Does Your Workplace Need Mental Health First Aid Officers?



It's a basic safety measure to have individuals in the workplace who are trained in first aid. So-called first aiders or first aid attendants can handle minor injuries and stabilize workers with more serious injuries or illnesses until they can get proper medical attention.

But did you know that individuals can also get training in how to provide *mental health* first aid'

According to Mental Health First Aid Canada, mental health first aid is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis until appropriate support is found or until the crisis is resolved.

Workers and managers may be in the best position to recognize the first signs and symptoms of mental health issues in their co-workers'provided that they're properly trained.

Providing mental health first aid isn't required under the OHS laws. But having workers trained in this type of assistance may help your company:

- Recognize and understand the symptoms of mental health problems, including those related to substance abuse
- Provide help to prevent the mental health problem from becoming more serious

- Promote the recovery of good mental health by accommodating workers in distress or recovering from a crisis
- Increase productivity and reduce absenteeism and overall pressure on benefits.

In fact, employers who take steps to improve mental health overall and provide psychological safety may be rewarded with dramatic cost and effectiveness benefits, enjoying significant and sustainable enhancements in:

- Productivity: happy and psychologically healthy employees work harder and more efficiently
- Recruitment and retention: today's employees expect a workplace that supports their personal and professional growth
- Cost savings due to disability and absenteeism: there's a strong link between mental health, physical well-being and injury prevention
- Conflict reduction: better mental health among employees means fewer grievances and complaints, and a stronger corporate reputation
- Operational success: mentally healthy workplaces are characterized by higher levels of employee motivation, commitment, innovation and creativity, as well as fewer errors, better decision making and improved planning.

The concept of mental health first aid isn't unique to Canada. For example, in Australia, although there's a growing recognition by workplaces of the impact of mental health problems, not enough is being done to equip staff with the necessary skills to rapidly respond to a colleague in crisis or detect the early signs and symptoms of a mental health problem.

As a result, there's been a push for the implementation of mental health first aid training and the appointment of so-called 'Mental Health First Aid Officers' in workplaces across

Australia.

Until recently, Australian workplaces providing staff with access to mental health first aid training and appointing officers has been confined primarily to healthcare, the public sector and the tertiary education sector. But the concept is now picking up momentum with major workplaces actively championing the idea.