

# Mental Health in the Workplace



**Mood Disorders** Society of Canada

La Société Pour **Les Troubles**  
**de L'Humeur** du Canada

## Mental Illness in the Workplace

Presented for  
Aboriginal Affairs and  
Northern Development  
Canada  
by  
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Workplace Wellness

# Mood Disorders Society of Canada

The Mood Disorders Society of Canada, (MDSC) is incorporated as a national, not for profit, consumer driven, voluntary health charity committed to ensuring that the voices of persons with mental illness, family members and caregivers are heard on issues relating to mental health and in particular with regard to depression, bipolar illness, anxiety and other associated mood disorders.



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# National Initiatives

- Canadian Medical Association: Anti-stigma CME – 76,000 Physicians and Specialists;
- Building Bridges - Native Mental Health Association of Canada;
- Correctional Services of Canada: Front Line Mental Health Training;
- National Anti-Stigma Campaigns.



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# Making Mental Health a Priority:

- Mental illness has a profound impact on all areas of our lives and needs to be aggressively addressed.
- Mental illness is associated with more lost work days than any other chronic condition, costing the Canadian economy **\$51 billion annually in lost productivity.**



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# Mental Health Facts

- At any given time, percentage of Canadians who have a mental illness: 10.4%
- Percentage of Canadians who will experience depression in their lifetime: 7.9-8.6%
- Percentage of Canadians who will experience an anxiety disorder in their lifetime: 12%
- Chances of having a mental illness in Canada: 1 in 5



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# Workplace Facts

- The fastest growing category of disability costs to Canadian employers is Depression; 10% of the Canadian labor force, (about 1.4 million) have the illness.
- 31% of employers have plans to address mental health and mental illness in the workplace;
- Currently, 64% of Canadian organizations have no structured process for supervisors to support employees' return to work after any illness or disability;

*Source: MDSC Quick Facts on Mental Illness and Addictions in Canada*



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# Workplace Facts

- 75% of short term disability claims relate to mental illness in Canada: *(2007 figures report 72%);*
- 79% of long term disability claims relate to mental illness in Canada: *(2007 figures report 82%);*
- Amount employer will save, per employee per year, for those who get treatment: From \$5000 - \$10,000 in average wage replacement, sick leave and prescription drug costs.



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# Why Pay Attention?

- On September 9, 2010 - In the first study of its kind, researchers from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) have calculated the actual cost of mental health leave and found that on average it's double the cost of a leave for a physical illness.
- The study looked at data tracking the short-term disability leave of 33,913 full-time employees in Ontario. Results showed that the cost to a company for a single employee on a short-term disability leave due to mental health concerns totals **nearly \$18,000**.



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# Stigma & Discrimination in the Workplace

- People with mental illness say that stigma can be worse than the illness itself.
- Create an environment free from stigma and discrimination. No exceptions!



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# Why Mental Health Issues are Often Hidden in the Workplace

## Fear:

- of losing employer's respect
- of losing one's job
- of not being promoted
- of being isolated or shamed by co-workers and colleagues
- of asking for accommodation
- that long-term career goals may be affected



## Reluctance to Disclose can be Harmful

- While the decision of employees to take time off work involves varying social and economic factors, low levels of time off sick are also not necessarily a good thing for an individual employee.
- If an employee is reluctant to come forward with a mental health issue it can lead to more serious problems.



# Front Line Managers

Managers have a key roll in identifying and reducing stress within the workplace. They are often the first point of contact when an individual is feeling stressed.

Managers need to be continually aware of potential signs which may indicate a problem. It is essential that they have adequate training to be able to spot these situations quickly and address them without delay.



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# Consequences of Not Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace

According to *Stress at Work: a guide for employers*: (UK Health & Safety Executive. Crown); the consequences of mental health problems in the workplace can be summarized in the following four categories;



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# Consequences of Not Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace

(cont.)

## 1/ Absenteeism

- Increase in overall sickness absence, particularly frequent short periods of absence;
- Poor health, (depression, stress, burnout);
- Physical conditions, (high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, sleeping disorders, skin rashes, headache, neck and backache, low resistance to infections).



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# Consequences of Not Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace<sub>(cont.)</sub>

## 2/ Work Performance

- Reduction in productivity and output;
- Increase in error rates;
- Increased amount of accidents;
- Poor decision-making;
- Deterioration in planning and control;
- Presenteeism.





# Consequences of Not Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace<sub>(cont.)</sub>

## 3/ Staff Attitude and Behaviour

- Loss of motivation and commitment;
- Poor timekeeping; e.g. extended breaks;
- Labour turnover, (particularly expensive for companies at top levels of management).



# Consequences of Mental Health Problems in the Workplace (cont.)

## 4/ Relationships at Work

- Tension and conflicts between colleagues;
- Poor relationships with clients;
- Increase in disciplinary problems.



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# What can you do?

Bring any and all workplace stress to the attention of your employer or manager. If there are workplace factors such as unrelenting or unreasonable deadlines and workloads, lack of resources, or physical factors such as lighting, noise or workstation placement that is causing stress, ask to work together to address and solve these issues.

A major stressor can be a lack of adequate training, if you feel that you need better training to do your job, ask what options are available.



# Workplace Kaleidoscope

Mental health problems may be triggered by work, but they may also be caused in part by other events.

There is a need to look at the individual experiencing mental health problems, the compounding characteristics of the workplace, and the remedies needed to improve the employee's wellbeing.



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# Supports in the Workplace

Creating workplace mental health and wellness supports is centered on the development of comprehensive policies. These policies will serve as the central anchor point from which all activities will be generated.

A knowledgeable and committed health and safety committee, made up of company-wide representation, will ensure the policies are informed by all stakeholders.



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# Mental Health Policy Statement

The M/H Policy Statement is your company position on providing a healthy workplace. It is the statement of your organizational commitment to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees.



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# Goals of the Policy

Decide upon five or six straightforward goals of the Policy. What is it that the company wants to achieve? List these goals clearly and concisely so that there is no ambiguity in what you are working towards. As an example;

- § To create a stigma free environment;
- § To promote healthy work/ life balance;
- § To create a culturally safe environment;
- § To accommodate employees returning to work;
- § To reduce workplace stress.





# Objectives of the Policy

Decide upon the objectives needed to reach your goals. These will form your operating principals. As an example;

- To develop strategies that will immediately ensure that mental health is equally valued as physical health.
- To create an environment where staff communicate workplace issues and identify opportunities to increase employee wellbeing.
- To increase awareness and understanding of mental health in all management and employees.



# Define Workplace Stress

Stress can and often does lead to both mental and physical illness;

Make a firm decision to improve your workplace and make a difference;

Conduct an organizational Stress Audit; look at workplace environment, training, supports, policies and practices.



# Creating a Healthy Workplace

(cont.)

- Contact based education - that directly involves people with mental health issues - is key. Reach out to local mental health organizations;
- Establish organizational and employee health as “twin priorities” among managers and employees.
- Create return to work processes that are tailored to the individual. When illness occurs, barrier free re-entry to employment, (with support as needed).



# Return to Work Support

- What specific things can employers do to help a person with a mental illness enter the workforce or return to work after having had a relapse?
- **The first step** is to ensure managers are trained to **'manage' employees** who are showing signs of wear and tear, or distress but to do so, without judgment and with empathy.



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# Return to Work Support (cont.)

- The **second thing** is that when a person is off work, stay in touch with them casually, ensure they are engaged and know they are still a part of the organization.
- **Third**, when a person is ready to return to work, their re-entry should include modified work schedules and tasks which are worked out with the employee, not unilaterally. Also, make sure that when the employee has been cleared medically to return, there is not a big delay, in making that happen. Recovery and a timely, gradual return to work go hand in hand.



# In Conclusion

- Managers and employees must have access to the supports they need when staff are working through mental health issues.
- Employers must have an open door policy for employees to come in and discuss mental health issues without fear of negative repercussions.
- Employers need to reach out and obtain the knowledge and tools to improve workplace environments and supports.
- Remove the word *should*. Replace it with *will*.
- Stigma and Discrimination are unacceptable.



# Contact Info

- The Mood Disorders Society of Canada, through its collaborative consultation approach, works at meaningful and sustained employer partnerships to develop and maintain healthy workplaces.
- If your organization would like further information on workplace mental health, please contact us.

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