CAMH's Mental Health Playbook for Business Leaders

Research-informed Workplace Recommendations from Canada's Foremost Mental Health Hospital and Global Leader in Mental Health Research

camh
mental health is health

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A Message from Deborah Gillis

Mental health is the next frontier of workplace inclusivity.

I joined CAMH because I firmly believe that employee mental health is the most important issue facing workplaces today. By stepping forward to not only address, but to champion mental health in the workplace, business leaders have the opportunity to help ignite and unleash their employees' full potential.

A staggering proportion of the Canadian workforce is carrying the invisible weight of stigma, stress, and illness. In any given year, one in five of us experiences a mental illness, including addiction.[1,2] Half a million Canadians miss work each week due to mental illness.[3] It's a leading – and particularly expensive – cause of disability in Canada.[4,5,6,7,8] In fact, it's estimated that by 2041, the cumulative cost of mental illness in Canada will be $2.5 trillion.[9]

Prioritizing and addressing mental health in the workplace is the right thing to do for your employees – and for your bottom line. When done effectively, the potential benefits to your business include higher performance, lower absenteeism, and reduced disability costs.[10,11,12,13] Additionally, mentally healthy workplaces have been proven to attract top talent and keep great employees in the workforce.[14]

As one of the world's leading mental health hospitals and research centres, CAMH is uniquely positioned to catalyze and advance a movement for workplace mental health across Canada. With the support of business leaders, we developed this first-of-its-kind, user-friendly playbook. What follows is a path to more effective solutions and better outcomes for employees and for businesses, through five powerful recommendations. The recommendations are based on the best available evidence, and were shaped by feedback from business leaders, as well as CAMH researchers, clinicians, and experts. An important addition to existing resources such as *The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* from the Mental Health Commission of Canada, this playbook is an invaluable tool to help business leaders take on this cause with confidence.

This kind of change requires true champions and strong leadership from the top. When implementing these recommendations, I urge you to be bold in your commitment, as well as vulnerable in your communication. Be Normalizers-in-Chief. Banish stigma by stepping forward to share your own journeys with mental health. Opening the door to these conversations can save lives.

Lead the way, and you will inspire others to follow.

President & CEO, CAMH Foundation

Workplace Mental Health: A Leadership Priority

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is Canada's largest mental health teaching hospital and one of the world's leading research centres in its field. CAMH conducts ground-breaking research, provides expert training to health care professionals and scientists, develops innovative health promotion and prevention strategies, and advocates on public policy issues with all levels of government.

BY THE AGE OF 40

half of Canadians have – or have had – a mental illness[15]

of US employees have **voluntarily left roles** in the past **for mental health reasons**

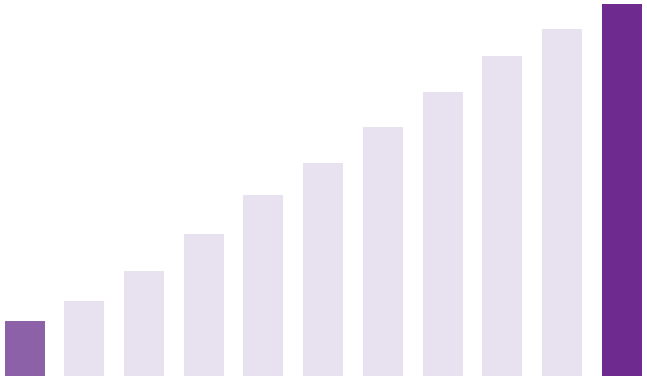
This number increased to

FOR MILLENNIALS

FOR GEN Z[17]

Economic burden of mental illness every year in Canada:

$51 BILLION[16]



$2.5 TRILLION

Cumulative cost of mental illness in Canada by 2041[20]

30%

of disability claims in Canada are due to mental illness[19]

70%

of all disability costs are due to mental illness

On average, leaves due to mental illness are about double the cost of leaves due to physical illness[18]

Recommendations for Canadian Business Leaders

1	Create a Long-Term, Organization-Wide Mental Health Strategy	This strategy should work hand-in-hand with your overall business strategy.
2	Institute Mandatory Mental Health Training for Leadership	Effective leaders must be trained, invested in, and sensitive to workplace mental health.
3	Develop Tailored Mental Health Supports	There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Effective programs are evidence-based, targeted, and inclusive.
4	Prioritize and Optimize Your Return-to-Work Process Checklist	Return to work should not mark the end of support for the employee; it's a critical stage in the support process.
5	Track Your Progress	Performance measurement is the keystone of a sound workplace mental health strategy.

Recommendation 1:
Create a Long-Term, Organization-Wide Mental Health Strategy

The most successful mental health strategies reach across the business enterprise.[21,22] Organizations with comprehensive mental health strategies perform better on average in all areas – from health and safety to shareholder returns.[23,24]

An organization's mental health strategy should work hand-in-hand with its overall business strategy.[25] This could mean dedicating a KPI specifically to employee mental health.

In your organization-wide approach, include programs and strategies that support employees along the entire spectrum of mental health – from prevention, to risk mitigation, to care.[26,27] Many organizations turn to *The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard)* from the Mental Health Commission of Canada for guidance.

For groups facing marginalization in daily life, such as visible minorities or people in the communities (LGBTQ2S Communities), the workplace can be a particularly powerful contributor to poor mental health outcomes.[28] The intersectionality of mental health and other dimensions of diversity should be top of mind as employers strive to create safe, inclusive workplaces.

1

Elements of an Organization-Wide Mental Health Strategy

Set the tone from the top: As with any effort to change organizational culture, having the CEO visibly championing an initiative – and holding the leadership team accountable – is critical. Leaders can also play an important role in tackling stigma and discrimination by stepping forward to share their personal journeys with mental health.[29,30] Mandatory leadership training (see Recommendation 2) is an essential component of an organization-wide strategy. This training helps leaders champion change, and be sensitive to specific employees' needs and identities.

Reduce the friction between work and life: An imbalance between work and family life is a strong risk factor for mental illness – it's been shown to be more detrimental to mental health than work-related stress.[31] Being able to reconcile work duties with outside-of-work duties, such as family obligations, leads to fewer absences from work.[32] While having time-flexible working arrangements, such as being able to take time in the day for a medical appointment, gives employees a greater sense of control and reduces their general stress.[33]

Address job stress: When determining whether your work environment strategy is at odds with your mental health strategy, carefully assess your employees' job-related stress. For example, job redesign has been shown to be a huge source of stress for employees – it dramatically increases a person's risk of taking mental health sick leave.[34] Having little control over how work gets done, high or conflicting job demands, and bullying/harassment at work have all been linked to common mental health illnesses such as depression and anxiety.[35,36,37,38]

Expose and address discrimination: Most people with mental illness and addiction report being disadvantaged at work due to their condition.[39] For groups facing discrimination in daily life, such as visible minorities or people in LGBTQ2S communities, the workplace can be a particularly powerful contributor to poor mental health outcomes.[40] Having to hide or mute one's identity at work can result in significant stress.[41] It's important to ask: Where is discrimination occurring in your organization? Examine your interview and promotion protocols and revise them to ensure equal opportunities are available. Institute mandatory mental health training, as well as cultural-sensitivity training for managers, and ask your employees about their experiences of discrimination at work.

Be sensitive to employees' beliefs and attitudes: Cultural norms can affect people's receptivity to mental health treatment. Some people are more comfortable talking about their health and emotions than others.[42] Careful needs assessment and cultural-sensitivity training can be great tools in this area, and can help you tailor communications and interventions to fit your employees' needs.

Include wellness and prevention: Physical and mental health are closely linked; it's a 'chicken and egg' relationship.[43,44,45] Consider investments in physical health as well as mental health. This could mean an on-site wellness centre or discounts for fitness centre memberships.[46]

Build in accountability: Decide early on how you will benchmark success (see Recommendation 5) and ensure accountability. Develop your mental health strategy with a cross-enterprise steering committee that holds representatives from every business function.[47]

32% of Canadian employees feel that their organization's leadership is taking action to address workplace mental health[48]

CASE STUDY

Working for Mental Health: Maple Leaf Foods

Maple Leaf Foods recently launched an ambitious, cross-organization strategy to create a psychologically healthy and safe workplace for all employees. Their mental health commitment to their employees is called "You Are Not Alone."

Working with CAMH, they conducted a needs assessment engaging 140 employees through internal focus groups from 3 different locations, and a further 133 employees through a survey. They asked employees about mental health in general, their feelings around their psychological safety at Maple Leaf Foods, and the changes employees thought were needed. Based on the findings, Maple Leaf Foods and CAMH co-developed a comprehensive mental health strategy that includes four strategic pillars:

1. **Ease of access to effective supports:** Improving the quality and breadth of supports, as well as awareness of these supports and how to access them
2. **Accommodation:** Providing best-in-class accommodation in a consistent fashion
3. **Stopping the stigma:** Creating a safe space for open dialogue
4. **Mental health training and education:** Providing mandatory training for leaders, and offering optional education for employees

In the surveys and focus groups, employees suggested dozens of programs and changes to help support their mental health. Based on a benefit/impact analysis, Maple Leaf Foods selected a suite of these strategies under each of the above pillars. They will be implemented over the next two years.

"Maple Leaf Foods' 'You Are Not Alone' initiative is about making employees feel safe when talking about their mental health and reaching out for support. With our comprehensive mental health strategy, we are sending a clear message that we take their mental wellness seriously."

– Peter Neufeld, Vice President, Leadership, Maple Leaf Foods

Recommendation 2:
Institute Mandatory Mental Health Training for Leadership

Like any other key organizational priority, mental wellness in the workplace requires committed and informed leadership.[49,50] Leaders are essential agents of change and play a pivotal role in shifting an organization's culture.[51,52] A successful mental health strategy fosters and invests in strong leadership from the top, and should include mandatory mental health training for leadership.

The training should focus on general information – fostering a common level of awareness and understanding about mental health in the workplace – as opposed to skills training.[53,54] The goal is to engage and empower leaders as invested champions for mental health in the workplace.

Many mental health training options for leaders have been proven to get results.[55,56,57,58] Some are as short as three hours in length and others are more intensive, leading to formal certification. Whatever training you choose, make it cross-organizational, easy to access, and mandatory for all levels of leadership including middle management.[59]

Given the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in a mentally healthy workplace, training that includes these topics could also help leaders ensure that they are equipped to meet their employees 'where they are' and respond to them appropriately.

Fear of Discrimination

Three-quarters of working Canadians say they would either be reluctant to admit or would not admit to a boss or co-worker that they were experiencing a mental illness. The top reasons for this reluctance include fear of being judged, and fear of negative consequences such as losing their job.[60] In order to willingly disclose their illness, employees need a reason – some way in which they will benefit from doing so. This benefit must outweigh the perceived risks.[61] **Often giving people the feeling that the workplace is a safe and supportive environment goes a long way to more open conversation.**

More than two-thirds of people with mental illness and addiction report being disadvantaged at work due to their condition. They believe that they have been refused a job interview, a job, a promotion, or otherwise disadvantaged in employment.[62]

CASE STUDY

Working for Mental Health: Bell

In 2014, Bell partnered with Queen's University and Morneau Shepell to adapt their mental health workplace training program into a stand-alone course that could be implemented by any organization.

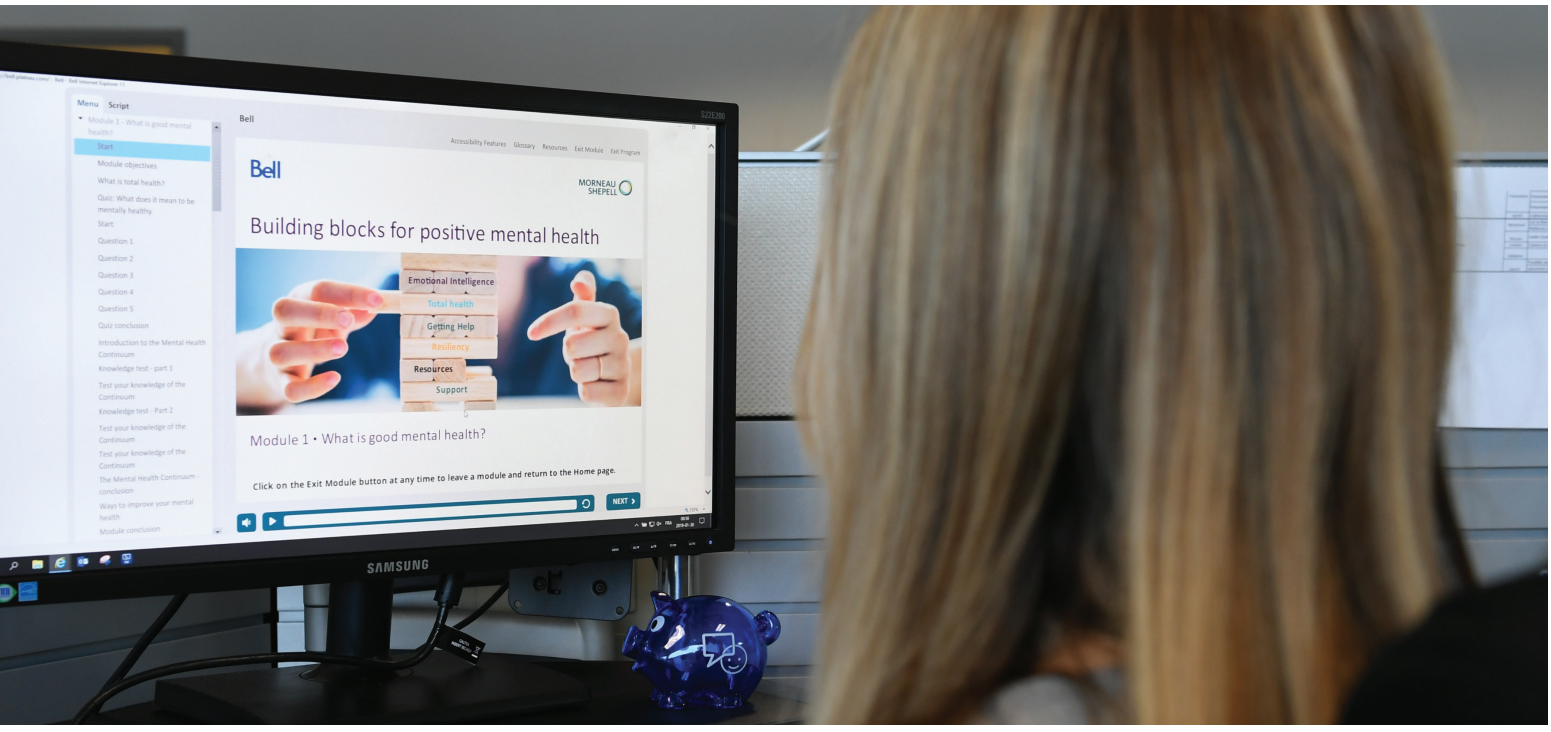
A certificate training program that teaches leadership skills in supporting employees and promoting positive workplace mental health, the program is aligned with *The National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* from the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

All Bell team leaders are required to complete a minimum level of the training, and since its inception in 2011, over 12,000 employees have been trained.[63] Modules help leaders to develop coaching skills and effective management practices focused on early intervention, recovery, and return to work.

By applying the same rigour to employee mental health as every other aspect of their organization – through training and tracking over 90 KPIs on mental health – Bell reports that, in 2018, for every dollar invested in their workplace mental health programs, they earned back $4.10.

"Investing in mental health training and robust support programs and benefits – creating a mentally healthy workplace – is both good for our people and for the business. It supports a healthy, engaged, and productive workforce, and will also lead to a positive return on investment."

– Bernard le Duc, Chief Human Resources Officer and Executive Vice President Corporate Services, Bell Canada and BCE



Recommendation 3:
Develop Tailored Mental Health Supports

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for mental health – in either the workplace or in general.[64] Different programs and approaches are effective for different people, environments, and mental health concerns.

A comprehensive needs assessment is essential for assessing your own employees' mental health needs and barriers, as well as your organization's support gaps. The assessment will help you ensure that your Employee and Family Assistance Program and other mental health/wellness programs are generous and flexible enough to be effective. A generous Employee Assistance Program is important for supporting a cultural change, and signals an organization's commitment to employee wellness.[65]

Tailor your programs to your employees' unique contexts, in terms of:

Delivery and access: Match your mode of delivery to your employees' types of work. For example, scattered locations (e.g. field work, physical labour, remote work) and jobs that require everyone on the floor at the same time, need different solutions.[66,67]

Inclusivity: Different cultures view stigma and mental health treatment in different ways. The effects of marginalization can also be complex. For example, members of LGBTQ2S communities are at higher risk of experiencing mental health issues for longer durations; however, they are also more likely to be open to diagnosis, treatment, and talking about mental health at work.[68] Your employees' demographics, along with feedback from employees themselves, should inform what outreach, accessibility, and treatment options are needed in your organization.[69]

Co-worker support groups for employees experiencing workplace stress have been found to reduce turnover and improve absenteeism rates.[70]

CASE STUDY

Working for Mental Health: BMO

Recognizing the importance of mental health and wellness, BMO focuses on providing its employees, their dependents, and retirees with access to a wide variety of programs to support mental health, including:

Mental health benefits coverage: BMO provides employees and dependents with coverage for mental health providers that's separate from their coverage for other paramedical providers. This policy allowed them to double their mental health coverage maximums, which in turn led to an increase in support for meaningful courses of treatment.

Family and caregiver support: In addition to providing 12 weeks top-up pay to any new parents who take maternity or parental leave following the birth of a child, BMO provides employees with back-up child care (up to 10 days) and adult/elder care (up to 6 visits).

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): This program is available to all employees, retirees, and their families, and includes professional counselling (available in-person, by phone, or by video), a mental health microsite and toolkits (covering topics such as addiction, sleep health, and mindfulness), and a digital wellness platform (featuring short videos from leading experts on mental health topics).

Awareness and learning: BMO has strived to open up a conversation about mental health and provide education across the organization. Their Learn from Difference program, available to all employees, focuses on inclusive, everyday actions that employees can take to create an environment where people feel valued, respected, and heard. Additionally, all-staff communications provide education and advice on mental health, and promote BMO's mental health support programs.

"BMO is deeply committed to doing all that we can to recognize that mental health is health – both in our workplace and beyond. We provide our employees with a robust benefits package, information, and training, and are focused on building a culture that encourages our teams to share their experiences and seek support for the challenges they face. We are proud to partner with CAMH on this global research and are focused on continuing to reduce stigma and increase action and awareness around workplace mental health."

– Cameron Fowler, President, North American Personal & Business Banking at BMO Financial Group

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CASE STUDY

Working for Mental Health: CAA Club Group

CAA Club Group (CCG) introduced a suite of tailored mental health supports as part of a larger wellness strategy. The programs were designed to be accessible to employees who work in offices, in retail stores, or at home.

Work-from-home flexibility: This program started as a pilot to improve resource availability during peak periods, with the additional benefit of reducing employee stress. After the program was introduced in CCG's call centres, they saw a 30 per cent decrease in average days lost due to intermittent absence.

On-site wellness consultant: CCG hired a wellness consultant to develop both individual and group programs to improve physical, mental, and financial well-being. The programs focus on helping employees build resilience and coping skills to deal with workplace and life stress, emphasizing the connection between physical activity and nutrition in maintaining mental well-being.

Guided meditation: This is one of CCG's most popular wellness programs, with 35 per cent of the workforce participating. Live sessions happen weekly in all main office buildings and via conference call. Online sessions are available for employees to access at their convenience, and a dedicated wellness room plays pre-recorded meditation sessions throughout the workday.

Within two years, CCG employees' average days lost due to poor mental health went from 4,148 days to 2,944 days. This resulted in a total savings of $178,000.

"We want our employees to feel comfortable talking about mental wellness as an important aspect of overall wellness. At CAA, we understand that every employee is unique, and we're working to provide the full spectrum of supports they might need."

– Matthew Turack, Group President, CAA Insurance

What the Research Tells Us

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Care Management

Every dollar invested in workplace CBT programs could return **about $1.79 per participating employee after one year.**

Care management matches an employee with a case worker who checks in with the employee at intervals throughout their CBT treatment, helping to manage the employee's care plan.

CBT along with care management could yield **about $0.39 to $3.35 for every dollar spent after one year.**

Smoking Cessation

When employees quit or reduce smoking, they use fewer sick days and are more productive at work.

Compared to bupropion, varenicline provides an additional net benefit of **approximately $537.22 per participating employee after one year.**

Compared to nicotine-replacement therapy, bupropion provides an additional net benefit of **approximately $620.55 per participating employee after one year.**

Compared to no aid, counselling sessions 10 minutes or less with a cessation expert in the workplace provides a net benefit of **about $620.00 to $639.00 per participating employee after five years.**

Return to Work

Employing occupational health professionals is an excellent investment – if they meet regularly with employees on sick leave. Why? **Employees that get follow-up meetings tend to return to work faster.**

Every dollar invested in sick leave follow ups by occupational health professionals could return **about $0.87 to $10.63 per participating employee after 1 year.**

Based on analyses from: Claire de Oliveira et al., (2019) Economic analyses of workplace mental health/substance use interventions: a systematic literature review. CAMH (unreleased).

Recommendation 4: Prioritize and Optimize Your Return-to-Work Process Checklist

Supporting an employee's return to work after mental health leave is a key challenge and gap for many organizations. This is where a strong human resources department, trained in mental health and wellness that takes a systems approach, can help ensure success.

Returning to work should not signal the end of mental health support from the organization; it's a critical stage in the support process.

Best practices include:

- Employ occupational health professionals who meet regularly with employees on sick leave. Employees that get follow-up meetings while on leave tend to return to work faster.[71]
- Coordinate and plan carefully.[72] Common problems that employees experience with returning to work include pushing themselves to exceed their work capacity upon return, and feeling pressured to return to work before they are ready.[73,74]
- Take accommodating their return seriously and have a full toolbox of options to suggest (e.g. modified hours/duties).[75,76]
- Ensure that access to mental health treatment continues after returning to work.[77]
- Conduct formal capability assessments upon return.[78]
- Train managers to assist employees in connecting to the support they need. Training should also focus on sensitivity, preventing/addressing discrimination, and on understanding managers' legal obligations around accommodation.[79,80]

At least half a million Canadians miss work each week due to mental illness[81]

CASE STUDY

Working for Mental Health: DIALOG

DIALOG's wellness approach is a holistic combination of flexibility, support programs, and a system of caring. Their return-to-work process prioritizes 'people first' with a systems-thinking approach. This approach includes:

Putting employees on leave in touch directly with a case manager from their benefits provider to ensure regular contact with an occupational health professional. This regular communication helps ensure that the employee is receiving all the resources needed for a successful return to work.

DIALOG connects employees with coaches who get to know – and stay in tune with – the employee's life and work demands. The coach and the HR team collaborate to plan the best way to welcome the employee back and reintegrate them into projects and work. DIALOG coaches are aware of all support and accommodations possible, such as returning to work gradually or combining work-from-home with days in the studio.

All employees receive generous time off and flexible work arrangements to balance life and work demands.

DIALOG's return-to-work program has led to great results: They have 50% fewer long-term disability cases than the national average.

"At DIALOG, we're focused on designing spaces that support well-being, and enabling people to collaborate and be their best selves. We want to ensure that's reflected within our organization, so it's important to us that we understand and consider the impact of the workplace on mental health."

– Alison McNeil, Principal, Interior Design, Toronto Office, DIALOG

Recommendation 5: Track Your Progress

Performance measurement is the keystone of a sound workplace mental health strategy.[82] This means tracking KPIs and using that data to determine overall progress, as well as specific interventions that are (or aren't) needed and effective.[83]

Good data is also essential for helping to ensure fairness and equity. Tracking utilization, as well as mental health outcomes across employee groups, can help unmask discrimination and identify access barriers to access.

Recommended indicators include: absenteeism, presenteeism, and successful return to work.[84,85] Other areas to consider measuring are: use of short and long-term disability, and RoI on mental health supports.[86]

You should also look at your organization's strategies for measuring other key objectives, and consider how mental heath measurement could be integrated with the same level of priority. For example, achievements related to your mental health strategy could be included in leaders' evaluations, and questions about psychological safety could be included in employee engagement surveys.[87,88]

Be aware that the introduction of a mental health strategy can result in a temporary spike in 'negative' indicators, such as increased use of Employee and Family Assistance Programs. This should be thought of as progress, not as a problem. Increased willingness to seek help is an indicator of reduced stigma and a signal of trust in the organization's mental health strategy.[89] An increase in sick leave days could also be the result of fewer employees coming to work while unwell (i.e. presenteeism).

Finally, when defining success, remember that mental illness will never be eliminated. The goal is long-term, continuous improvement.

Measuring Presenteeism and Lost Productivity

When an employee continues to work while unwell, they can't be fully focused and productive. This is 'presenteeism,' and the impacts are significant: Of the $51 billion economic cost of mental illness in Canada annually, some **$6 billion a year is related to lost productivity.**[90,91]

Measuring presenteeism is difficult. It's often a hidden problem that's tough to bring to light. Proxies can include productivity and mental health sick leave; an increase in both would be desirable.

Build Clear Lines of Feedback

Feedback from employees, unions, and middle managers is a valuable tool for continuous improvement.[92] **Regularly ask employees: How could we improve our mental health strategy? Then, take the answers seriously.** There are few things worse from an employee's perspective than giving feedback and feeling that it's being ignored.[93]

CASE STUDY

Working for Mental Health: GE Canada

In 2013, GE Canada made a mental health commitment to employees: To provide a nurturing, stigma-free, respectful, and trusting work environment. Implementation began with leadership engagement and training in order to ensure buy-in and to set the initiative up for success. The employee resources and programs that followed were bolstered with robust measurement plans and strategies for continuous improvement.

With the program still in effect, internal audits are used to assign scores to strategy elements such as Leadership, Policy & Participation, Planning, Implementation & Operation, Evaluation & Corrective Action, and Management Review. A Mental Health Strategy Scorecard tracks implementation progress (e.g. visits to online resources and percentage of eligible managers who have completed training), as well as outcomes over time (e.g. percentage of Employee and Family Assistance Program use that's mental health-related and the number of short-term/ long-term disability cases due to mental illness per 100 employees).

Strong data has allowed GE to course correct and build on interventions that are working well. The results have been very positive, with the company seeing a dramatic reduction in lost work due to mental illness disability and saving millions of dollars in long-term disability liabilities.

"At GE Canada, we aspire to be a nurturing, stigma-free, respectful, and trusting work environment. The results of our mental health strategy speak for themselves – healthier employees and a stronger organization as a whole."

– Meredith Keenan, Vice President, Human Resources, GE Canada

Looking Ahead

The journey to creating mentally healthier workplaces will never be complete. We all have a role to play and we must all continue to do better.

Canadian employers have a responsibility and an opportunity to work toward creating workplaces where mental health is considered as important as physical health. Doing so will empower employees to seek help when they need it and help them reach their full potential. By sharing your stories – your successes and challenges – and your data, we all have the opportunity to learn from each other and make progress together.[94]

Employees must work together to fight discrimination and speak up for each other's and their own workplace mental health.

Supportive public policy including incentives for employers, stronger legislation, and innovations in insurance regulation, could all make a big difference in helping Canadian businesses prioritize their employees' mental health.

Finally, health organizations and researchers must continue to develop and widely share ever-stronger evidence on 'what works,' and support the development and evaluation of innovative, research-informed workplace interventions.

For more information, including helpful tools and resources about workplace mental health, visit CAMH's Workplace Mental Health Resource Centre at camh.ca/workplacementalhealth

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