



# Workplace Mental Health

## Rapid Response Survey

Survey date: September 2017

No. of participants: 135

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Percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Therefore, totals may not equal exactly 100%.

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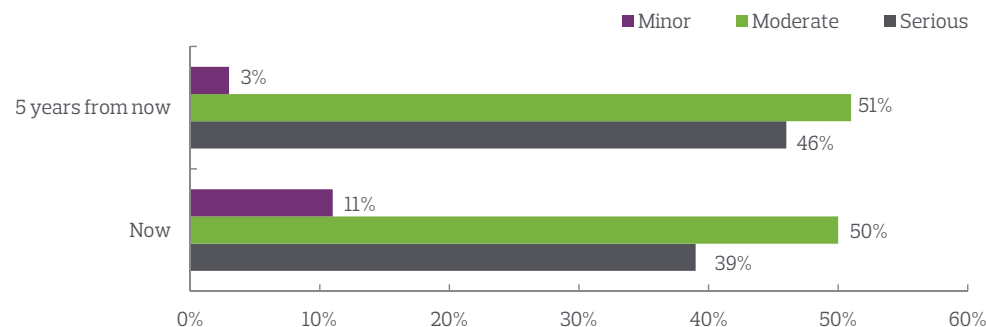
## Connecting business risk and strategy

The Conference Board of Canada estimates that about 1.3 million Canadian workers suffer from mental health conditions related to anxiety and depression. A significant portion, about 60%, are still at work with reduced hours or capacity, while others are no longer able to work at all. In addition, the Canadian Mental Health Association reports that almost one half (49%) of those suffering from anxiety or depression have never gone to see a doctor about the problem. This Aon survey asked employers to consider the financial risk exposure presented by employee mental health and the strategies they have in place to address these concerns.

While most organizations support positive workforce mental health through an array of group benefit and in-house support or training programs, a majority (64%) of those polled do not have an organizational mental health strategy that they would consider a key component in their overall people and risk management framework. Organizations are clearly concerned about employee mental health, but the lack of overarching strategy may hamper their ability to design and manage programs that fully address its hard and soft cost effects on benefit plans, productivity, and engagement.

## Business risk

Concern about the business risk of mental health is growing and may continue to grow in the future.



## What drives mental health strategy?

Employers who have an identifiable organizational mental health strategy are motivated by the desire to reduce costs, support managers dealing with the mental health concerns of their reports, or align with a desired corporate culture, among other things. Among those who don't, there is concern over cost, and the difficulty of measuring return-on-investment (ROI) and overall benefit. The concept of value-on-investment (VOI) is increasingly replacing the older model of ROI. Financial outcomes are important, but so too is the improvement of employee productivity and engagement.

Motivating factors	Rank	Demotivating factors
Reduce paramedical costs	1	Too difficult to measure return on investment
Address office conflict, employee complaint patterns, grievances, legal actions, etc.	2	Benefits are unclear
Satisfy an increased need for manager awareness and training	3	Cost prohibitive resource requirements
Align with our desired corporate philosophy/culture	4	Uncertainty about what is involved, or how to begin
Reduce drug costs	5	Other organizational priorities at this time

## What are employers doing to support employee mental health?

The vast majority of survey respondents (83% to 98%) identify core benefit components as supports for mental health strategy. Nearly all provide short- and long-term disability programs, drug benefits, employee assistance programs, and paramedical practitioner coverage.

Non-core efforts to support employee mental health	
Employee assistance program/Employee and family assistance program	97%
Clear and safe process for reporting workplace bullying or harassment	73%
Lunch and learn sessions	52%
Physical health promotion	52%
Personal finance/debt counselling or training	49%
Web-based education programs	48%
Self-help sessions on topics like stress or time management	38%
Health risk assessments	34%
Dietary counselling	32%
Yoga or meditation classes	27%
Prayer space	26%
Telephonic health concierge services	20%
Meditation space	19%
Peer support networks/groups – in person	15%
Technology-based behaviour awareness tools or apps	13%
Peer support networks/groups – online	1%

### Paramedical coverage

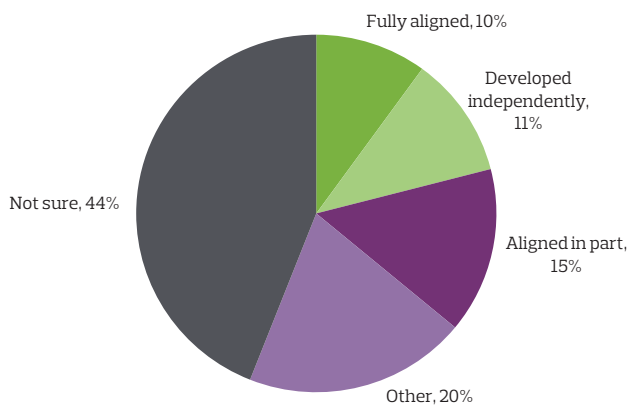
Among the respondents who offer paramedical coverage (e.g. psychology or psychotherapy services), most (63%) have not made recent changes to their plans in reaction to rising concerns over mental health. Public awareness campaigns tell us that several large employers have increased annual caps for psychologist services in a concerted effort to help their employees navigate mental health issues. Though efforts like this generate interest in the market, very few of the employers surveyed here (7%) have followed this path to date. Many may be waiting to see whether the early adopters of increased annual caps actually achieve the desired impact of reducing overall benefits costs, and improving productivity and engagement.

It is interesting to note that where psychological or psychotherapeutic service coverage is provided to employee, ninety per cent provide dependent coverage. When considering benefit design changes, employers should note the impact of dependent coverage, especially in the mental health arena where studies show a rising incidence of mental health issues among youth populations.

## Alignment with the national standard

A voluntary standard – National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (“the Standard”) – developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and its partners, has been in place since 2013. It defines a psychologically healthy and safe workplace as one, “that promotes workers’ psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to worker psychological health, including in negligent, reckless, or intentional ways”. The Standard offers a framework upon which to build a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. Only 25% of employers surveyed say they are fully or partially aligned with the Standard. A significant proportion (44%) is unsure of the degree to which their programs align with the standard. The Standard is still fairly new and may be applied with more rigor if concern for the business risk associated with mental health grows, as indicated by the results of this survey.

## Among employers with a mental health strategy, what is the nature of its alignment with the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace?



## Consistent application and measurement

Communication and training are among the greatest mental health program challenges. As an inherently sensitive area to manage, it is vital that policies are applied consistently across organizations and their success and true impact measured and evaluated at regular intervals.

How is consistent application of policy encouraged? Is policy measured for success/impact?	Using this method encourage consistent application (%)	Of those providing this option, what % are actively measuring its success/impact
Regular communications with all employees	54%	25%
Manager training	43%	21%
New hire training/orientation	33%	18%
Posters	30%	20%
Onsite workshops	27%	52%
Integrated programs (e.g. EAP and disability management)	24%	48%
Financial support/advocacy from leadership	15%	33%

## Acceptance and accommodation

There are a number of approaches to accommodating employees experiencing mental health issues. Depending on the situation, formal accommodation or back-to-work strategies related to a disability may be required. Employers may also utilize options typically associated with formal accommodation practices to alleviate pressure on employees before the situation escalates to disability claim level. The table below sets out current practices as reported by survey respondents.

Accommodation practices in place	
Flexible hours/scheduling	59%
Flexible location (e.g. working from home)	47%
Reduced hours	47%
We do not have any formal practices in place	37%
Private work areas	23%
Integrated programs	12%
Job-sharing	12%

## Connecting mental health strategy and business risk

A quarter of organizations are not sure whether their programs are working. Still others think their programs may or may not be having a positive effect on their workforce, but they haven't actually measured the impact. Very few are absolutely confident in their ability to assess their program strategy against specific organizational concerns like benefits costs (19%), productivity (9%), or engagement (8%).

Measuring the impact of mental health programs and benefit supports is critical to understanding whether the right programs are in place. Measuring factors like drug and disability costs is a good start. The next step is to establish a line of sight to the relationship between tangible costs and strategic mental health programs. Doing so can lead to core benefit cost savings, and have a positive influence on the less tangible but equally critical costs associated with productivity and engagement.

## Do employers feel their current efforts allow them to effectively support mental health within their organization?

**34%** say no, but do not actually have measurable data

**33%** say yes, but do not actually have measurable data

**25%** are unsure

**8%** have measurable data and know whether or not programs are providing effective support

## Methods used to connect mental health strategy and overall business risk

	Method	
Review of data in these areas reflects hard costs incurred when a health issue – mental or physical – has progressed to the stage where help has been sought and/or insurance claims have been made.	EAP/EFAP utilization review	76%
	LTD claims incidence review	71%
	Overall benefit plan cost review	70%
	LTD claims duration review	68%
	Drug plan claims review	68%
	STD claims incidence review	64%
	STD claims duration review	59%
	Paramedical benefit utilization review	55%
Review of data in these areas may identify early warning signs for hard costs that may be incurred later.	Formal employee surveys (e.g. via engagement surveys)	48%
	Informal employee surveys or feedback	43%
	Casual absence data review	42%
	Regular internal program audits/reviews	22%
	Health risk assessments	21%
	Presenteeism assessment	9%

*\*The term "presenteeism" is broadly defined as, "actively at work, but not productive."*

## Final thoughts

The results of this survey indicate that mental health is a significant and growing concern for Canadian employers. Addressing mental health is a necessary consideration in the development of a robust organizational people risk strategy. However, uncertainty remains over how to make the strategy work in a cost-effective manner, how to manage it over time, and finally how to measure its overall success – both in financial terms and cultural benefit to the organization.