

Use Mental Illness Awareness Week to Examine Your Workplace Policies



Oct. 6-12, 2013 is Mental Illness Awareness Week in Canada. So it's a fitting time to consider how your company accommodates workers with such disabilities and what it does to foster psychological health and safety in the workplace.

According to a new report commissioned by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, 90% of Canadians with serious mental illnesses are unemployed due largely to prejudice about their conditions, costing the Canadian economy an estimated \$50 billion a year.

The Aspiring Workforce report, which will be released on Oct. 9, examines the challenges facing the mentally ill and recommends collaboration among all sectors to find work for mentally ill Canadians, many of whom have training and skills.

In addition, studies have shown the various psychological and mental health issues workers are suffering from, such as depression, and their impact on the workplace.

The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, which organizes Mental Illness Awareness Week each year, recommends that workplaces do the following this week to increase awareness of mental illness issues and resources:

- If your workplace has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), contact the officials and ask them to display posters, information pamphlets and information about the EAP services in a prominent location in the workplace.
- Establish programs to help people deal with workplace stress or other mental illnesses. You can use CSA Z1003/BNQ 9700, the first Canadian standard for psychological health and safety in the workplace, to set up a psychological health and safety management system. (Watch this recorded webinar on the new standard.)
- Organize a panel debate on mental illness with experts at lunch hour, after work or even during work hours to benefit all workers. Teach workers how to deal with stress. Ensure they know what help is available for addiction, depression, anxiety or other mental health problems they may be experiencing.

- Give information to management about the impact of excluding people with a mental illness from the workplace and the dollars lost due to a lack of mental health promotion in the workplace. For example, show them how psychologically unsafe workplaces cost companies millions.

To learn more about how you can help workers struggling with a mental illness, go to Mental Health Works, a national program that helps employers and employees address mental illness in the workplace.

And for more information on psychological safety in the workplace—including why you should take steps to address it in *your* workplace—go to the OHS Insider's Psychological Safety Compliance Centre for:

- A model psychological harassment policy
- An infographic on psychological safety
- 10 tips for improving workers' mental health
- A stress prevention at work checklist
- A psychological health and safety survey.