



Executive Summary - Mental Health in the Workplace

The Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee is presenting Mental Health in the Workplace as an initiative to explore further to enhance the wellness, health and safety of employees at Scott Construction.

The main focus of the JOHS committee falls into four categories:

1. To start the conversation about mental health and how it involves everyone in some way both at home and at work
2. To educate employees and create an awareness of mental health – through tool box meetings, newsletters, management meetings and through formal education
3. To begin to remove the stigma surrounding mental illness
4. To ascertain where Scott Construction is as an organization and begin to focus on specific action items to support this initiative

Background

Most adults spend more waking hours in the workplace than anywhere else, and many youth also work at least part-time. The workplace can contribute to mental well-being and play an essential part in helping people to attain their full potential. However, it can also be a very stressful environment that can contribute to the development of mental health problems and illnesses, such as depression and anxiety. No workplace is immune, no matter its size, whether it is in the private or public sector, manufactures goods or delivers services. Creating mentally healthy workplaces in all sectors benefits workers, their families, and employers, while contributing to the economic prosperity of the country.

The costs of not addressing mental health issues in the workplace are significant: mental health problems and illnesses typically account for approximately 30 per cent of short- and long-term disability claims, and are rated one of the top three drivers of both short- and long-term disability claims by more than 80 per cent of Canadian employers.^{48, 49}

In 2010, mental health conditions were responsible for 47 per cent of all approved disability claims in the federal civil service, almost double the percentage of twenty years earlier.⁵⁰ Mental health problems and illnesses also account for more than \$6 billion in lost productivity costs due to absenteeism and presenteeism.⁵¹ On top of shouldering these costs, employers are increasingly being held legally responsible for psychological health and safety in their workplaces—making them liable to claims, for example, if a worker is harassed or bullied or even chronically overworked.⁵²

The Psychological Health and Safety Standard that is being developed for Canadian public and private sector workplaces will provide guidance for changing how mental health and mental illness are approached in the workplace and enable both employers and employees to measure progress.⁵³ However, a shift in workplace culture cannot be accomplished by a Psychological Health and Safety Standard alone. Strong organizational leadership and a comprehensive approach to organizational change will be required.

Only 23 per cent of Canadians surveyed said they would feel comfortable talking to an employer about their mental illness.⁵⁷



Workplace promotion, prevention and anti-stigma initiatives, training for management, and employee assistance programs all have a role to play.^{58 59} Efforts should include encouraging work-life balance, making sure that people have clear descriptions of their roles at work, and facilitating their participation in deciding how work gets done. Implementing policies and practices to deal with bullying and harassment will also help to reduce the risks for mental health problems.^{60, 61}

In addition, workplaces should support the recovery of employees living with mental health problems and illnesses and enable their full participation in the workforce. As efforts to reduce stigma in Canadian society encourage more employees to feel comfortable in coming forward with their mental health problems and illnesses at work, workplaces that implement comprehensive approaches will be in a better position to respond.

About the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC)

In 2010 the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) commissioned a study to fill a gap in pan-Canadian information about the number of people living with mental health problems and illness today and the associated costs. The study built a unique model based on a wide range of existing studies in Canada and internationally. Its findings, combined with existing evidence of effective interventions, offer some key reasons for why it is important to invest smartly in mental health.

The total cost from mental health problems and illnesses to the Canadian economy is significant.

- The study commissioned by the MHCC makes it clear that the economic cost to Canada is at least \$50 billion per year. This represents 2.8% of Canada's 2011 gross domestic product.
- Health care, social services and income support costs make up the biggest proportion of these costs. But it also cost business more than \$6 billion in lost productivity (from absenteeism, presenteeism and turnover) in 2011
- Over the next 30 years the total cost to the economy will have added up to more than 2.5 trillion.

In any given year, one in five people in Canada experiences a mental health problem or illness and it affects almost everyone in some way.

- More than 6.7 million people in Canada are living with a mental health problem or illness today. By comparison 2.2 million people in Canada have type 2 diabetes.
- Mental health problems and illness hit early in people's lives. More than 28% of people aged 20 – 29 experience a mental illness in a given year. By the time people reach 40 years of age, 1 in 2 people in Canada will have had or have a mental illness.
- If we include families and caregivers, mental health problems and illness impact almost everyone in some way.

The impact of mental health problems and illnesses is especially felt in workplaces and among working aged people.

- People in their early and prime working years are among the hardest hit by mental health problems and illnesses.
- About 21.4% of the working population in Canada currently experience mental health problems and illnesses, which can affect their productivity.
- Mental health problems and illnesses account for approximately 30% of short- and long-term disability claims and are rated one of the top three drivers of such claims by more than 80% of Canadian employers.



There is strong evidence that investing in effective programs can make a difference to the economy and to the health of the population.

- *Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada* offers a range of proven and promising practices that can make a difference to the bottom line and to people impacted by mental health problems and illnesses in Canada.
- Improved management of mental health in the workplace including prevention, early action to combat stress and identify problems could decrease losses to productivity significantly.

(Mental Health Commission of Canada)

Recommended Action by Scott Construction:

1. Develop a plan that is conducive to the time, resources and commitment level by key stakeholders (executive, senior managers, workers, CLAC)
2. Create an Action Team – management/workers/external resources like CLAC, FSEAP groups, benefit providers
3. Communicate to all staff how Scott Construction will focus on mental health in the workplace
4. Review the policy statements that support and complement the focus of this initiative
 - a. Bullying/Harrassment policy, Anti-discrimination policy, Code of Conduct statement
5. Collect data to ascertain current state of Scott Construction – review of absenteeism data, benefits utilization rates, rates of accidents/injuries/incidents, EAP data
6. Guarding Minds @ Work survey to all staff for baseline health risk assessment
7. Develop specific tactics from data focusing on high impact as priority
8. Follow up at specified intervals – 3, 6, 12 month intervals to assess impact to employees – absenteeism, injury rates, engagement scores, awareness



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