

Mental health in the workplace

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization, around 450 million people currently struggle with mental illness making it the leading cause of disability worldwide¹. Closer to home, more than 6.7 million Canadians are affected. In fact, one in two Canadians have, or have had, a mental illness by the time they reach 40 years of age¹. The cost to our economy is an estimated \$51 billion a year¹. These numbers predate the devastating mental health impacts of COVID-19.

Now more than ever individuals, communities and organizations are looking for ways to prevent, manage and treat mental illness. This paper will explore the impacts of mental health in the workplace pre and post COVID-19, discuss how organizations can support their employees' well-being and look at current available mental health resources.

MENTAL HEALTH VERSUS MENTAL ILLNESS

Mental illness and mental health are not the same—though they are often used interchangeably. While interrelated, they are distinct concepts (fig.1).

MENTAL HEALTH	MENTAL ILLNESS
<i>Well-being</i>	<i>Mental disorder</i>
<i>Mental wellness</i>	<i>Mental health problems/challenges</i>
<i>Emotional health</i>	<i>Emotional problems/challenges</i>
<i>Social/emotional wellbeing</i>	<i>Mental ill-health</i>
	<i>Psychiatric illness</i>

Mental health is our state of emotional health, a sense of well-being. The World Health Organization states—if you have a brain, you have mental health. Most individuals will have mental health concerns from time-to-time such as undue stress, feelings of isolation or loneliness or simply feeling low. A mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect an individual's ability to function.

Mental illness can be defined as changes to a person's thoughts, moods, feelings and behaviours that cause distress or reduce a person's ability to function. Signs and symptoms can present differently from person to person and may depend on genetics, the type of mental illness and the person's environment. Mental illness encompasses a range of conditions including depression, anxiety, addiction, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and many others.

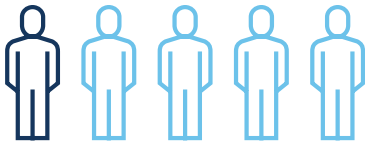
MENTAL HEALTH DATA

MENTAL HEALTH OVERVIEW

Looked at in terms of economics alone, the cost of the mental health crisis is staggering. As noted, the estimated economic cost of mental health issues in Canada is at least \$51 billion per year with direct costs related to health care, social services and income support making up the largest proportion¹. An estimated \$20 billion of this cost stems from the workplace alone. By 2041, it is estimated that the cumulative cost of poor mental health to the Canadian economy will exceed \$2.5 trillion².

If the economic costs are upsetting, the human costs are even greater .

**ONE IN FIVE CANADIANS
SUFFER FROM A MENTAL
ILLNESS EACH YEAR¹**



35 PER CENT
*of Canadians are at high
risk for mental illness¹*



NINE PER CENT
*of Canadians are taking
an antidepressant¹*

Suicide is among the leading causes of death in Canada with an average of approximately
4,000 CANADIANS DIE BY SUICIDE EVERY YEAR¹

WORKPLACE AND MENTAL HEALTH PRIOR TO COVID-19

Before COVID-19, workplace mental health was one of the most important issues facing organizations. Around 500,000 Canadians in any given week are unable to work due to mental illness¹. In total, the loss of productivity at work due to mental illness related absenteeism and presenteeism (working while unwell) adds up to CA\$6.3 billion annually across Canada³.

- People in their early and prime working years are among the hardest hit by mental health problems and illnesses². In fact, 21 per cent of the working population in Canada is currently experiencing mental illness⁴.
- Nearly half of employed Canadians with a mental health-related disability feel that one or more of their conditions makes it difficult to change or advance in their job⁵.
- Mental illness is a leading cause of disability in Canada¹.