

What to consider when implementing a

Mental Health and Safety Program

in your workplace

WSPS.CA

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services®

ABOUT WORKPLACE SAFETY & PREVENTION SERVICES (WSPS)

WSPS works with your business to help reduce the risk of occupational incidents to create better workplaces for the future. As the largest health and safety association in Ontario, we support over 167,000 member firms and 4.1 million workers in the manufacturing, agricultural and service sectors.

Meet the WSPS Workplace Mental Health Team

- **Krista Schmid** – Specialized Services Lead, Healthy Workplace
- **Kristy Cork** – Specialized Consultant (Healthy Workplace)
- **Esther Fleurimond** – Specialized Consultant (Healthy Workplace)
- **Danielle Stewart** – Health & Safety Consultant (Workplace Mental Health)
- **Janet Carr** – Health & Safety Consultant (Workplace Mental Health)
- **Katie Bobra** – Health & Safety Consultant (Workplace Mental Health)
- **Alexandra Petrisano** – Health & Safety Representative (Workplace Mental Health)

Executive summary

MENTAL HEALTH in the Workplace AFFECTS **1 IN 5 CANADIANS**[1]

Nearly 7 million Canadians will experience a mental health problem in any given year. The total economic costs of mental illness in Canada is estimated at $50 billion.[2]

In other words, workplace mental health impacts everyone – including your business.

A recent analysis from **Deloitte Insights**[3] found that for every $1 invested in workplace mental health, the median yearly return is $1.62. Our free guide ***What to Consider When Implementing a Mental Health and Safety Program in Your Workplace*** aims to provide you with an introduction to workplace mental health exploring the following topics:

PART ONE

Our definition of health and safety includes mental health – does yours?

Historically, employers defined health and safety in terms of ensuring a physically safe workplace for employees. In the last decade, this definition has broadened to include employees' psychological health. This important shift recognizes not only an employer's legal responsibility in the duty of care for their workers, but the significant impact that mental health has on workplace productivity.

PART TWO

Building the healthy workplace

Research has demonstrated a 230% return for every dollar that employers invest in creating a psychologically safe workplace. Investing in a workplace mental health program focused on prevention takes time, careful strategy, and clear communication among all staff.[4]

[1] Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada. Retrieved from https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/node/5020
[2] Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada, Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2014.
[3] Deloitte Insights, The ROI in workplace mental health programs: Good for people, good for business, 2019.
[4] PwC Australia. (2014). Creating a mentally healthy workplace Return on investment analysis. Retrieved from https://www.headsup.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/beyondblue_workplaceroi_finalreport_may-2014.pdf.



PART THREE

13 Psychological factors for workplace mental health

The Mental Health Commission of Canada has defined 13 interrelated factors that can positively or negatively impact employees' psychological responses to work and workplace conditions. Employers need to seek to understand these factors, conduct needs assessments on how the factors impact their workplaces, and implement necessary changes.

PART FOUR

Is your organization ready for a mental health program?

Implementing a workplace mental health program is an ongoing process that requires an investment of time and resources. In this section, we examine the way in which an organization enacts a mental health program depends on its state of readiness.

PART FIVE

Why you should train management to respond to mental health concerns

A research study revealed that training managers to understand and support employees' workplace mental health improved the managers' knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported actions in this area. Managers should ensure that employees aren't being psychologically harmed in the workplace and maintain an attentive, supportive, and helpful approach to dealing with mental health concerns.

PART SIX

Should you implement the 'preventing mental harm' model?

Systematically assessing the way employees are managed is a key strategy in identifying and addressing areas of employee distress or mental harm. The 'preventing mental harm model' identifies three areas of opportunity for managers.

Our definition of health and safety includes workplace mental health – does yours?

PART ONE

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PART ONE

"Safety in the workplace is about more than just physically protecting staff – it should be inclusive of an employee's state of mind."

Our definition of health and safety includes workplace mental health – does yours?

What does it mean to be a mentally healthy workplace? Flexible working hours, on-site support staff or scheduled meditation breaks?

The truth is, that in order for an organization to count itself as fostering a psychologically safe environment, employers need to start thinking about mental health as a health and safety issue.

THE CORE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IS SIMPLE

While workplaces have always considered the safety of their employees as a point of high concern, it's only in recent years that employers began to see how psychological health impacts performance. Historically, when employers discuss health and safety, they're talking in terms of workplace accidents and physical risks. This shifted somewhat in the last decade when HR departments began considering chronic injuries as an overall extension of physical safety at work.

From there, the most apparent continuation is to include mental injury in the context of both health and its relationship with physical safety. In fact, by doing so, employers gain a much more comprehensive understanding of the impact of work on their workers.

A psychologically safe workplace is one where every reasonable effort is made to protect the mental health of workers.

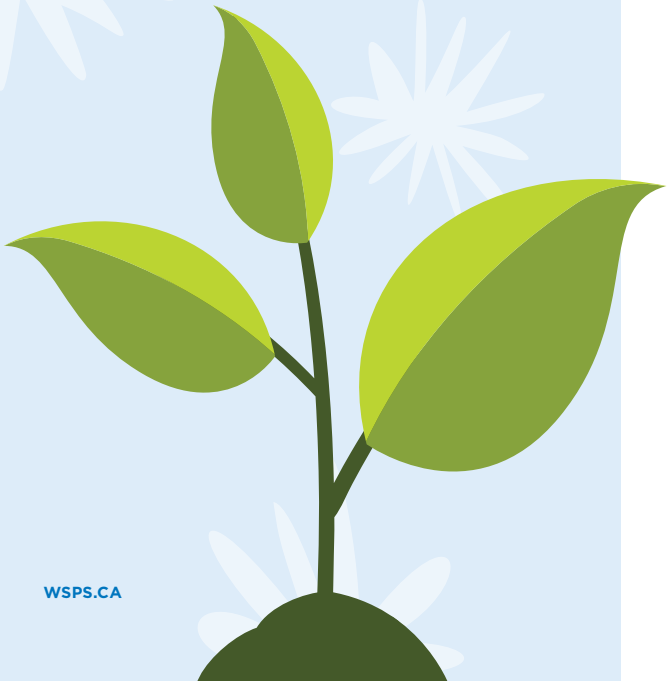
WHERE DOES THE RESPONSIBILITY LIE?

This commitment to safeguarding employee mental health shouldn't stem purely from ethical responsibility. Legally speaking, employers have a duty of care for their workers – one which resides within the legislation for health and safety practitioners to provide a physically safe system of work. While it may be defined 'a safe place to work', employers are continually choosing to interpret this as being inclusive of protecting employee mental well-being as well.

PART ONE

CONSIDER THIS

Safeguarding employee mental health isn't just the right thing to do – it's essentially ensuring your organization will not only survive the future of work but flourish in it.



MANAGING WORK AND PEOPLE

It's about how you manage your people and organize your work – something we all have to do every day. The key is that we do this with mindfulness and carefulness. Everyone has a responsibility in contributing to a healthy and safe workplace, both physically and psychologically. This includes front-line workers, managers, supervisors, senior leadership and joint health and safety committees.

What are the dangers of neglecting mental health at work?

Workplace mental health, the facts:

According to the Canadian Association for Mental Health (CAMH), approximately 500,000 employed Canadians are off work due to mental health problems.[5]

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) predicts that by 2020, mental illness will be one of the leading causes of disability – with 30% of disability claims and 70% of disability costs being attributed to mental illness.[6]

This is measurable when you consider the overwhelming impact mental health has on workplace productivity. If an employee is suffering internally, and not necessarily visibly, **poor mental health often goes unchecked and unregulated**. Not only does this diminish individual productivity, but it also impacts your team as a whole. After all, you're only as strong as your weakest link.

[5] Dewa, Chau, and Dermer (2010). Examining the comparative incidence and costs of physical and mental health-related disabilities in an employed population. Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 52: 758-62. Number of disability cases calculated using Statistics Canada employment data, retrieved from http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/labor21a-eng.htm.

[6] Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/node/5020

Building a healthy workplace

PART TWO

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Research from PwC, a global professional services company, shows an average of 230% return on every dollar invested in creating a mentally healthy workplace.[7]



Building a healthy workplace

Mental health in the workplace may seem like another buzzword topic – but many employers ignore it at their peril. Fostering a psychologically health and safe workplace should be an organizational priority, not just because it's ethically the right thing to do, but because it's an investment well spent.

THE WORLD OF WORK IS EVOLVING AROUND US

It's no longer strictly a physical effort that's needed, it's often cognitive – and as such it takes a toll on the human mind and emotions. We simply cannot separate life from work anymore – they're both one in the same. We take our private lives into the office, and we take work home at the end of the day. Therefore, the way we see work, and our perceptions around it, have to change as well.

WHAT IT MEANS TO INVEST IN YOUR EMPLOYEES' MENTAL HEALTH

Having a workplace mental health program will positively impact your organizational efficiency. Research from PwC, a global professional services company, shows an average of 230% return on every dollar invested in creating a mentally healthy workplace[8]. There's a rather strong business case to be made here, specifically regarding to recruitment and retention.

KEEPING ONTARIO WORKERS SAFE

Helping organizations foster and maintain a psychologically safe and healthy workplace is a strategic initiative for Ontario's health and safety system. To support this initiative, the website **ThinkMentalHealth.ca** has been developed by Ontario's health and safety system partners, to provide informative and actionable mental health resources. The goal is to assist Ontario's employers in creating a psychologically healthy workplace.

This site provides access to:

- reputable and tested tools
- models
- frameworks

Think Mental Health

[7,8] PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia and Beyond Blue. (2014). Creating a mentally healthy workplace: return on investment analysis, retrieved from https://www.headsup.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/beyondblue_workplaceroi_finalreport_may-2014.pdf.

PART TWO



The tools found on this site have been reviewed to ensure they provide sound and practical advice for reducing stigma and managing mental health hazards in your workplace.

MAKING A BUSINESS CASE FOR PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE WORKPLACES

When you talk about the business case for creating a mentally healthy culture, you have to talk about cost. Doing nothing is costly. When we don't consider our mental health, benefit premiums often skyrocket – mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety rapidly become a significant cause of disability. Not only does this diminish individual productivity, it impacts your team as a whole through presenteeism.

WHAT IS PRESENTEEISM AND WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

A common term in this conversation is presenteeism. As defined by the Canadian Mental Health Association: Presenteeism is the action of employees coming to work despite having a sickness that justifies an absence and as a consequence, they are performing their work under sub-optimal conditions. A psychologically safe workplace leads to more productive staff and diminishes rates of presenteeism.

> **Presenteeism is the action of employees coming to work despite having a sickness that justifies an absence and as a consequence, they are performing their work under sub-optimal conditions.**

PART TWO

Mental health fact



Studies have shown that presenteeism levels register from two to five times higher than absenteeism levels.[9]

STEPS LEADERS SHOULD TAKE TO ENSURE A CULTURE OF EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Presenteeism is a source of concern for leaders because, while absenteeism may be more physical, as in you can see an empty office seat, presenteeism is less visible and potentially more harmful. To prevent employers from going down the path of having to assess presenteeism and absenteeism rates, Canadian workplaces should be adopting a prevention strategy. Canada's leading practice strategy is the CSA/BNQ National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. This framework is centered around 13+ workplace factors which we will discuss in the next section.[10]

THERE'S NO EASY FIX – IT REALLY TAKES TIME

You need to understand the facts and the myths, both from your leaders' perspective and from employees themselves. This sort of seismic culture shift needs to emanate from the top down. However, it also has to be reflected in the way we interact with our peers; such as not jumping to conclusions and not making assumptions about how other people work.

[9, 10] Ron Z. Goetzel, Stacey R. Long, Ronald J. Ozminkowski, Kevin Hawkins, Shaohung Wang, and Wendy Lynch. (2004)."Health, Absence, Disability, and Presenteeism Cost Estimates of Certain Physical and Mental Health Conditions Affecting U.S. Employers," Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, April 2004.

13 Psychological factors
for workplace mental health

PART THREE

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PART THREE

13 Psychological factors

1. Organizational culture
2. Psychological support
3. Clear leadership and expectations
4. Civility and respect
5. Psychological demands
6. Growth and development
7. Recognition and reward
8. Involvement and influence
9. Workload management
10. Engagement
11. Balance
12. Psychological protection
13. Protection of physical safety

13 Psychological factors for workplace mental health

According to the Canadian Medical Association, 39% of Ontario employees wouldn't tell their manager if they had a mental health issue[11] – which probably goes some way in explaining why mental illness costs the Canadian economy $51 billion every year in lost productivity.[12]

Our Organizational Health Team talks about the 13 psychological factors for workplace mental health – where they came from and how you can implement them into your organizational strategy.

WHAT ARE THE 13 FACTORS?

As with any risk to your organization, the best defence is a good offence. Never has this been truer than in the case of workplace mental health. **The 13 factors are defined as elements that can impact employees' psychological responses to work and workplace conditions.** The factors are based on how we organize our work and manage our people with mindfulness and carefulness.

Consistent with research into fundamental psychosocial risk, the 13 Factors have been validated as part of the development of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. When these factors are addressed, they can positively influence employee and organizational health, resilience and sustainability.

It's important to note that each one of these factors is tied to the next. That's to say, flux and influence one another, creating positive or negative changes in the mindset of your workforce.

[11] Canadian Medical Association (2008). 8th annual National Report Card on Health Care. Retrieved from https://www.cma.ca/multimedia/CMA/Content_Images/Inside_cma/Annual_Meeting/2008/GC_Bulletin/National_Report_Card_EN.pdf.
[12] Smetanin et al. (2011). The life and economic impact of major mental illnesses in Canada: 2011-2041. Prepared for the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Toronto: RiskAnalytica.

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Implementing a mental health program in your company may feel like an overwhelming responsibility – but it's also a necessity. Here are three steps to get you started.

STEP ONE: UNDERSTAND

The first step in implementing these factors is understanding them. **ThinkMentalHealth.ca** boasts an impressive video series – 'have THAT talk' – which details the intricacies of each factor individually. It's a great tool you can use to further educate yourself on how to initiate discussions with your team, build awareness and prompt open communication.

STEP TWO: ASSESS

Organizations should also conduct a Needs Assessment, to see how the 13 Workplace Factors impact their organization. Perception surveys, such as the Guarding Minds@Work survey is a great needs assessment tool that can be used.

STEP THREE: IMPLEMENT

Once you're fully versed in the factors' nuances, it's time to talk about implementation. A good place to start is **ThinkMentalHealth.ca** readiness survey tool. Here, employers answer a range of questions using a scale of one to five – the website then calculates how ready the business is to adopt and implement a workplace mental health program.

Measuring the ROI on investing in mental well-being is something of a hot topic. But can you put a price on the mental health of your workforce? Implementation is dependent on existing policies and programs already in place within your organization, as well as how you scored in the readiness assessment. Ensure you give yourself enough time to do some thorough research into the best tools and programming for your organization.

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KEEPING WORKERS IN THE KNOW

A common mistake organizations make after conducting a needs assessment is not reporting back to staff in a timely and honest manner. One way of ensuring your program flourishes is understanding the diversity of your workforce and encouraging worker participation at all levels – to offer their input and suggestions.

Research from Cloverpop, a decision making and collaboration software company, found that inclusive teams make better business decisions 87% of the time, with those decisions yielding 60% better results.

Essentially, do not treat mental health initiatives as some kind of 'flavour of the month' trend. It's not something to be forced upon your staff. These programs need to be implemented for the right reasons, with the mindset of transforming your workplace rather than ticking a box on a health and safety report.

It's a journey – but it's one worthwhile.

Incorporating senior leadership

In order for any workplace mental health program to be successful, it's essential that your senior leadership team is visible and active throughout the development stage.

A workplace mental health program takes effort and patience. Remember, creating a mentally healthy workplace requires continual improvement over time, there is no quick fix.

Is your organization ready
for a mental health program?

PART FOUR

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Is your organization ready for a mental health program?

For many years, Bell Canada (Bell) has organized Bell Let's Talk – the one day of the year where employers across Canada come together to voice their support of mental health awareness.

MAKING MENTAL HEALTH A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

While this is a commendable initiative, organizations need to remember that mental well-being is an issue which impacts year-round. Implementing a mental health and safety plan in your company may feel like an overwhelming responsibility – but it's also a necessity.

The costs involved in crafting and implementing a mental health and safety initiative do not have to be extensive, but employers need to remember that this is not a 'quick win' scheme. It's a long-term investment – of both your time and money.

MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS AS A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

A good psychological health and safety plan contributes to decreased workplace incidents and injuries. Most jobs require employees to have good concentration, social skills and the ability to solve problems effectively which can be negatively impacted by psychologically unsafe workplaces.

These programs don't come to a natural end – in fact, an authentic psychological health and safety program will continue to evolve and transform throughout the years.

How you go about enacting a Workplace Mental Health program will change from organization to organization depending on their state of readiness. To keep things on track, refer to the **ThinkMentalHealth.ca** readiness survey tool.

PART FOUR

DETERMINE YOUR READINESS

When considering if your organization has the resources to sustain a mental health program, it's important to remember that not all ROIs are financially measurable – consider the people behind the numbers.

LOOK FOR MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONS WITHIN YOUR WORKPLACE

Stop for a moment and think about the talent and passion that currently exists within your organization. Are there individuals within your organization who could be mental health champions as you create and try to sustain the program?

If no one comes to mind, start talking to your staff to find out where their passions lie. You will be amazed at what you learn. Sure, your senior management needs to be on board, but mental health champions embedded within your organization are extremely valuable.

WORKPLACE WELLNESS ALSO INCLUDES PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

By implementing a Workplace Mental Health program you are helping people be more productive and engaged at work and increasing overall productivity. Mental health impacts everyone, including your business.

Essentially, it's not about whether you're financially able to provide an initiative – it's about whether you can afford to neglect the well-being of your staff base. WMH programs are essential to creating safe and secure workplaces.

It's becoming more and more imperative that workplaces ensure safety both physically and psychologically. With the rise of mental health issues in our society, we all have a role to play and prevention and resolution. Workplaces need to know that they are not the sources of mental harm to their workers. Workplaces should be paying attention to how they organize their work and manage their people. They need to ensure such processes are done with mindfulness and carefulness.

If psychological health and safety issues arise at work, effective responses are required to resolve the issues and prevent it from happening again in the future.

Why you should train management to respond to mental health concerns.

PART FIVE

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PART FIVE

Why you should train management to respond to mental health concerns

How all-encompassing is your mental health strategy?

While many businesses may pride themselves on having an inclusive health and safety initiative, sometimes the real-life specifics may be lost in complicated processes.

DEFINING YOUR APPROACH

It's good to have a defined approach to dealing with mental health concerns on paper – but putting that into practice is something completely different.

This sensitive subject may well be one that makes even the most seasoned nervous – after all, mishandling employee psychological concerns can have some serious ramifications. So, how much of a responsibility do employers have in staff mental health?

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH, YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

According to the ***Occupational Health and Safety Act*** in Ontario (OHSA), it's the employer's responsibility to take "every reasonable precaution" to ensure the health and safety of all their employees. While health and safety legislation doesn't specifically identify psychological health and safety, it should be considered best practice for employers to address mental harm in the same way as physical harm.

PART FIVE

Your managers have mental health needs too

Although a manager is an employee, their primary responsibility is to manage other employees. It's also their role and responsibility to support the employer's efforts to accomplish their duties under the OHSA.

However, don't forget about the mental health of your managers! Managers have many roles and responsibilities and their jobs are not easy. We can't forget that mental health is everyone's responsibility – we all have a role to play.

WHERE TO START

Improving your managers' abilities to effectively organize work and manage people can go a long way in preventing mental distress and harm. In fact, according to the research, training managers to understand and support the mental health of staff improved knowledge, attitudes and self-reported behaviours. Even simple training can help to mitigate the costs of disability and lead to higher productivity and efficiencies.

When it comes to training your management team, there are a few simple notions you can implement in your workplace today:

1. **Remind your managers to focus on the facts of a case –** not hearsay or office gossip. Managers should be encouraged to approach their employees about concerns and speak to them face-to-face in a non-judgmental manner.

2. **Understand an employee's choice of treatment for mental health concerns is outside of their control.** Their focus should stay on managing workplace stressors, clarifying expectations and helping the employee be successful at their job. While managers should remain as open and helpful as possible when dealing with mental health concerns, they should not act as a therapist.

3. **Be clear with your managers that their role is not to fix issues that reside outside of the workplace.** Furthermore, it is not healthy for one manager to be the sole support for an individual – that's a lot of pressure for one person.

Effective managers understand not only the technical requirements of the job, but also what it means to lead and coach people. Workplaces that do not prioritize training managers on workplace mental health, are not providing managers with the tools they require to effectively do their job.

Should you implement the
‘preventing mental harm’ model?

PART SIX

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Should you implement the ‘preventing mental harm’ model?

Society is working hard on breaking down stigma on mental illness and building awareness of mental health. Make no mistake – while the workplace is a contributing factor to psychological distress, it is one of many sources of mental distress. A conscientious workplace is looking to understand their role and mitigate or prevent while confidently addressing mental harm and potential mental injuries.

BUT WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS IN A PRACTICAL SENSE?

Start by assessing where you have the most influence – namely how your people are managed – and look at how to improve this process step-by-step. It’s important to uncover any parts of this process could be leading to employee distress or mental harm.

This has led to the development of the Preventing Mental Harm model, which identifies three areas of management opportunity:

- promoting mental well-being
- preventing mental harm
- resolving work-related mental injury

As an employer, it’s essential to remember that mental health is not a ‘static condition’. It can be influenced by many factors such as

- genetics
- life events or conditions
- environment
- relationships
- experiences
- resiliency or actions of others

As such, this could result in any employee experiencing mental distress at some point in their careers.

PART SIX

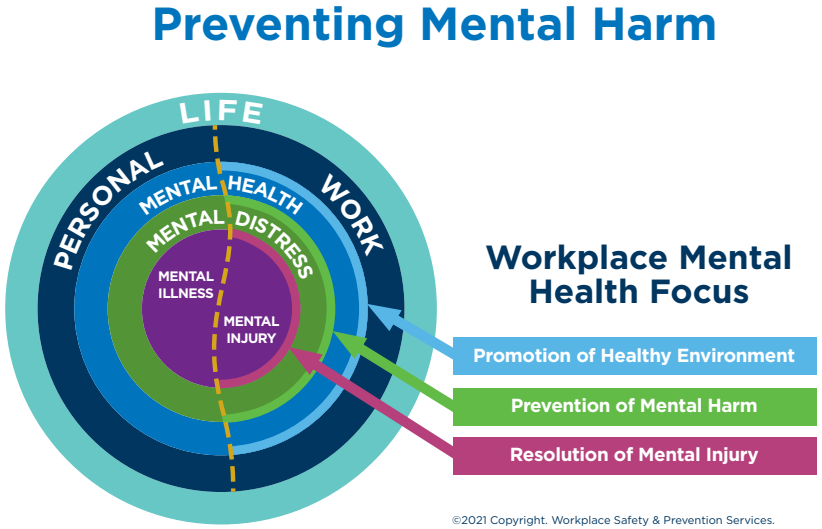
To utilize this model to its full capabilities, employers should revisit the 13 psychological factors for workplace mental health, which will assist on identify potential vectors of psychological harm. The resolution of an employee's mental injury will include both the investigation and correction of workplace factors that contribute to mental harm, as well as accommodation and return to work strategies.

WHAT ARE THE REALISTIC BENEFITS OF APPLYING SUCH A THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The nature of the model allows for significant culture change – reaction to proactive mental harm prevention. With this in mind, workplaces will be better able to ensure the allocation of resources to improve efficiency, mitigating high risk and increase return on investment.

While there's few legal requirements for mental health prevention at work, we see a growing interest in the topic at large. Concerning OHSA, there's an increasing amount of pressure for employers to include psychological health and safety in harassment, bullying and violence provisions.

Realistically this will require a mindset change that legislation and regulation must be prepared to see beyond the physical hazards to recognize the greater picture that psychological demands and behaviours have on worker health.



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PART SIX

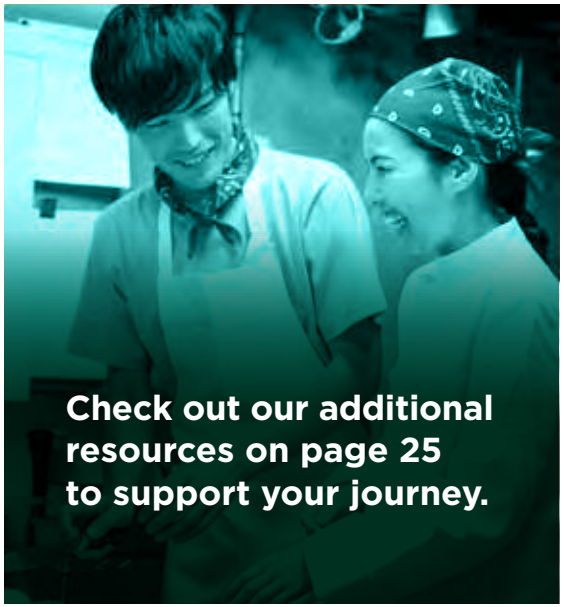
CONCLUSION



Want to learn more about how to develop and implement an effective workplace mental health and safety program?







Check out our additional resources on page 25 to support your journey.

RESOURCES

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RESOURCES

Additional resources

Want to learn more about how to develop and implement an effective workplace mental health and safety program? Here are some additional resources to support your journey.

1. ThinkMentalHealth.ca website

Fostering and maintaining a psychologically safe and healthy workplace is a strategic initiative for Ontario's health and safety system. To support this initiative, the website **ThinkMentalHealth.ca** has been developed by Ontario's health and safety system partners to provide informative and actionable mental health resources. The goal is to assist Ontario's employers in creating a psychologically healthy workplace.



2. WSPS classroom and on-site training

- **Mental Health First Aid (Basic) (MHFA) (2 days)** – Train your employees to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental disorders and provide appropriate assistance.
- **Workplace Mental Health – Raising Awareness (120 minutes)** – Reduce the stigma of workplace mental health and discuss how we can begin to work towards creating physically and mentally safe and healthy workplaces.
- **Workplace Mental Health: How Managers Should Respond (1/2 day)** – Improve mental health literacy and provide managers with practical tools and resources to be able to manage mental health issues in the workplace.
- **Workplace Mental Health: What Health and Safety Committees Should Know (1 day)** – Help health and safety committee members evolve traditional ways of thinking and find a more holistic approach inclusive of overall health and safety: physical, mental and social.

RESOURCES

3. WSPS eCourses

- **Developing Your Workplace Violence and Harassment Program in Ontario (2 hours)** – Learn how to comply with the requirements of OHSA regarding workplace violence & harassment.
- **Business Case for Workplace Wellness (1/2 hour)** – Learn how to establish a successful workplace wellness program and develop a business case for investing in workplace health.
- **Respect in the Workplace (90 minutes)** – Provides organizations, of all sizes, in any industry, with a standard tool for all employees to combat bullying, abuse, harassment, discrimination, and incivility.
- **Stress in the Workplace (1 hour)** – Introduces participants to the complex issue of stress in the workplace

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This eBook was prepared by:
Workplace Safety and Prevention Services (WSPS)

For more information, visit WSPS.CA
or contact WSPS at customercare@wsps.ca

Our commitment to understand and respond to the needs of Ontario workplaces is unwavering.

Our passion to provide effective health and safety solutions is unparalleled.

Contact us today!

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5110 Creekbank Road
Mississauga, ON L4W 0A1
1 877 494 WSPS (9777)
T 905 614 1400 | F 905 614 1414
E customercare@wsps.ca
WSPS.CA

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