

# mental wellness

Is your workplace a happy one? If so, odds are that it's also more innovative, collaborative and productive too. With all that in mind, no wonder savvy – and caring – employers are making mental health a priority for their staff.

Experts agree: healthy workplace strategies enhance organizational performance and directly benefit employees. As organizations tune into this fact, a question on many managers' minds is how to go about promoting mental health.

"Employers need a workplace wellness strategy, recognizing that this is a critical step that will contribute to business results," says Dr. Graham Lowe, president of the Graham Lowe Group Inc., a workplace consulting and research firm.

He says organizations increasingly recognize that healthy environments are prerequisites for the kind of capabilities they require. "You cannot expect people to be innovative and collaborative if they are not physically and mentally healthy."

The challenge is many people – employers and employees alike – don't know where to begin. For them, programs such as the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace offers help.

"Guarding Minds @ Work is a free, web-based resource for employers," says Mary Ann Baynton, a consultant to Mental Health Works. "It's very

practical: the first phase identifies and assesses issues in your workplace that may be impacting psychological health and safety; when you've got that information, a risk report card recommends responses based on research and evidence."

The site also provides tools and resources for employees. "One great example is a new video-based tool called Working Through It," says Ms. Baynton, explaining the video was inspired by a request from a woman who suffered from depression. "When she was depressed, she couldn't read or surf the Internet. She needed answers to questions like, 'Who can help me at work?' and 'What if I lose my job?'"

The video, comprised of questions and answers from people who have experienced depression, is now available free of charge. "These are real people who have struggled with depression, speaking to people who are currently struggling about what worked for them and how they were able to get through it. It gives hope and inspiration, but it also provides motivation and strategy," says Ms. Baynton.

The primary message, she says, is "You're not alone. There are things you can do to

reclaim your own well-being; there is hope for a better tomorrow.' We've already had people tell us that some of these resources have saved their life."

Arguably, few large corporations have embraced mental health promotion as vigorously as Canada Post.

With its 72,000 employees serving the nation, the corporation sees its commitment to

mental health having the potential to influence positive results on a grand scale.

"We're quite literally present in every community in the country, giving us a unique responsibility and ability to promote awareness," says Anthony Wilson-Smith, vice president of Communications, Canada Post.

Among its programs, Canada Post has launched mental

health awareness tools for over 8,000 of its team leaders across the country. Using community resources such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, Canada Post also prepared information on understanding mental illness and delivered it to the homes of all Canada Post employees, benefiting them and their families.

Workers can also access an Employee Assistance Program that provides personal, web-based and telephone counselling. "It's not just for issues such as depression, but for child- and elder-care concerns or financial concerns," says Judy Middlemiss, manager of Health and Wellness Programs. "If you live in Toronto and your mother has to go into a care home in Vancouver, our EAP provider will research the area and find appropriate places for you to contact."

Flexible work arrangements, where possible, provide further support to employees grappling with family and health issues. Counselling, nutrition and fitness support are also provided.

Mr. Wilson-Smith says Canada Post Foundation for Mental Health, meanwhile, was created to provide mental

health experts with desperately needed resources.

"We set a target of raising a million dollars our first year, and in fact raised more than that," he says. "The money we collect is dispersed by the Canada Post Foundation for Mental Health annually; 19 non-profit organizations across the country will use the funds immediately to improve services and outreach. It's a very direct investment at a grassroots level."

All fundraising for the foundation is done by employees, so there is no overhead. (For more information, visit [canadapost.ca/takingsteps](http://canadapost.ca/takingsteps).)

"We're just at the beginning of the journey. We seek to achieve great good, and we know we have a long way to go," says Mr. Wilson-Smith. "There are enormous corporate, social and emotional costs due to mental illness. When we're able to help, everyone gains."

For reasons like these, Dr. Lowe says workplace wellness is becoming a cornerstone of corporate social responsibility. "Providing a healthy environment for employees has huge impact on the individual employee, on their families, and on society as a whole." ■

## New workplace resources available to all

**Guarding Minds @ Work** is a resource for employers to assess and address psychosocial issues at work that impact the mental well-being of employees and ultimately an organization's bottom line.

**Working Through It**, a resource for employees struggling with work or life issues, helps answer questions such as "Who can help me at work?" and "How can I begin to feel better?"

Both resources are available free of charge at [www.gwlcentreformentalhealth.com](http://www.gwlcentreformentalhealth.com)

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## Turning knowledge into action

We're helping employers across Canada find real solutions to complex workplace mental health issues. Through the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, we're supporting research to expand knowledge, and turning that knowledge into practical strategies and tools available publicly for all employers. **The Centre connects employers and employees with free, valuable resources like:**



### Working Through It

**Working Through It™** – A series of web-based videos offering the perspectives of 10 individuals who share how they worked through mental health pressures and successfully coped at work, off work and returning to work.



**Guarding Minds @ Work™** – Practical, user-friendly tools and resources to help employers identify organizational issues that may impact employee mental health, identify action steps and measure progress and outcomes.

Visit the Centre's website at [www.gwlcentreformentalhealth.com](http://www.gwlcentreformentalhealth.com) to find these and other tools to support mental health in your workplace.



# in the workplace

For businesses, the case for promoting mental wellness is clear

By Lorne Zon  
CEO, CMHA, Ontario

Every year, the cost to our economy from workplace mental health and addictions issues is an overwhelming \$51 billion. This staggering figure is double Ontario's current record deficit and rivals the federal government's projected deficit for this fiscal year.

It doesn't have to be that way.

In fact, this economic cost analysis by Dr. Carolyn Dewa in 2008 is just the latest in a series of studies that clearly demonstrate the need to act on issues of mental health and addictions in the workplace.

Part of the problem, however, is that despite the economic facts, the true costs of inaction are not readily visible. We measure indicators such as productivity, worker retention, absenteeism and health benefit costs. What we don't understand is how workplace mental health impacts these indicators. We also fail to measure 'presenteeism' – the lost productivity due to employees who may be at work, but not mentally healthy enough to fully execute their responsibilities.

If the responsibility to help employees and colleagues strictly on moral and ethical grounds is not enough, then add to them the compelling business case for investing in



our employees. Consider the following:

- mental health disorders in the workplace cost Canadian companies 14 per cent of their net annual profits;
- every day, 500,000 Canadians are absent from work due to psychiatric problems;
- mental health is the number one cause of disability in Canada, accounting for nearly 30 per cent of disability claims and 70 per cent of total costs.

From a business perspective, it is also worth considering the impending legal liability of inaction. Across Canada, employers are finding themselves increasingly responsible for not only their employees' physical well-being, but also their mental health.

A 2009 study by Dr. Martin Shain entitled "Stress at Work, Mental Injury and the Law in Canada: A Discussion Paper for the Mental Health

Commission of Canada" states: "Employers may become liable if mental injuries are found to result from careless, negligent, reckless or intentional acts and omissions – financial damages are increasing as new precedents are being developed."

The latest "Health Is Cool" survey (2009) conducted by Desjardins Financial Services gives further rise for concern. Based on 1,062 employee respondents, the survey indicated that increased stress at work ranked second overall in terms of impacts from the recession. Among employers that responded, 61 per cent agree that the recession is harming employees' mental health.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression will be the single biggest burden on health by 2020. In the workplace, factors contributing to unhealthy environments include the coupling of high-effort and low-reward with high-demand and low-control. Sounds familiar? Indeed, it is an all too common scenario in organizations today.

Conversely, taking early and sustained action can be cost effective and boost productivity. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario has considerable experience in workplace mental health. Our Mental Health Works and

## No one is immune from mental health problems

Addressing mental health issues in the workplace is a win-win proposition for employers and employees alike.

**Mental Health Works** is an award-winning workplace initiative of the **Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario** that began in 2001. Through custom-designed workshops, presentations, consultations and practical tools, Mental Health Works helps organizations manage their duty to accommodate employees experiencing mental disabilities such as depression or anxiety in the workplace. The program helps employers respond immediately and appropriately when employees experience mental health problems, and effectively manage performance and productivity issues.

Contact us:

**mental health WORKS**

Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario  
416-977-5580, ext. 4120  
E-mail: [info@mentalhealthworks.ca](mailto:info@mentalhealthworks.ca)  
Website: [www.mentalhealthworks.ca](http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca)

WorksWell programs provide insight. For example:

- Don't assume you know what the problems are; use a situa-

tional assessment tool instead.

- Make sure the entire management team makes

employee mental health and well-being a priority. This commitment enables managers and supervisors to act.

- Create flexible workplace options and allow individuals to recommend what they need to work well and be productive. Also, make sure employees are aware of online mental health resources, so workers can access them confidentially and avoid the risks of stigma and discrimination.
- When people are struggling, ask them what you can do to help them be successful. Engage employees in decision-making.
- Build clear and open communication lines.
- Make sure HR evaluations include both constructive criticism and praise.
- When assigning work, set reasonable timelines. Informed employees feel more in control of their work and are more likely to commit to finishing on time.

We might not be able to save the entire \$51 billion each year. But by working together proactively, companies could reasonably reduce that cost by 20 per cent and save over \$10 billion each and every year, while increasing productivity, reducing absenteeism and saving the costs of staff turnover.

By any measure, that adds up to a sound business case. ■

## WHAT WERE WE THINKING?

When we established the Canada Post Foundation for Mental Health, we were thinking about the seven million Canadians who will need help for mental health problems this year. We were thinking about the fact that stigma is seen as one of the key barriers preventing people from seeking help. And, we were thinking it was about time someone did something about it. Please help by making a donation or purchasing a book of Mental Health stamps at your local post office. Or donate online, anytime.

Please donate today  
[canadapost.ca/takingsteps](http://canadapost.ca/takingsteps)



**Taking steps**  
to support mental health

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POST



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