

Psychological health and safety in the workplace

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Each year more than 20 per cent of Canadians experience a mental health issue or illness.

Mental health claims represent 30 per cent of all disability claims and account for 70 per cent of total costs. Suffering from mental health issues can lead to absenteeism, presentism (that's when staff work while sick, causing productivity loss, poor health, exhaustion and workplace epidemics), and staff turnover. All of this undermines mental wellness due to increased workload for those remaining in the workplace.

We spend many of our waking hours in the workplace. It makes good business sense for organizations to consider the impact they have on the mental health of their workers at all levels to ensure they are not contributing to harm - intentionally or through complacency.

The BC Ministry of Health requires the health authorities to implement the Canadian Standards Association's Standard on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (PHSW). Other workplaces can use this standard to ensure they meet the requirement of due diligence in preventing harm and accommodating diversity in their workplaces.

At first glance, the Psychological Health and Safety Standard reads like an organizational development tool. That's because it is. Factors such as organizational culture, support for employee development, respectful and timely communications and workload management are not only the foundations of a healthy and productive organization, but also one that supports the people working within the organization.

A few years ago, HSA members participated in the Guarding Minds @ Work Survey. The results, when compared to results from a national survey, showed several areas of concern for most HSA worksites. That should not surprise HSA members. Employers are refusing education leaves and funding, and denying opportunity. They routinely deny special leave, workloads are crushing and workplaces are unsafe from violence and musculoskeletal injuries.

HSA is working collaboratively with several community social services which are voluntarily implementing the PHSW standard. Our biomedical engineering technologists working at Providence Healthcare will see a focused implementation after reporting some significant concerns with the 13 factors.

What can you do?

- Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is an occupational health and safety issue.
- If you have concerns about your workplace, bring it up to your OHS steward. Take a workshop to familiarize yourself with the Standard.
- Speak up.
- Continue speaking up. This is a safety issue.

- Check out mentalhealthcommission.ca for more information.

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