

# Building the path forward for accommodation and leave professionals



2025 DMEC  
Annual Impact Report





## Our Mission

DMEC's mission is to advance strategies, foster thought leadership, and provide employers, HR professionals, absence management practitioners, and suppliers with trusted tools, education, and networking opportunities necessary to effectively manage absence, disability, and time-off challenges in the workplace.

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# Building the path forward

Every day, accommodation and leave management professionals make decisions that change people's lives. Whether someone keeps their job during a health crisis, gets the accommodation they need to stay productive, or understands their rights under a law that just changed last month, someone in this field made that happen.

Historically, most of them did it without a roadmap.

**DMEC exists to change that.** Over the past 30 years, this organization has grown from a handful of employers sharing what they knew into the professional home for accommodation and leave management. In 2025, that home got stronger. New competency frameworks gave practitioners a career path they could envision and advocate for. New research tools gave organizations the data to make better program decisions. And a deepening engagement with policy makers brought employer expertise into the legislative conversations shaping the future of work.

This report reflects a profession investing in itself, and a community that shows up to build what comes next together.

**Because on this path, no one walks alone.**



# Words from our CEO



Accommodation and leave management professionals are doing some of the most consequential work in HR today. They support employees through health crises and caregiving challenges, keep organizations compliant, and advocate for people at some of the most difficult moments of their lives. And yet, for most of the professionals doing this work, there has never been a clearly defined path forward. No established career ladder. No widely recognized standard for what mastery looks like.

## **Building that path is what DMEC is here to do.**

These last three years have been a lot of foundation laying. We modernized the CLMS program, expanded our microcredential library, and launched a leave planning tool that members have already used more than 4,000 times. Each of those efforts came from listening closely to what our community actually needs. That same instinct drove us to establish DMEC's first Leadership Council in 2025, bringing together senior employer leaders to advance the policy priorities that will define this field going forward.

We have more planned. New credentials, a clearer career path for practitioners, and a digital experience that makes it easier for every member to get what they need.

Through 2029, we will release eight new microcredential courses every year and continue building the role-based competency frameworks that give practitioners a visible path through their careers. The sky is the limit in terms of what we can build, when we can build it, and how far we can take this community. We have only just begun.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bryon E. Bass". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a thin horizontal line.

Bryon E. Bass, CLMS  
Chief Executive Officer, DMEC



**"We've only just begun. We have a lot coming our way this year and into the future. These last three years have been really a lot of foundation laying and now we're going to start seeing the fruits of that labor!"**

Bryon E. Bass, CLMS  
Chief Executive Officer, DMEC

# What guides us

DMEC strives to embody five core values in our day-to-day interactions with members, sponsors, and each other.



## PASSION

We are passionate about the work we do each day to support the mission and vision of DMEC. From daily tasks to strategic projects, we put our heart and soul into our work. Our goal is that our members and sponsors see that passion and embrace the vision of DMEC alongside us.



## REPUTATION MATTERS

Integrity and honesty are what matter most in our interactions with members, sponsors, and each other. We strive to always do what we say we are going to do. And if we fall short, we take ownership and do better next time.

**"In 2025, we made a deliberate commitment to focus on the member experience: thanking our members, appreciating them, and tailoring what we offer to what they actually need. The potential here is extraordinary, and we are just getting started."**

LeAnn Swanson  
Vice President, Operations, DMEC



## FORWARD THINKING

Today's effort and planning ensure tomorrow's success. Whether it is new tools or new systems, we are always looking for better ways to serve our members now and in the future. We commit our time, effort, and resources to advancing DMEC's mission for years to come.



## COLLABORATIVE

We are only as strong as our team, our members, and our sponsors. Everyone's voice and expertise matter. We encourage our staff, volunteers, and sponsors to play a key role in charting our course and building our future together.



## MEMBER-FOCUSED

There is a reason members say they feel at home with DMEC. We are here to empower them to be better employers, and that shows up in every interaction we have. Whether they need help getting registered or a resource to tackle a tough issue, we are focused on meeting their needs.

# Our members

Building the path forward in accommodation and leave management starts with the people walking it. In 2025, DMEC members represented organizations of every size and sector: small businesses managing leave for the first time, mid-sized manufacturers navigating complex state laws, large employers coordinating programs across dozens of states, and suppliers supporting them all, along with individual members. Walmart, Delta Air Lines, Caterpillar, Harvard University, and EY are among the organizations whose professionals used DMEC resources this year.

**22,000+**

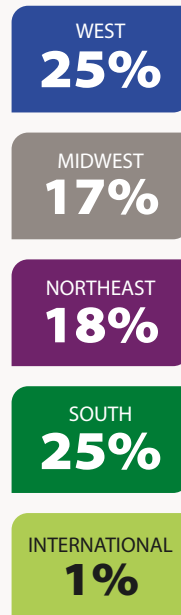
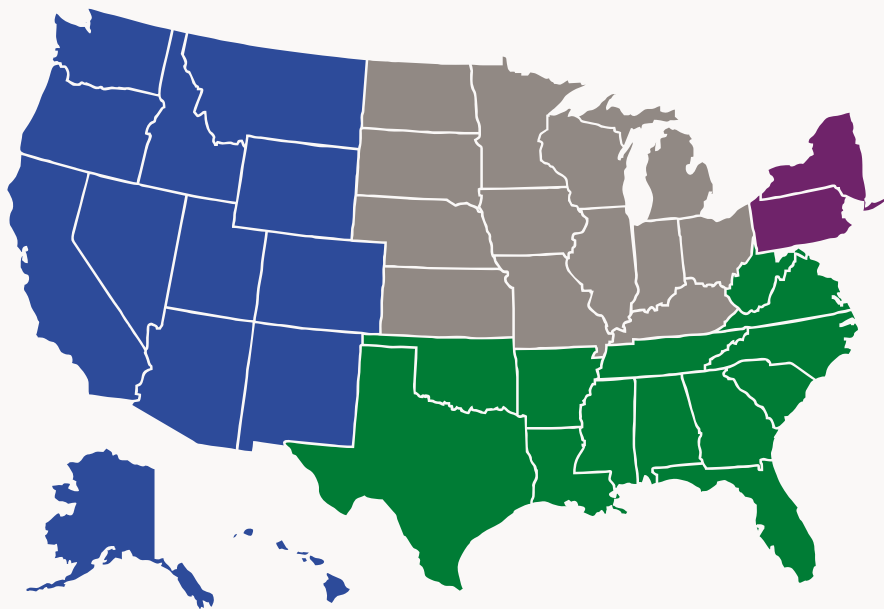
ACTIVE MEMBERS

The 2025 member engagement survey put overall satisfaction at 95%. Members do not stay because they have to. They stay because the resources, the education, and the people they meet here are specific to what they do. Accommodation and leave management is a specialty, and DMEC treats it as one. Members come from across the U.S. and Canada. The West and South each account for about 25% of members, the Northeast for 18%, and the Midwest for 17%.

Most members work within organizations of all types, including employers and suppliers, while others participate as individual members, along with a smaller group of affiliates, press, and policymakers engaged through a dedicated program for legislative and executive government officials.

Within organizations, members are distributed across mid-sized organizations (19.5%), large organizations (12.8%), and small organizations (12.2%). A member trying to understand a single state leave law has very different needs from one managing intermittent leave across 50 states. DMEC's range of programs and educational formats is built to serve both ends of that spectrum, and everyone in between.



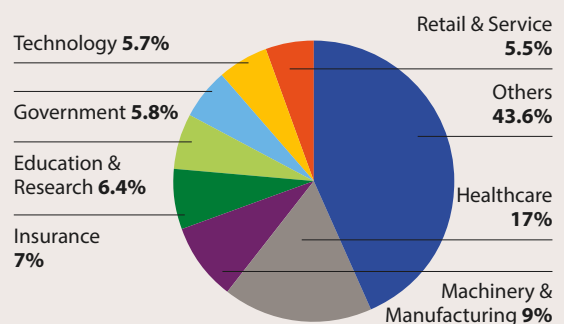


### MEMBERS BY REGION

The top three industries among members are Healthcare (17%), Machinery and Manufacturing (9%), and Insurance (7%). But the member base extends well beyond those three. Education and research institutions make up 6.4%, government agencies 5.8%, technology companies 5.7%, and retail and service organizations 5.5%. Banking and financial services, transportation, food and beverage, and energy and utilities round out a member base that spans nearly every corner of the economy. What members consistently say is that DMEC is where they find their people. Professionals in this field often work in organizations where accommodation and leave management is a discipline unto itself.

DMEC gives them a community of peers who speak the same language, face the same challenges, and are willing to share what works. That sense of belonging is not a byproduct of participation. For many, it is the reason they stay.

### MEMBERS BY INDUSTRY



# A commitment to lifelong learning

Building the path forward means giving practitioners the credentials, competencies, and knowledge to walk it with confidence. For too long, accommodation and leave management has been a field where expertise was built through experience alone, with no formal structure to recognize it. DMEC is changing that, and 2025 was a year of significant progress on that front.

Accommodation and leave management is a field that demands continuous learning. The professionals doing this work are expected to stay current on federal and state legislation, manage complex claims, navigate accommodation requests, and support employees through some of the most demanding situations of their careers. That requires access to the right education, the right tools, and a community of peers who understand the work.

DMEC exists to provide all of that, and in 2025 continued building toward something more ambitious: becoming the premier destination for professional development in accommodation and leave management. That means not just offering courses, but creating a structured career path for practitioners in a field that has never had one. The professionals who manage accommodation and leave have built their expertise largely through experience, with few formal markers to show for it.

DMEC is working to change that, through credentials, role-based competency frameworks, and modular content that can grow and adapt as the field does.

The modular approach matters for two reasons. It means courses can be updated quickly when laws change, without rebuilding everything from scratch. And it means content developed for one credential can be adapted and reused across others, making the entire education system more coherent over time.



That kind of architecture is what makes it possible to plan at the scale DMEC is working toward: eight new microcredential courses per year through 2029, alongside the ongoing development of role-based competency frameworks that will define what mastery looks like at different stages of a leave management career.



In 2025, that work moved on multiple fronts. The CLMS program received its most comprehensive update since launch, with new content on state leave laws, pregnant and nursing workers, and federal legislation, alongside new interactive elements and an applied learning module. Four new microcredential courses expanded the catalog to cover Illinois and Wisconsin state leave laws, benchmarking for integrated accommodation and leave management

programs, and pregnancy rights and accommodations. And the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work Specialist competency track was piloted at year-end, with foundational research underway for the LOA Coordinator track planned for 2026.

### Webinars: timely insights for complex workplace issues

DMEC's webinar program is one of the most consistently used benefits of membership. In 2025, DMEC hosted 35 live webinars with 17,991 total views across live and archived sessions. The format gives practitioners a way to stay current without disrupting their workflow, accessing timely, practical education from their own offices as issues come up in their day-to-day work. Members participate at no cost, and 87.5% of registrants were DMEC members.



**17,991**

webinar views across live and archived sessions

The program runs four ongoing series, each sponsored by a national partner. Tools and Tactics delivers practical techniques and process tools for the most common challenges in accommodation and leave management. Regional Compliance Update covers the latest developments in circuit court decisions, legislative changes, and state



## Certified Leave Management Specialist (CLMS)

Since its launch in November 2016, the CLMS program has grown into a community of more than 5,600 professionals, approximately 2,200 of whom hold an active designation today. In 2025, the program recorded 670 new designations and 394 recertifications. 73% of all-time registrants are DMEC members, and 48% work for employer organizations, with suppliers and consultants making up the remainder.

On October 31, 2025, DMEC launched CLMS 2.0, the most comprehensive update to the program since its inception. The updated course includes expanded coverage of state-level paid and unpaid leave laws, a new module on pregnant and nursing workers, enhanced detail on federal legislation including PUMP and PWFA, increased interactive elements, a new applied learning module for hands-on practice, and additional downloadable tools and checklists for on-the-job use.



workers' compensation updates across five U.S. regions. Inside Track focuses on strategy and execution for accommodation and leave management programs. And the Technology series explores how HR professionals can use technology to streamline processes and better support employees.

The top five webinars of 2025 by registrations reflect what practitioners are navigating on the ground:

1. The Employee Leave Journey: Effective Time Away Support — 1,119 registrants
2. Mental Health in the Workplace: Navigating Accommodations — 850 registrants
3. State-by-State PFML: Mastering Leave Reporting Requirements — 824 registrants
4. Next-Level FMLA: Mastering Family and Medical Leave — 780 registrants
5. Accommodating Neurodiversity in the Workplace — 749 registrants

Mental health, paid family and medical leave, and FMLA compliance led the list. These are the situations accommodation and leave managers face with employees every day, and the consistent demand for this kind of focused, practical guidance is what the webinar program is built to meet.

Employers and suppliers rely on the CLMS to ensure their teams can navigate leave management with confidence. For individual practitioners, it offers a recognized credential in a field where demonstrating expertise has not always been straightforward. The program draws professionals at every stage of their careers, from those new to accommodation and leave management to specialists with decades of experience.

## CLMS PROGRAM



## Enhancing access and usability

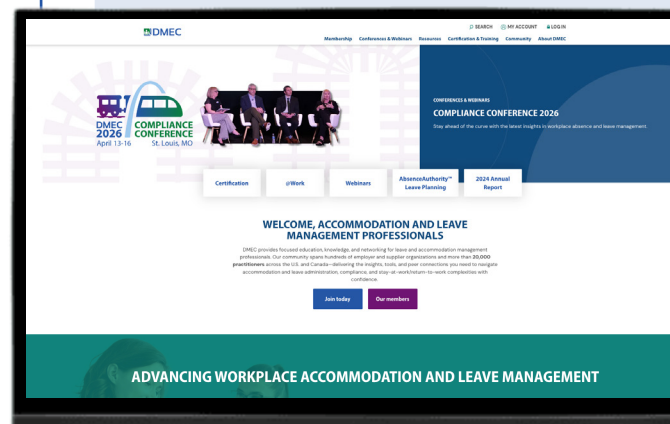
DMEC's website is where members go to access everything the association offers. In 2025, DMEC worked with a specialized UX partner to improve navigation, design, and accessibility, ensuring the site meets modern standards and works for the broadest possible range of users. That work was informed by a member usability survey completed during the year, which helped identify where friction exists and where improvements would have the most impact.

The investment is multi-year and intentionally foundational. As the underlying architecture improves, DMEC will be better positioned to deliver a more personalized experience, one where members spend less time searching and more time engaging with content relevant to their specific role, industry, and learning goals.

## Microcredential courses

DMEC's microcredential program continued to grow in 2025, recording 467 completions, bringing total all-time completions to more than 2,000. The most registered course of all time remains the ADA Accommodation Process.

The Education team focused the year on two priorities: expanding the catalog of state leave law courses, where members consistently look for practical, state-specific guidance, and building foundational courses that support program excellence more broadly.



ADVANCING WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATION AND LEAVE MANAGEMENT

Four new courses launched during the year: Illinois state leave laws, Wisconsin state leave laws, benchmarking for integrated accommodation and leave management programs, and pregnancy rights and accommodations. Together, they reflect DMEC's commitment to both compliance and operational best practices.

Each completed course awards a digital badge. In a field where expertise has traditionally been hard to see and harder to prove, badges give practitioners something concrete: a verified record of specific competencies that they can share with employers and carry with them throughout their careers.

The program's engagement rate consistently exceeds industry averages, reinforcing the value of credentials that make expertise visible, credible, and transferable across roles and organizations.



### FMLA/ADA training for supervisors and managers

Frontline supervisors are often the first point of contact when an employee needs accommodation and leave support. How they respond in that moment, whether they recognize the request, handle it appropriately, and connect the employee to the right resources, can determine whether an organization stays compliant or ends up in litigation. Court opinions related to the FMLA and ADA, as well as guidance from the Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, consistently identify inadequate supervisor training as one of the most significant compliance risks organizations face.

DMEC's FMLA/ADA Training for Supervisors and Managers addresses that gap directly. The course gives frontline managers the knowledge they need to recognize potential FMLA and ADA situations and understand their responsibilities when they arise. To date, 260 organizations have used this training to equip their supervisors, and that number continues to grow.

4

NEW COURSES

467

COMPLETIONS

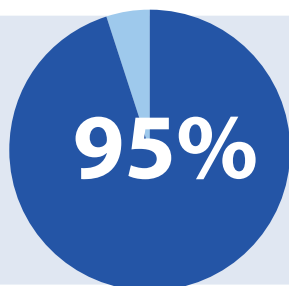


# Turning insight into action: industry research and surveys

Building the path forward requires knowing where you stand. The data DMEC produces gives practitioners and organizations the benchmarks, trends, and insights they need to evaluate their programs, make informed decisions, and stay ahead of a field that keeps changing. In 2025, that research agenda expanded significantly.

Knowing how your absence program compares to peers, where utilization is higher or lower than industry norms, and what plan design choices drive outcomes gives employers a foundation for better decisions. In 2025, DMEC expanded that foundation significantly, with new survey data, new tools, and new research that reflects where the field is heading.

The 2025 Member Engagement Survey captured responses from 325 professionals, with employer members making up 64% of respondents. Overall satisfaction came in at 95%, and DMEC's Net Promoter Score reached 68. The top challenge employers identified was compliance with leave laws, which tracks closely with what the education program sees in webinar demand and microcredential registrations. The field is complex, and practitioners are actively looking for guidance they can trust.



MEMBER  
SATISFACTION

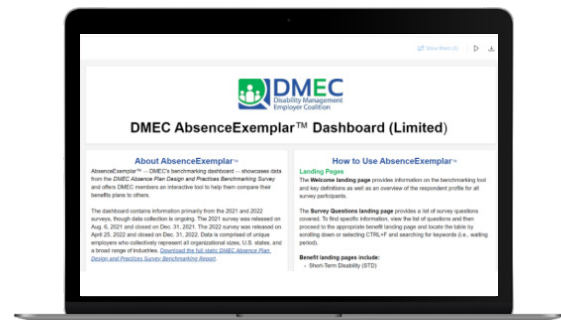
## AbsenceExemplar® benchmarking dashboard

The DMEC AbsenceExemplar® Benchmarking Dashboard gives members real-time access to accommodation and leave plan design and practices data from more than 1,200 organizations across industries, organizational sizes, and U.S. states.

In 2025, data from the 2025 Leave Management Survey was added to the dashboard, enabling year-over-year trending for the first time.

**25%-50% TIME SAVED**

Members report less time spent on leave research.



## From data to direction: research that informs the field

DMEC's research program continues to provide both foundational benchmarks and forward-looking insight for the field.

The Leave Management Survey, now in its 13th edition, remains one of the most comprehensive sources of data on employer practices, with 761 responses across industries and organization sizes in 2025. The Absence Plan Design and Practices Benchmarking Survey also continued, with the full 2024 report and accompanying webinar available on the DMEC website. Together, these studies give members a consistent view of how programs are evolving and where they stand relative to peers.

In 2025, DMEC also advanced its thought leadership with the release of the AI Think Tank white paper, *Defining Ethical and Effective Workforce Integration*. Developed in collaboration with employers, compliance experts, and HR technology leaders, and sponsored by PERKY, the paper addresses a defining challenge for the profession: how to integrate AI into accommodation and leave management in ways that improve efficiency without compromising the human judgment these decisions require.

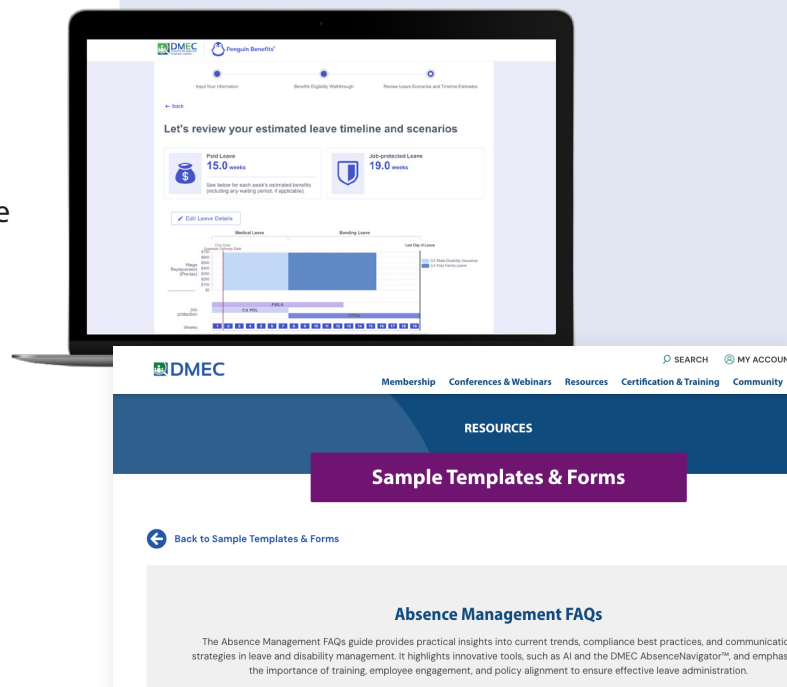
Rather than offering abstract guidance, the paper outlines practical considerations for responsible adoption, reflecting DMEC's role not only as a source of data, but as a convener shaping how the field responds to emerging change.

## A comprehensive resource library

DMEC continues to expand its library of practical tools in response to what members need in the field. In 2025, five new resources were added:

- **AbsenceAuthority™**, a leave planning tool that helps practitioners identify applicable leave laws and requirements by situation
- a PFWA Documentation Assessment of Reasonableness form
- an Absence Management FAQ
- a Sample Military Leave Policy
- and an In Loco Parentis Assessment Form

Each resource is designed to give members a reliable starting point for the situations they encounter most, reducing research time and compliance risk.





Management Survey data from 2023 and 2025, representing nearly 1,500 employer responses, with unlimited access now available to subscribing organizations.



### Research agenda: what's next

DMEC's 2026 research agenda expands both the depth of its data and the scope of its thought leadership.

Building on the momentum of the AI Think Tank, DMEC will convene a second cohort alongside a new *Advancing Leave Planning Technology Think Tank*, developed in partnership with Penguin Benefits. Together, these initiatives continue DMEC's focus on helping employers navigate complex technology decisions with greater clarity and confidence.

At the same time, DMEC is strengthening the field's data foundation. The Leave and Accommodation Metrics Council will convene for the first time, bringing together data professionals from employers and suppliers to define shared metrics and establish a common language for measuring program performance.

Several major data resources will also return or expand in 2026. The Salary Survey will be fielded for the first time since 2004, with results expected in Q2. The AbsenceExemplar® Full Dashboard will expand to include Leave

**"We are building a community around our benchmarking tools, where practitioners can connect with peers, share how they are applying the data in their organizations, and shape how those tools evolve. That kind of exchange is what moves the field forward."**

Deborah LaBonar, PhD  
Director, Benchmarking and Research, DMEC



# DMEC conferences: Where the field comes together

No path forward is built alone. It is built in conversations between peers who understand the same challenges, in sessions that answer the questions practitioners have been sitting with for months, and in the connections that last long after the conference ends. DMEC conferences are where that building happens. For a few days, the entire industry is in the same room, and what comes out of those days, the ideas, the relationships, the clarity, carries practitioners through the rest of the year.

In 2025, two in-person events brought our community together, with more than 1,200 attendees from over 400 companies across 40 states and three international locations.

1,200

ATTENDEES

400

COMPANIES

40

STATES

**"I received a better understanding about PWFA. Great takeaways on ADA and how to conduct the interactive process to provide accommodations. I feel like I am now part of the DMEC family."**

DMEC Compliance Conference attendee



## 2025 DMEC Compliance Conference

The 2025 DMEC Compliance Conference took place April 14-17 in Columbus, Ohio, drawing 502 attendees from 231 companies. Nearly half were attending a DMEC conference for the first time, and the event earned a Net Promoter Score of 82, with virtually all respondents reporting it met or exceeded their expectations.

The Compliance Conference draws practitioners who arrive with specific, pressing questions. What does the PWFA require in practice? How should we handle the interactive process under the ADA? What do the newest state leave laws mean for our programs? The sessions address those questions directly, and attendees leave with answers they can use the following Monday morning. As one first-time attendee put it: "I received a better understanding about PWFA. Great takeaways on ADA and how to conduct the interactive process to provide accommodations. I feel like I am now part of the DMEC family." That last sentence matters. Compliance knowledge and professional community are not separate things at DMEC. They come together in the same room.





## 2025 DMEC Annual Conference

The 2025 DMEC Annual Conference took place August 4-7 in Washington, DC, drawing 745 attendees from 260 unique companies across 40 states and 3 international locations. More than a third were first-time attendees, and 93% reported the event met or exceeded their expectations.

Washington, DC, was a fitting backdrop for a conference that increasingly sits at the intersection of practice and policy. But what attendees describe most is not the location or even the sessions. It is the people. "This is the only place where leave and absence are front and foremost and where everyone in the industry comes together," said one attendee. "A lot of times in the leave and absence space it can feel like no one else understands." Another first-time attendee put it this way: "It was so great to be among my peers who understand and experience the same challenges and rewards of working in our role across a broad spectrum of industries and geography."

**"It was so great to be among my peers who understand and experience the same challenges and rewards of working in our role across industries and geography."**

DMEC Annual Conference attendee

The practitioners who attend DMEC events are building something together: a professional community with shared standards, shared language, and a shared commitment to doing this work well. The Annual Conference is where that community is most visible and most felt.

## 2025 DMEC Virtual Annual Conference



On October 1, DMEC hosted a virtual extension of the Annual Conference, bringing top sessions to members who could not be in Washington. The program covered the most discussed topics in the field, from neurodiversity and mental health to technology disruption in leave planning. The top session, Absence Eras Tour, drew 155 registrants and 109 live attendees. As one participant noted: "Very interesting topics, especially the topic focused on mental health since we are seeing an increase in leave requests and ADA accommodations for this condition."

The virtual event reflects a commitment DMEC holds across everything it does: that access to the best thinking in this field should not depend on geography or budget. In-person conferences are where the community comes alive, but extending that content online means more practitioners, wherever they are, can stay connected and keep growing.

# Celebrating industry leaders

Kelly Woodbridge, CLMS  
2025 Emerging Leader  
Award winner



Every path forward needs people willing to lead the way. In accommodation and leave management, those people are often working quietly, inside organizations that may not fully understand the complexity of what they do, building programs that change the experience of employees who never know their names. DMEC's awards program exists to change that, to name the people and organizations that are raising the standard and show the rest of the field what is possible.

The people in this field make a real difference in the lives of employees and the organizations they work for, and calling that out matters, both for the individuals being recognized and for a profession that is still building its own sense of what excellence looks like.

DMEC's awards program recognizes work across three areas:

- The **Emerging Leader Award** celebrates early-career professionals who are already making a mark.
- The **Kaleta-Carruthers Innovation Award**, named for DMEC cofounders Sharon Kaleta and Marcia Carruthers, honors leaders who have built integrated disability and absence management programs with documented, measurable results.

- The **Partnership Award** recognizes long-standing members whose commitment to the organization and the field goes well beyond their day-to-day responsibilities.

The 2025 Emerging Leader Award went to **Kelly Woodbridge, CLMS, accommodation specialist at Lehigh University**. Kelly was nominated by two colleagues, one of whom joined her on stage at the award ceremony alongside DMEC CEO Bryon Bass. "What makes Kelly truly stand out is not just what she's accomplished, it's how she's done it. She listens deeply, she sees the whole person, and her quiet strength and authenticity encourage people to be better," said nominator Caitlin Leidy. Kelly brings experience spanning higher education, government vocational rehabilitation, and clinical mental health counseling to her work in ADA compliance, disability policy, and neurodiversity inclusion.

In 2026, DMEC will also introduce the **Best in Class Employer Award**, recognizing organizations that lead in ADA, FMLA, PFML, mental health support, and return-to-work practices. It is a natural extension of the awards program into the organizational level, acknowledging that great outcomes in this field depend not just on individual practitioners but on the programs and cultures that support them.

# Community building and thought leadership



## "I found my people."

It is one of the most common things first-time DMEC members say. After years of doing complex, specialized work inside organizations where few people truly understand it, they find a community that does. Building the path forward together requires that community to stay connected year-round, not just at a conference. In 2025, DMEC invested in how it listens to, communicates with, and connects its members, moving beyond one-way content delivery toward more direct, two-way relationships.

That shift showed up across two significant initiatives this year: a new approach to personalized member communication powered by PropFuel, and a fully redesigned Vendor Directory.

## PERSONALIZED MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Understanding what members need cannot be inferred from registration numbers or renewal rates alone. In 2025, DMEC adopted PropFuel, a conversational engagement platform, to transform how it interacts with its community. Instead of broadcasting information, DMEC can now ask questions, listen to responses, and use what members share to shape programs and resources in real time.

That shift matters because members are not a single audience. They come from different industries, different-sized organizations, and different points in their careers. What a compliance specialist at a hospital system needs from DMEC is not the same as what a benefits manager at a manufacturing company needs. PropFuel gives DMEC the ability to engage with those differences, reaching members across email, the website, and SMS in ways that feel relevant to where they are and what they are working on.



# 40,000

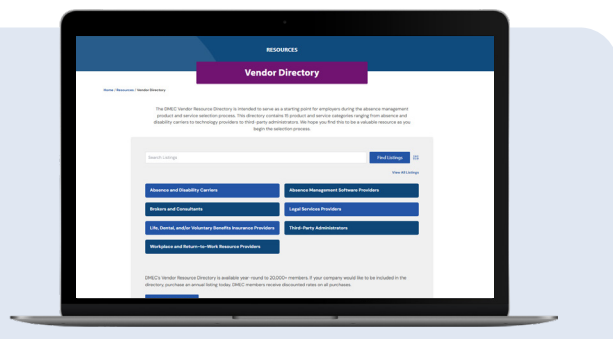
people reached in 2025

Through campaigns covering program promotion, event communication, and membership renewal, DMEC reached more than 40,000 individuals in 2025. The insights gathered through those interactions feed directly into how DMEC plans its education calendar, designs its resources, and prioritizes its investments. As the organization grows, this approach ensures that growth does not come at the cost of the personal connection that has always defined the DMEC experience.

## VENDOR DIRECTORY

In July 2025, DMEC replaced its static PDF vendor directory with a fully interactive online platform, available to its community of more than 22,000 accommodation and leave management professionals across the U.S. and Canada. The shift was practical as much as it was strategic. A PDF that gets updated once a year is a starting point. A dynamic platform where vendors manage their own listings in real time, where members can submit reviews and rate services, and where direct connections between employers and vendors happen through integrated contact forms, is a working tool.

The directory covers 15 categories, including absence and disability carriers, technology providers, and third-party administrators. Vendors benefit from year-round visibility to DMEC's membership. Members get transparent, community-driven information to help them evaluate products and services at a time when the market for leave management technology is growing and getting harder to navigate. Since launch, page views and vendor inquiries have increased, reflecting a resource that members are actively using rather than occasionally consulting.



## @WORK MAGAZINE



@Work magazine published five issues in 2025, each reflecting a different dimension of how the field is evolving in practice:

- Employer Compliance
- Mental Health and Well-Being
- Integrated Disability and Absence Management
- Americans with Disabilities Act and Return to Work
- Technology and Innovation

Taken together, the editorial direction follows the pressures practitioners are managing day to day. The year opened with compliance, which continues to define the baseline of the work. As regulations expand across federal, state, and local levels, the challenge is keeping pace with constant change while maintaining consistency across programs.

Mental health followed as a dedicated focus, though in practice it cuts across nearly every area practitioners handle.

Giving it its own edition reflects how central it has become, not as a separate topic, but as a consistent factor in accommodation and leave decisions.

Mid-year, the focus shifted to integration. As programs grow more complex, the distinction between accommodation and leave management becomes harder to sustain in practice. The emphasis on integrated approaches reflects a broader move in the field toward coordination rather than fragmentation.

The fall issue turned to the ADA and return to work, with attention on how programs operate in practice and how employees are supported as they transition back into the workplace.

The year closed with technology and innovation, a topic that increasingly shapes how this work is delivered. The focus reflects both the opportunity and the uncertainty that technology introduces, particularly as organizations balance efficiency with the need for judgment in complex employee situations.

Across all five issues, the magazine continues to serve as a space to examine not just what is changing in the field, but how those changes are being worked through in practice.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media extends DMEC's presence into the day-to-day work of its community.

Between conferences, webinars, and formal learning experiences, it provides a continuous channel to share timely updates, highlight new resources, and keep practitioners connected to the broader field as they navigate issues in real time.

Across LinkedIn and Facebook, DMEC publishes content focused on what matters most to members. This includes new education offerings, research insights, upcoming events, and key developments in accommodation and leave management. Together, these platforms help ensure that information reaches practitioners not only when they seek it out, but as part of their regular professional rhythm.

LinkedIn has emerged as the primary channel for this work. In 2025, DMEC's following grew to 9,421, up 8% from the prior year. Impressions reached nearly 210,000, more than double the previous period. Facebook reached 1,129 followers, up 3%, with approximately 20,000 impressions.

The difference between the platforms reflects how professionals in this field engage.



Many accommodation and leave practitioners operate in highly specialized roles and are often the only person in their organization doing this work. LinkedIn provides a professional environment where that work is visible. It allows individuals to see how peers are approaching similar challenges, engage with industry-specific content, and stay connected to a broader professional identity. These are dynamics that more general social platforms do not support in the same way.

For DMEC, this makes LinkedIn more than a distribution channel. It is an extension of the community itself. It supports visibility, connection, and ongoing engagement in a field where those elements are not always easy to find.



**"Our focus goes beyond providing resources. DMEC is built to be an indispensable partner for accommodation and leave professionals. We aim to be the organization they turn to when they need to grow, when the work gets hard, and when they want to feel supported in the work they do."**

Bryon E. Bass, CLMS  
Chief Executive Officer, DMEC



# A commitment to member value

Building the path forward means **making sure the right people are helping chart the course**. In 2025, DMEC grew the circle of leaders, partners, and experts who are shaping where this organization goes next. New members joined the Employer Advisory Council, bringing senior employer perspectives directly into the decisions that define DMEC's priorities. New national partners deepened the resources and reach available to the community. And internally, the team grew with new expertise in experiential learning, instructional design, benchmarking, research, membership, and communications. **Each addition reflects a conscious decision about what the organization needs to deliver on its commitments over the next several years.**

Employers join the Advisory Council because they believe their voice matters here. Partners invest because they see DMEC as the right place to reach and support the accommodation and leave management community. Staff join because the mission is worth building toward. That trust shapes how DMEC makes decisions, develops programs, and allocates resources. It is the reason DMEC asks what members need before it builds, and measures its success by whether what it delivers makes a real difference in how practitioners do their jobs.



The investments made in 2025 are foundation work. More credentials, a clearer career path for practitioners, a more personalized digital experience, and deeper engagement with the policy conversations shaping the future of leave law. That is where DMEC is heading, and the people, partnerships, and infrastructure added this year are what will make it possible to get there. The professionals in this field have spent years doing consequential work without enough support, recognition, or resources. **DMEC's job is to change that, one year at a time.**

# Remembering Sharon Kaleta, ARM, Co-founder of DMEC



2025 was also a year of loss for the DMEC community. With the passing of Sharon Kaleta, the organization lost not only one of its founders but **one of the people who shaped what it is and what it stands for.**

Sharon helped build DMEC from the ground up, at a time when there was no clear roadmap for this work and no guarantee it would succeed. What she brought was a clear sense of a problem worth solving and a belief that employers needed a place to learn from one another and figure out how to do this work well.

That vision took form in 1992, alongside co-founder Marcia Carruthers, beginning with a small group of employer peers and growing steadily into a national organization that today serves more than 22,000 professionals. What started as a conversation became a field of practice, with DMEC at its center.

**Sharon's contributions were both practical and lasting.** She secured the organization's first sponsors and developed the CPDM (Certified Professional in Disability Management) certification, building its curriculum and helping define the field's early body of knowledge. She also saw early the potential of online education, partnering with San Diego State University to make learning accessible beyond the classroom, well before it became standard practice.

What Sharon described as her greatest source of pride was simple: people came back to work because of DMEC. Employees kept their jobs. Employers learned how to better support the people who worked for them. The work was never abstract for her. It was always about the person on the other side of a leave request or an accommodation conversation, trying to stay connected to their work during a difficult time.

She carried that perspective into her own life. Living with a disability in her later years, she spoke openly about the realities of stigma, the frustration of being underestimated, and the patience the field still requires. She remained clear-eyed about how much work remained, and clear about why it was worth doing.

One small thing Sharon introduced in DMEC's early days was the "DMEC hug," a deliberate gesture of welcome that came to symbolize the kind of community she believed in. It reflected something fundamental in her approach to life: that caring about people should show up the moment they walk into the room.

The Kaleta-Carruthers Innovation Award, established in 2024 to honor her alongside Marcia Carruthers, carries her name forward. So does this organization, which would not exist without her.

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