So what does this **mean** for **employers** today?

Overall, the survey confirms that mental health issues are having significant impacts on employees and employers. Employers face significant productivity and cost impacts. There are encouraging signs of a willing attitude among managers to help employees with mental health issues, but stigma remains a barrier and managers lack the supports needed for them to do this effectively.

Employers have a significant opportunity to reduce their mental health related costs by providing increased management training, improved guidelines and policies, and stronger support from Human Resources.

The information provided by the Ipsos Reid survey suggests that employers are moving in the right direction by:
- Increasing awareness and reducing stigma among employees
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**Survey** leads to **management training** course

As one response to these findings, the Centre has identified and supported the development of a training course to help leaders who are managing performance for a staff member experiencing an addiction or mental health issue.

This new training course is being developed by the Canadian Association of Mental Health (Ontario Division) through its Mental Health Works initiative. The Mental Health Works course is being introduced in Toronto in March and in Calgary in June 2008, at conferences organized by the Conference Board of Canada. The course will also be available to employers on an ongoing basis through Mental Health Works at [www.mentalhealthworks.ca](http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca).

The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace is committed to increasing knowledge and awareness of mental health issues in the workplace, and to turning that knowledge into action to help employers and employees prevent and reduce negative impacts. The information and tools provided by the Centre are publicly available to employers through our website.

The Centre is funded by The Great-West Life Assurance Company. For further information on the Centre, e-mail centreformentalhealth@gwl.ca or call 1.866.407.5888.

Helping turn **knowledge** into **action**

The Ipsos Reid survey

**Depression** and the **workplace**

**what have we learned?**

Mike Schwartz, Executive Director

Late last year, in co-operation with the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace released the results of a major public opinion survey looking at perceptions of depression and its impact on the workplace. The Ipsos Reid survey, commissioned by the Centre, was the largest of its kind and involved the perspectives of more than 4,000 staff and managers with Canadian employers. Following are some of the highlights.


**Confirms significant incidence and cost of depression**

The survey indicated that depression is having a substantial impact on people and workplaces. Eighteen per cent of employees (including 16% of managers) reported having been diagnosed with depression at some point in their lives. A further 8% felt they had suffered from depression without being diagnosed. This total of 26% is higher than some earlier research had indicated, but in line with an American statistic reported by Dr. Ron Kessler et al of Harvard1 that nearly one-half of the population would experience a mental health issue at some time in their life.

This very significant incidence of depression, within management as well as employee ranks, was confirmed by survey results that showed:
- 8% of employees reported they were taking medication for depression at the time of the survey.
- Managers knew or believed they had supervised staff suffering from depression. When asked about the cost impact, they estimated the cost of reduced productivity (presenteeism) from a depressed employee was about $7,000, and the cost of absenteeism almost $10,000. Most organizations lack any formal measurement to assess the actual cost of productivity for employees so these estimates would be subjective.
- 82% of workers think the CEO should make helping employees with depression a key human resources priority.

**Incidence of depression**
- 26% of all respondents reported they had been diagnosed with depression at some point, or felt they had experienced depression
- Of those:
  - 17% reported their depression lasted a few weeks or less
  - 28% said a few months
  - 14% said about 1 year
  - 9% said over 10 years

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1. [http://archpsyc.amaassn.org/cgi/content/abstract/62/6/593?ijkey=cc4596b8a0bd15e08b8d1e5a038c30e1f7ef5d3d&keytype2=tf_ipsecsha](http://archpsyc.amaassn.org/cgi/content/abstract/62/6/593?ijkey=cc4596b8a0bd15e08b8d1e5a038c30e1f7ef5d3d&keytype2=tf_ipsecsha)
The impact of the workplace

There is also controversy around the finding that the majority of those who reported having depression described the triggering event as personal rather than work related. The survey revealed that approximately two-thirds of those who had experienced depression believed they could link this depression to a specific triggering event, and a relatively high proportion of these events included factors like relationship issues (such as divorce), a death in the family, or other non-work related factors. While the trigger may be a personal event, a toxic work environment can create the stress that compounds personal problems, leading to a mental health issue. On the other hand, a supportive work environment can act as a buffer against stress in one’s personal life.

Reason for optimism

We expected the survey results to generate discussion and debate, and they have. We’re encouraged by the ongoing dialogue. Workplace mental health is clearly affecting employers and raising questions and concerns.

The overwhelming finding related to depression and mental health issues is that the incidence of these issues, and the cost impacts to employers, are substantial.

Some of the news, however, was encouraging. The overall picture of workplaces is more positive than is sometimes perceived.

- 82% of employees are mostly or fully fulfilled in their jobs
- 70% feel their workplace is a healthy environment and that their employer respects work-life balance
- 78% say their employer provides them with flexibility to respond to personal or family responsibilities and 74% feel their employer is supportive of their personal needs
- The majority of Canadians work a reasonable 39 hours per week

Areas of concern and need for action

The survey revealed there are still many areas of concern and a need for further action.

- While there were some indications that stigma might be ‘softening’, it remains a significant concern. Of the 26% who reported suffering from depression, less than 4 in 10 are likely to have told someone in the workplace. Fewer than 20% told their supervisor, and only about 6% told Human Resources. So while managers indicate a willingness to help, in many cases stigma is a barrier to help being provided. Reducing stigma can allow for earlier identification and treatment. This in turn can reduce the severity, frequency and duration of mental illnesses.
- Although many (83%) believe workers with mental health conditions can be just as productive with the right supports, 43% of respondents believe that if they acknowledged they had depression, they would not be able to get ahead in their careers. This suggests employers need to communicate their willingness to provide reasonable supports necessary to allow employees who are experiencing or recovering from mental illness to remain productive and contributing members of the workforce.
- While many (73%) workers reported that they felt their employer was very or somewhat accommodating for employees with depression, when those who actually experienced depression were asked, approximately one-half reported receiving ‘not much’ or ‘no support at all’ from their direct boss, manager or supervisor. This indicates a difference in perspective from those experiencing a mental health issue and their co-workers. There is an opportunity for employers to learn from the experiences of those with depression about the types of supports that allow them to remain productive. It is unfair to expect that supervisors will intuitively know how to do this.
- While 83% of managers believe it is their job to intervene when an employee is suffering from depression, only 55% claim to know how and much fewer, only 18%, claim to have had training to do this. Managing employees who are emotionally distressed can be draining for managers and in some cases can be traumatizing. There was a clear call from managers for more support including training, support from upper management, guidelines and policies and HR support.
- While 83% of managers believe it is their job to intervene when an employee is suffering from depression, only 55% claim to know how and much fewer, only 18%, claim to have had training to do this. Managers want more support in managing employees with depression, including:
  - better training (45%)
  - more support from upper mgmt. (30%)
  - better guidelines and policies (30%)
  - more support from HR (28%)

“Managers want to do the right thing, but are not sure what that is”
“Managers estimated the cost of presenteeism at $7,000, and the cost of absenteeism at almost $10,000 annually for an employee with depression”

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