



Bust the stigma of mental health at work 7 ways to make your workplace a pathway to mental wellness

With mental illness affecting one in five Canadians¹, it touches all of us in some way. There are effective treatment strategies, but the stigma associated with mental illness often stop people from disclosing their illness or seeking help. Here's what you can do to help break the stigma and boost mental health at work.

1. Start with understanding

When it comes to mental health, it helps to know the difference between an issue and an illness. Both are very real and need support.

A **mental health issue or concern** refers to any mental health condition, with or without a formal diagnosis.

The term **mental illness** is generally used only when there's a formal diagnosis, meaning someone's ability to function is significantly impaired. You can use it to describe chronic conditions that stem from:

- > **Inherited traits** from blood relatives with mental illness
- > **Environmental exposures** such as stressors or toxins before birth, or psychological traumas in life
- > **Brain chemistry** altered by physical changes through events like traumatic brain injury or substance abuse
- > **Social factors** such as stressors at home or at work

It's possible to live with and recover from mental illness. Recovery doesn't necessarily mean a complete cure; many people are stable and can live productive lives with or without symptoms. If you know of someone at work who has a mental health concern, encourage them to seek help; the earlier they do, the better the outcome.

2. Look for ways you can help

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has identified 13 factors that can influence and support psychological health and safety in the workplace. Visit mentalhealthcommission.ca to watch the video series and discover how each applies to your workplace.

3. Dispel the myths of mental illness

Battling the stigma starts with sharing the facts: mental illness is a medical condition that can be treated. Visit CMHA.ca to read the [10 myths about mental illness](#) from the Canadian Mental Health Association.

To reduce the impact of mental illnesses on our communities and workplaces, learn the facts and start challenging our own assumptions and behaviours. Speak out against the stigma when you encounter it and share what you know to help others understand.

4. Talk about your mental health concerns and encourage others to do the same.

Talking about a mental health concern will increase the likelihood you'll get the care and support you need, but you might worry it will affect your job. The Co-operators partnered with the University of Regina to find the best ways employers can foster a safe environment for their employees to disclose a mental health concern.

The study discovered it's important to:

1. Give mental health the same importance in the workplace as physical health.
2. Educate leaders on mental health symptoms, treatments and the impacts on workplace behaviour and performance.
3. Offer support to make sure leaders are confident discussing mental health concerns with employees.
4. Find advocates willing to share their positive experiences, either publicly or one on one.
5. Ensure employees feel valued and empowered and are aware of available workplace accommodations.
6. Be empathetic when discussing how mental health symptoms may affect performance.
7. Check in with staff frequently to address stressful working conditions and workplace triggers.
8. Encourage co-worker and team support for employees struggling with a mental health concern and ensure appropriate support is in place.

5. Work with leaders to create a culture of wellness

Workplace programs and policies create a safe place for all employees to manage their health and break down barriers. If you don't have one already, access an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other resources to share in house.

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6. Choose to get help for yourself

Use the mental health services available and learn as much as you can about your condition. These resources can help improve your well-being and provide a positive role model for others who are struggling.

7. Get involved

Use your voting power to support laws and practices that promote inclusion and stop discrimination against people with mental illnesses. Spend time with people who experience mental illness to share and learn from each other. Volunteering with a community organization is a great way to connect with others.



¹ cmha.ca/about-cmha/fast-facts-about-mental-illness

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