

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH Strategies for your organization

According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, mental illness is “a worldwide crisis” and is the leading cause of disability and premature death in Canada. Canadians spend more time at work than elsewhere, and companies – small and large – depend on their employees being at work, getting the work done. The estimated cost in lost productivity due to mental illness is \$51 billion annually, which includes the costs of “presenteeism” (at work physically but not mentally or emotionally), disability claims and benefit claims, combined with the cost for 500,000 or so Canadians who miss work each day due to a mental health issue.

A generation ago, we talked in whispers when a colleague went off work on “stress leave”. Today we are aware of situations in more specific terms – biochemical imbalance, bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety disorder, difficulty with stress. We also know what’s true – mental health issues are increasingly impacting our organizations, our families and society in general.

The 2014 Morneau Shepell national survey on mental health in the workplace identified key findings and mental health priorities:

- 33% of working Canadians are now suffering or have suffered from a mental health condition, such as depression or an anxiety disorder
- 27% of employees surveyed report experiencing significant symptoms of stress
- Employees overwhelmingly believe that workplace support can mitigate the impact of negative stressors
- 90% of employees believe that a mentally healthy workplace is a productive one
- 99% of physicians surveyed indicate that work issues have a role in the mental health issues they see on a regular basis.

Employers are taking action

Successful companies know that by improving their employees’ health and wellness, it will have a significant positive effect by reducing absenteeism, “presenteeism” and disability claims. If employees can access services to help them through difficult situations, the result can be increased productivity, retention of staff and improved morale, all resulting in reduced costs.

Employers who develop a comprehensive plan can prevent or better manage situations created by mental health issues.

Many implement an Employee & Family Assistance Plan (EFAP) that meets their company’s needs.

THE JOHNSTONE’S ADVANTAGE

Our mission is simple:
Treat each client as if they were our only client.

Our value is clear:
We are completely independent. We work for you and offer total flexibility on insurers and plans.

We offer all your group insurance services including administration, brokerage, consulting, and communications.

We provide dedicated client support, customization and flexibility to meet all of your company’s benefits needs. And we make **solid group plans simple.**



Then they develop an action plan to identify existing (or potential) issues to set up wellness strategies to effectively address these issues. In recent years, EFAPs have increasingly been designed to help employees (and their dependents) deal with emotional and psychological problems, which have been deemed as good value to employers, proven to help overall mental health and improve productivity. Many EFAPs are now focusing more on mental health, offering mental health assessments, and providing more access to personalized health and wellness tools for employees through phone, web and mobile apps.

Insurers are taking action

Canadian group insurers are implementing additional support for mental illnesses to their products. A good example is RBC which has recently partnered with Best Doctors to provide enhanced and timely support for employees on disability due to depression, anxiety and other mental health concerns. Support includes significantly faster access to psychologists (including a series of 12 therapy sessions), recommendations by leading psychiatrists to the treating physician to confirm and/or change the diagnosis, and a treatment plan and one-on-one assistance from an assigned Client Advocate who provides support and guidance throughout the program.

Stigma

In the 2014 Morneau Shepell study, more than 60% of people with mental health problems and mental illness reported they won't seek the help they need, for many reasons including fears of stigma. The issue of stigma is complex as it related to workplace mental health which impacts whether someone seeks care, remains at work or returns to work following an illness-related illness.

Since society still harbours stereotypes about people with mental illnesses, misconceptions and fears make their way into workplaces. Some stigma results from well-meaning misunderstandings, but these can result in discrimination and harassment. Whether it is self-stigma, co-worker stigma or an employee's perception of physician community stigma, it makes it hard for an employee to feel comfortable in letting their employer or co-workers know that they are struggling.

Employees – take action!

More and more, individuals with mental illness do not feel they need to live in the shadows. It helps that the majority of employers are recognizing the role they play in shining a light on this growing issue in the workplace. Social media and online tools are helping as well. We have the ability to access help more easily, and more individuals are talking openly about their own story of the impact of mental illness on their lives.

Employees are encouraged to ensure they have the confidential contact information for their employer's EFAP program. Confidential helplines are also available – in BC these include heretohelp.bc.ca and anxietybc.com. You can also call Johnstone's Benefits anytime for confidential assistance and additional information.

CONTACT US

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