live with a physical chronic condition.

This misunderstanding isn't just inaccurate, it's harmful. It can lead to discrimination, social isolation, and a diminished sense of self-worth for those affected. When people are viewed through the lens of limitation rather than capability, it shapes how they're treated in workplaces, social settings, and even healthcare settings.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following?



Survey insights

One of the most telling insights from the survey is that 59% of people admit to downplaying their condition to avoid making others uncomfortable. This quiet self-censorship speaks volumes about the emotional labour involved in caring for not just the condition itself, but also the reactions of others. It highlights how stigma can pressure individuals to mask their struggles, even when support and understanding are most needed.

Despite these challenges, many individuals with physical chronic conditions live independently, pursue careers, raise families, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Their resilience and adaptability often go unseen, overshadowed by assumptions rooted in fear or misinformation.

And the pressure to conform to societal expectations is real: 52% feel compelled to appear a certain way even when struggling physically. This number jumps to 65% among those who have a condition requiring ostomy care or continence care.

Even in healthcare settings, 43% said they often need to advocate for themselves because their condition is misunderstood or minimised. This number jumps to 60% among those who require ostomy or continence care.



59% of people downplay their physical chronic condition to avoid making others feel uncomfortable.

To dismantle stigma, we must replace assumptions with empathy and elevate real stories over stereotypes. Seventy-four percent of participants wish there was more public awareness about the realities of living with physical chronic conditions. Education, visibility, and inclusive dialogue are key to building a society where people with physical chronic conditions are seen for who they are, not just the diagnoses they carry.



From awareness to action

Why understanding isn't enough and what real support looks like

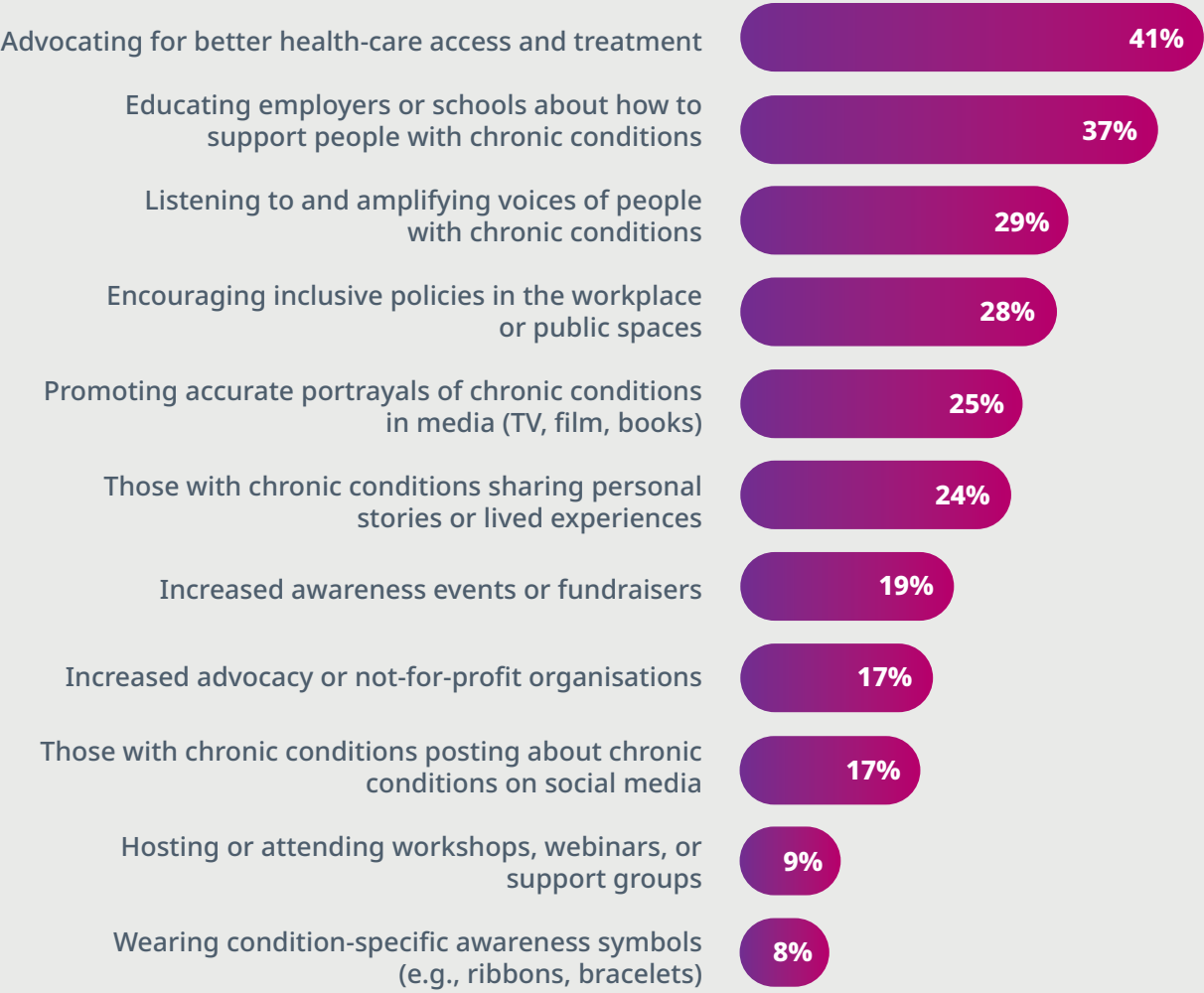


Physical chronic conditions affect millions of people, yet stigma and misunderstanding continue to create barriers to care, employment, and community support. To truly improve the lives of those living with physical chronic conditions, we must bridge the gap between awareness and action.

Our data explores two perspectives: how confident the general public feels about supporting loved ones with chronic physical conditions, and how emotionally supported people living with these conditions actually feel.

When asked, 68% of the general public said they feel confident, either very or somewhat, in supporting someone with a chronic condition. Interestingly, 68% of people living with physical chronic conditions also reported feeling emotionally supported by those around them.

How would you like to see people raise awareness about physical chronic conditions?



Survey insights

However, more than a quarter of participants lacked confidence: 25% were not very confident, and 3% not confident at all. This suggests that while many want to help, a significant number may not feel equipped to do so effectively.

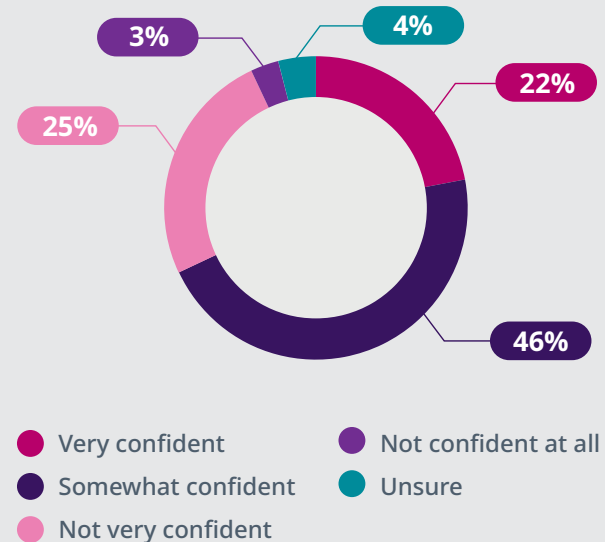
The most common barriers to offering support included:

- Lack of understanding about the person's condition or needs (41%)
- Uncertainty about what to say or do (37%)
- Practical limitations like distance (33%), time (30%), and financial circumstances (27%)
- Emotional concerns, such as fear of offending (25%), overstepping (20%), or discomfort (18%)
- Assumptions that the person prefers to manage alone (13%) or past negative experiences (7%)

Among those living with physical chronic conditions, while most feel supported, 21% do not, and 11% are unsure if they feel supported or not, highlighting a meaningful gap that still needs to be addressed.

Bridging the gap means moving beyond awareness to action.

How confident are you that you could support friends or family?



What would negatively impact providing support?



Overall, 68% of the general public is confident that they could support a friend or family member.

Where do we go from here?



For those living with chronic conditions:
own your narrative.

You are more than your diagnosis, and your experience deserves to be seen, heard, and respected. Advocate for the visibility you need, while also claiming the space to be defined by your passions, relationships, and dreams.

For the general public:
listen with empathy and see with nuance.

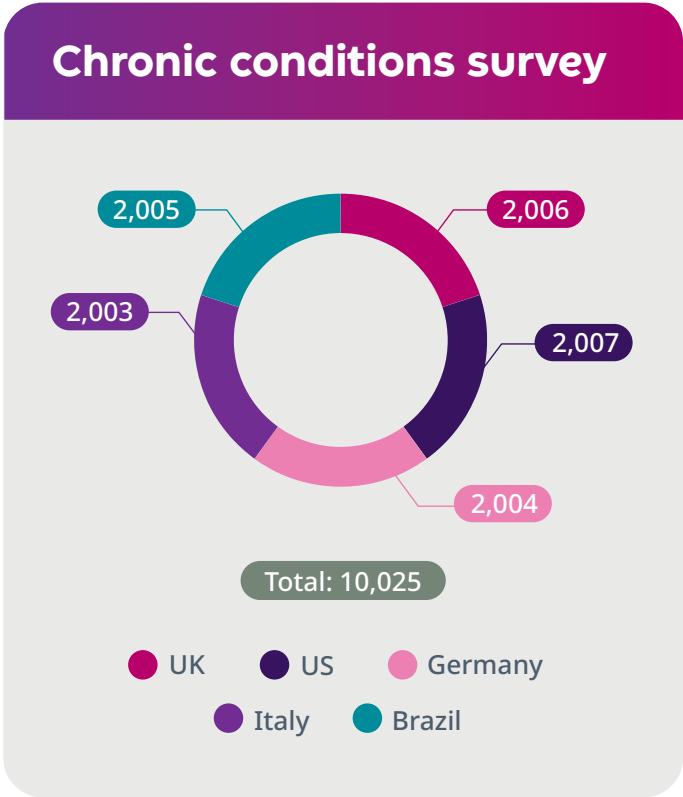
Don't reduce people to their conditions, but don't ignore them either. Acknowledge the realities they face, and make room for their full humanity. Whether you're a friend, colleague, caregiver, or stranger, your understanding can help build a more inclusive and compassionate world.



Our methodology

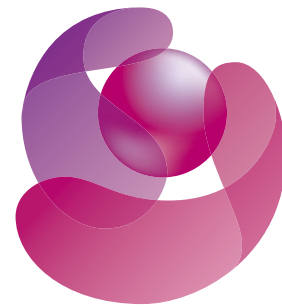
Convatec worked with a third party to conduct a nationally representative survey of 10,025 adults across the United States, United Kingdom, Brazil, Italy, and Germany, from August 11–19, 2025.

Our questions explored the perceptions and reality of living with a physical chronic condition.



Chronic conditions reported in the survey included:

Musculoskeletal Conditions (e.g. arthritis, fibromyalgia, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, spinal cord injury / spina bifida)	24%
Metabolic and Endocrine Conditions (e.g. diabetes, thyroid conditions, metabolic syndrome)	24%
Cardiovascular Conditions (e.g. heart disease, hypertension, stroke)	24%
Respiratory Conditions (e.g. asthma, COPD, pulmonary fibrosis)	19%
Neurological Conditions (e.g. multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, migraine, neuropathy)	15%
Autoimmune and Inflammatory Conditions (e.g. lupus, Crohn's, ulcerative colitis, psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis)	14%
Cancer	4%
Advanced Wound Care Needs (e.g. diabetic ulcers, pressure sores, chronic surgical wounds)	3%
Ostomy or Continence Conditions (e.g. colostomy, urostomy, ileostomy, bladder or bowel dysfunction)	3%
Rare or Genetic Conditions (e.g. cystic fibrosis, sickle cell disease, muscular dystrophy)	2%
Palliative or Supportive Care Needs (e.g. long-term symptom management, advanced illness care)	1%
Other	17%



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