Since its inception in 2007, the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace (the Centre) has been working to define and respond to workplace mental health needs. The following is a summary of the Centre’s work to help foster psychologically healthy and safe workplaces, identify related needs through research commissioned by the Centre, and develop resources to help employers address those needs.
Defining workplace mental health needs

A National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

In December 2009, the Centre hosted a national forum on the development of national workplace standards on mental health to benefit and support employees and employers. Supported by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the forum included leaders from business, research and standard-setting bodies [the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and the Bureau de normalisation du Québec (BNQ)]. The forum resulted in the development of a consensus statement to take forward to national standard-setting bodies.

In early 2013, the National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard) was released. The Centre, which helped fund this initiative, applauds the launch of the Standard. The Standard 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.

A presentation highlighting how the Centre’s resources can help employers work towards the Standard can be viewed on the Centre’s website at www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com.
National surveys and research reinforce value of Standard

Since 2007, the Centre has been conducting surveys that help inform the development of solutions for employers to foster psychological health and safety in the workplace. The survey results also reinforce the value of a voluntary Standard that provides a framework and guidance for employers who wish to foster a workplace that is psychologically healthy and safe. The surveys, which were conducted by Ipsos Reid, are among the largest of their kind and include supervisors and employees from a range of industries across Canada.

2007

• In 2007, the Centre engaged Ipsos Reid for a survey of Depression in the Workplace.
• This survey of 4,122 employed Canadians was the largest and most significant Canadian study at the time to evaluate depression in the workplace.

The survey revealed that:
• 19 per cent of Canadian workers missed three or more work days due to depression, stress or anxiety in the last 12 months.
• Only 18 per cent of Canadian managers and supervisors said they had received training to help them identify and deal with employees who exhibit signs of depression.

2009

• In 2009, the Centre engaged Ipsos Reid once more for a survey of Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, as well as a follow up to the Depression in the Workplace survey.
• This survey of 6,800 employed Canadians was the largest and most significant Canadian study at the time to evaluate levels of psychological health and safety in the workplace.

The survey revealed that:
• 1 in 5 (19 per cent) Canadian employees felt their work environment was not psychologically safe or mentally healthy.
• Industries with employees most at risk included transportation and warehousing, manufacturing, health care and social services, and public administration.

2012

• Two follow-up surveys tracked progress on perceptions of Depression in the Workplace and Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. A third survey explored a new dimension, the Emotional Intelligence of managers and supervisors in the workplace.
• Altogether, over 6,600 employed individuals (2,317 of which were managers or supervisors) participated in the surveys.
• The largest of their kind in Canada, these surveys provided data to help define and respond to workplace mental health needs, including identifying and addressing psychological health and safety in the workplace and addressing depression in the workplace.

Full survey details are available at www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com. Highlights from the 2012 survey on Depression in the Workplace, Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, and Emotional Intelligence are featured on the following pages.
Depression in the Workplace

2012 SURVEY RESULTS FROM ALL RESPONDENTS

- Employers were perceived to be less accommodating of those experiencing mental health-related issues compared to those with physical health-related issues.
- **83 per cent** of respondents agreed it is easier for workplaces to deal with physical disabilities than with mental health conditions.
- **14 per cent** of employees reported having been diagnosed by a doctor as being clinically depressed. 8 per cent believe they are currently suffering from depression but have not been diagnosed, and 16 per cent reported they had suffered depression in the past.
- Respondents with depression reported receiving most support from their co-workers, followed by their direct manager or supervisor. They reported significantly less support from human resources, health and wellness staff or union representatives.
- **85 per cent** of respondents agreed that workers with mental health conditions can be just as productive as other workers if they have access to the right supports.
- **83 per cent** of respondents agreed that workers have a responsibility to self-identify if they have a mental illness but 31 per cent felt that their direct supervisor would not be understanding or supportive if they did so.
- **Over 14 per cent** believed that people chose to be depressed and could just snap out of it if they want to.

2012 SURVEY RESULTS FROM MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

- Comparable to 2007, 4 in 5 managers and supervisors continued to believe it is part of their job to intervene with an employee who they believe is showing signs of depression.
- Only 1 in 5 managers and supervisors had received training in identifying and helping employees with signs of depression in 2007, now almost 1 in 3 have. In addition, 55 per cent of managers and supervisors report having intervened with employees compared to 29 per cent in 2007.
- **63 per cent** of managers and supervisors would like to receive better training to deal with this type of situation and 43 per cent would like to receive more support from upper management and human resources staff.
Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

2012 SURVEY RESULTS FROM ALL RESPONDENTS

- More than 70 per cent of Canadian employees surveyed reported some degree of concern with psychological health and safety in their workplace, including 14 per cent who disagreed that their workplace is psychologically healthy and safe. 30 per cent of workers reported levels of concern that warrant serious attention.
- More people felt physically safe than psychologically safe in their workplace.
- Over half of respondents reported experiencing frustration, exhaustion or irritation sometimes or often in the previous month. About a quarter reported experiencing anxiety, helplessness or depression.
- Over one quarter of respondents reported feeling that no matter what they did, it would never be enough to please their manager/employer.
- Consistently across all risk factors, higher levels of concern were reported by men compared to women, and by union members compared to those not in unions.
- 46 per cent of respondents believed that economic uncertainty has had a negative impact on their workplace and 22 per cent were worried about losing their job.

These survey results focused on psychosocial factors present in Canadian workplaces. These are organizational factors that have a potential impact on mental health and/or psychological safety of employees.
Emotional Intelligence

In 2012, for the first time, the Centre included Emotional Intelligence in its survey. It measured the Emotional Intelligence of managers and supervisors in Canada, specifically relating to how they may respond to the emotional distress of their employees.

The survey was based on the skills assessment available in the Managing Emotions module of the Centre’s Managing Mental Health Matters program, which encompasses:

- Dealing with other peoples’ negative emotions and reactions
- Communicating effectively, including resolving conflict
- Understanding emotional reactions
- Managing emotional reactions

Almost three quarters (73 per cent) of managers and supervisors had no significant strength in any of the four key skills areas measured in the survey.

65% of managers and supervisors said they could do their job more effectively if they found ways to more easily manage distressed workers.
One might question if this self perception is consistent with reported attitudes and skills given that this same group reported:

• 51 per cent were uncomfortable providing negative feedback to employees.
• 42 per cent tend to immediately defend or justify themselves when receiving negative feedback.
• 51 per cent thought that crying at work is a ploy to get attention.
• 35 per cent did not interfere in conflicts between workers and let them work it out themselves.
• 70 per cent agreed that negative emotions do not serve any useful function in their positions.

2012 SURVEY RESULTS FROM MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

• Over 90 per cent of managers and supervisors felt it was important to improve their emotional intelligence in the workplace and believe it is possible to do so.
• 2 out of 3 managers and supervisors felt additional training and support would help them do their jobs more effectively.
• Across all sectors – including health care, manufacturing, industrial and labour organizations, and service/hospital/retail and corporate/financial/office sectors – managers and supervisors scored as having more challenges than strengths.
• Half of managers and supervisors were rated as challenged in one or more skill areas.
• The areas where managers and supervisors experienced the most challenges in working with distressed employees were communicating effectively (29 per cent) including resolving conflict; and understanding their own emotional reactions (27 per cent). Survey results showed that nearly one third of managers and supervisors had some challenges in these areas.
• Only 1 per cent of managers and supervisors were strong in all four skill areas measured in the survey.
• 60 per cent of managers and supervisors agreed that dealing with conflict was one of the most stressful parts of their jobs.
• 41 per cent of managers and supervisors felt they tend to communicate aggressively when they feel they are not getting their message across.

83% of managers and supervisors believed that workers would describe them as a motivational leader.

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• 35 per cent did not interfere in conflicts between workers and let them work it out themselves.
• 70 per cent agreed that negative emotions do not serve any useful function in their positions.
The Centre offers free tools and resources

In response to these workplace needs, the Centre has worked with various organizations with expertise in this area to create and provide, free of charge, practical ideas, tools and resources designed to help with the prevention, intervention and management of workplace mental health issues. These include:

**Managing Mental Health Matters**  
A scenario-based training program designed to help managers, supervisors and other leaders learn how to effectively recognize and manage mental health-related issues in the workplace through a series of online videos and activities. The five episodes provide a guide on Managing Accommodation, Managing Performance, Managing Emotions, Managing Conflict and Managing Return to Work.

**Guarding Minds @ Work™**  
A self-service resource to help small to large employers assess the psychological health and safety of their own workplace, and includes a framework for action planning and evaluation. The program helps employers understand and effectively address psychosocial issues affecting health and productivity in their workplace.

**On the Agenda**  
A series of interactive sessions for managers to engage their teams in discussions about addressing workplace issues that may impact mental health.

**Working Through It™**  
A video-based program to help individuals reclaim well-being at work, off work and when returning to work. It focuses on video interviews of real people sharing their experiences working through times of mental health pressures. Their messages, aimed at employees, include three important themes: 1) you are not alone; 2) there are things you can do to reclaim your well-being; and 3) there is hope for a better tomorrow. Supplementary reference and checklist documents are also available as part of this resource.

All of these and additional tools and resources are available in English and French to anyone, anytime, anywhere, at no cost at www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com.