



MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE



WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

- **Source:** Canadian Mental Health Association What is Mental Health and Mental Illness [LINK TO SOURCE](#)

Not everyone who suffers poor mental health has a mental illness. Conditions such as a mood disorder, schizophrenia, personality disorders or clinical depression are diagnosed by a medical practitioner as mental illness. Other issues such as stress, anxiety and depression can present in many of us from time to time. These can be triggered by personal or work issues. When a person's resilience level and learned coping mechanisms are not enough to manage these stresses, mental health is affected.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AT HOME AND AT WORK?

Wherever you go, there you are.

Our unique sense of self, personality, habits, experiences and coping mechanisms accompanies us, regardless of where we are. This means the adage "Leave your personal problems at the door" is not a realistic expectation. Issues affecting our mental health do not automatically turn off when we arrive at work, as much as we might wish they did. Concerns impacting our mental health at work often return home with us. We can temporarily mask our feelings, but without addressing them, eventually, they will manifest, wherever we go.

Your employees' mental health is also affected by family issues. The stress of raising children, relationship conflict, elderly parents, medical issues, financial concerns, legal matters, and other personal problems make mental health a shared issue. Each year, one in five Canadians experiences a mental health challenge. Chances are, someone we know, live or work with is currently dealing with an issue which, through ripple effect, impacts others.

Chronic stress at work includes conflict with colleagues and managers, job demands, bullying and harassment and is a reality for one in four Canadian workers.



MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE: NOT YOUR BUSINESS? THINK AGAIN.

JUST THE FACTS

- \$51 billion per year lost: estimated economic impact of mental illness in Canada
- 500,000 Canadians miss work each week due to mental health issues
- 60% of disability claim costs are related to mental health concerns
- 1 in 4 Canadian workers experience chronic work stress
- 1 in 5 Canadians experience mental health challenges each year
- WHO predicts mental health issues will be the number two cause of disability claims by 2020

WHAT ELSE?

- The longer someone is off work, the less likely they are to return
- One Canadian study shows \$13,000 per employee is lost each year by businesses with absenteeism and presenteeism issues due to mental health issues
- 1.1 million small to medium-size businesses in Canada often lack resources to deal with mental health issues

- **Source:** Mental Health Infographic created from independent research conducted by APAS laboratory/Dr. M Milot [LINK TO SOURCE](#)



HOW CAN AN EMPLOYER SUPPORT EMPLOYEES AND BUILD MENTAL HEALTH RESILIENCE IN THE WORKPLACE?

BUILD AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE

- Strengthen your organization and increase resilience to the impact of mental health issues by creating a positive and supportive working environment

CREATE A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE WORKPLACE

Canada has a voluntary program available to all employers that focuses on helping to improve the well-being of individuals and organizational health. Adopting [The Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) and implementing its suggestions in your workplace has big rewards. It helps improve:

- Productivity
- Financial performance
- Risk management
- Organizational recruitment
- Employee retention

Learn as much as you can about mental health and how to recognize if an employee is struggling.

WATCH FOR SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Employees can easily become masters of hiding mental health issues when they fear for their jobs, and in a culture where stigma prevails. A strong manager can see through an “I’m fine, thanks” response. Here are symptoms something is wrong:

- Change in productivity and focus on the job
- Increased absenteeism
- Requests for leaves
- Presenteeism: at work but preoccupied or disengaged
- Change in mood, including withdrawal from others, quick to anger, negativity
- Loss of self-esteem
- Sleep deficient, decreased energy
- Evidence of substance abuse (drinking, drugs, eating disorders, self-harm, gambling, excessive online usage, etc.)
- Change in physical appearance (lack of self care, rapid weight decrease/increase)
- Emotional reactions to small issues
- Lack of interest in the job at hand

Ten Canadians die from suicide every day, and reaching out can truly be the difference between life or death. Make note of the suicide hotline in your area and share it.

KNOW YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Employers have an obligation to support and accommodate employees with mental health challenges. Read the applicable legislation for your province or territory and become familiar with your legal obligations to support and accommodate staff affected by mental or physical health issues.

TAKE ACTION

- Whole health is a combination of physical and mental health. Help your business, yourself and your staff by developing a wellness program and bringing mental health to the forefront.
- Encourage staff to explore *my-benefits health*® for tools and information to support their mental and emotional well-being.
- Keep talking. Open dialogue with staff, ask how someone is, and really listen. Collaborate with them to identify ways to support them, and in turn, retain productivity and success on the job.
- Share these online resources from the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) with your staff:

» [Work-Life Balance Quiz](#)

» [Work-Life Balance – Make it Your Business \(PDF Download\)](#)

» [Mental Health Meter](#)

» [Library of resources and articles](#)





WHAT ELSE CAN AN EMPLOYER DO?

MAKE MENTAL HEALTH A PRIORITY BY INVESTING IN AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

You are a business owner or manager, not necessarily a qualified mental health professional. While there are steps you can take to create a positive working culture, accessing outside assistance when dealing with the impact of a mental health issue is a wise decision.

First developed in the 1940s as a resource for those battling addiction, today's EAPs provide support for a wide range of issues, including assistance for family members and guidance for an organization's management staff. The self-referral nature of an EAP provides confidential access to professional psychological guidance and other resources.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD EAP:

- Provides individuals with a gateway to better mental health through professional counselling
- Is founded on evidence-based research
- Includes personal financial, legal, eldercare, childcare, nutritional guidance and more
- Uses a return-to-work/stay-at-work focus to promote work as a component of good mental health
- Offers managers support and guidance when addressing issues affecting employee productivity
- Guides employees and immediate family members towards sustaining good mental health
- Is easy to access and offers a variety of online resources in addition to private counselling
- Is dedicated to client success, employing a careful matching system to ensure the client is connected to the support best suited for their personality and their needs



DO EAPs WORK?

Many EAP providers claim positive success; however, they use in-house research to back up these claims. New independent Canadian research now proves a positive impact on work absenteeism, Long Term Disability (LTD) and drug claims after accessing a high-quality EAP.

This study shows in the 12-month period following EAP support, users:

- were 3.3 times less likely to file an LTD claim;
- reported significantly reduced prescription drug claims;
- returned to work during or shortly after EAP completion (2 out of 3 initially off work reported this success);
- experienced a greater degree of problem resolution the higher the number of sessions accessed; and/or
- reported EAP counselling helped with their return to work.

In addition, users reported an average of 50% reduction in symptoms, and an average of 70% improvement in productivity after EAP access and assistance.

Additional support for employers is provided in the following online resources:

- » Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) support for employers
 - » Canadian Mental Health Association
 - » National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace
 - » Job stress in users of an Employee Assistance Program and association with presenting status
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