

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

Burlington Chamber of Commerce & Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade

Category from the OCC economic vision that best represents this issue:

- ❖ *Building a 21st century workforce through workplace training*

Issue:

Mental health issues and chronic job stress negatively impact workplaces in the form of disability costs, absenteeism, productivity, quality of work, and employee safety incidence rates. Opportunities exist for improved business success, especially in today's knowledge-based business economy.

Background:

One in four Canadians suffers a mental illness every year, often in the form of depression and/or anxiety. Currently, mental health claims (especially depression) have overtaken cardiovascular disease as the fastest growing category of disability costs. Today in Canada disability represents 4% to 12% of payroll costs¹ and the World Health Organization predicts depression to be the number one form of disability by the year 2020. This is alarming – especially in today's knowledge-based economic culture – since mental disorder interferes with a person's cognitive skill and therefore impacts their ability to work.

Employee mental ill-health leads to absenteeism, decreased productivity and quality of work issues, which in turn impact business success. This is critical at a time when brain-based cognitive skills are required to provide competitive advantage locally and globally.

Health conscious workplaces can promote early diagnosis and reduce the impact of mental health problems, mental illness, and addictions. If a person receives effective treatment in the first few months of their illness, the duration, frequency, and severity of symptoms will be reduced. In addition, early and effective treatment increases the chances of the individual making a full recovery. When short-term disability becomes long-term, there is a lesser chance that the person will be able to return to previous levels of proficiency.

The annual cost of mental illness and addictions in Ontario today is estimated to be approximately \$40 billion. Billions per annum could be saved by discretionary modifications to the organization and management of work to make it less injurious to employee mental health. At one time a similar crisis existed with workplace physical safety. Measurement and tracking of incidence rates, coupled with public awareness, played a strategic role in turning the tide – proving the adage that 'what you measure is what you get'. The same can be true of workplace mental health.

Recommendations:

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Develop a comprehensive Workplace Mental Health Strategy that would include the support of programs on mental health awareness education with a focus on anti-stigma, mental health treatment and rehabilitation for employees. Programs and services should also support reintegration of employees back into the workplace and crisis intervention. This

¹ Mental Health Commission of Canada

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strategy should support the existing work of the Mental Health Commission of Canada (http://mentalhealthcommision.ca/English/Pages/workplace_guide)

2. Broaden the focus of regional mental health centres to include workplace mental health issues enabling them to refer to agencies or for-profit local providers to treat employees of local workplaces by providing workplace-oriented programs.
3. Create a public education and awareness campaign on the social and economic value of workplace mental health and the availability of community workplace-oriented resources.
4. Establish metrics by tracking the incidence of employee disability due to mental disorders in organizations with a large number of employees. This includes collecting periodic data stating the number of employees, number absent due to disability, number of disability cases related to mental health, number of days absent due to disability, for the specified period.

Estimated Financial Impact to the Province:

- ❖ *Entail a small cost to government (less than \$10M)*