

## Mental Health in the Workplace

Perhaps you know someone at work who is struggling with mental health challenges. Perhaps you are having these struggles too. You may hesitate to tell your employer, wondering what might happen if you disclosed your concerns, and what difference would it make anyway?

Thanks to a new standard regarding psychological health and safety in the workplace, presented by the Canadian Standards Association in 2013, we now have Safeguards in place. Although voluntary at this time, legislation is planned to further enhance enforcement. These standards offer the employee more security. They include training consultants to assist employers and staff to address these issues in a balanced manner, and to educate both staff and management to help ease the conversation. (Link: <http://bit.ly/1aGB2b3>). Dialogue and awareness can also be encouraged through posters that promote psychological wellness, addressing exercise, eating habits, stress management and recognizing early warning signs of mental illness.

Employers, especially those in small business, may have no Employee Assistance Plan, and believe they cannot afford to accommodate employee needs. But many accommodations cost nothing, and only require creativity. For example, an employee who cannot manage crowds yet must take the 8 a.m. bus to work, which challenges their mental health to the degree their workday is impacted, could benefit by more flexible hours. Others may require more frequent breaks and could divide their lunch hour time throughout the day. Others require a quieter location, which could be a simple shift to a corner area, or to a more private cubicle. These accommodations can result in better mental health and a stronger relationship with an employer who is willing to work with someone's challenges.

With costs to the Canadian economy of billions of dollars, we must continue to enhance our mental health awareness and acceptance in the workplace. Huge strides have been made in the past decade yet stigma still stands as a barrier to the necessary conversations to address concerns. As with any major cultural shift, this will take time, but these new standards should help to speed the journey.

For more information you can contact the Canadian Mental Health Association at [www.cmhawwd.ca](http://www.cmhawwd.ca) to explore their programs, 24 hour crisis lines, and training. Literature is available at CMHA centres. Another website is [www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com](http://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com)

*This article was written by Thea Trussler, Referral Coordinator for Bridging Employment Supports, CMHAWWD. The "Open Mind" column is sponsored by community partners who are committed to raising awareness about mental health, reducing stigma and providing information about resources that can help. Contact [ahkeley@cmhawwd.ca](mailto:ahkeley@cmhawwd.ca). For local mental health resources / information, visit [www.communitytorchlight.com](http://www.communitytorchlight.com) or call 1-844-HERE247.*