

The Puzzle of Poor Workplace Mental Health

Your investment has never been higher,
but something's still not working.



Mind
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Organizations across Canada have been using Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) since the 1940s. It's become table stakes when developing a workplace benefits program.

However, EAPs have changed very little over the last 70 years.

But everything else has. The world. Your company. Your employees.

And that's why **half a million Canadians still miss work each week** because of mental health issues.

Maybe it's time to re-evaluate your strategy?

This resource will help guide you through the questions you need to ask yourself and your leadership team. It will help you identify your actual goals, evaluate your current program and create a strategy that provides employees with the assistance they actually need when they need it the most.



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Workplace Mental Health in Canada



30%

of disability claims, and

70%

of disability-related costs
result from poor mental health
or mental illness

In today's economy, many companies are now charged with caring not only for the physical health of their employees but also for their mental well-being. The last few decades have seen a host of public policy improvements and initiatives taken by the private sector that has led to a healthier and safer Canadian workplace. As a result, over 80% of Canadian employees say they trust their employers on matters of health and safety.¹ And yet, despite these improvements, Canadians in the workplace continue to report high rates of poor mental health and mental illness.

It is estimated that one in three Canadian workers experience high levels of stress² and approximately half a million Canadians miss work each week because of mental health issues.³ The COVID-19 pandemic has made matters worse, with 4 times as many Canadians reporting high levels of anxiety since the pandemic started.⁴

Today, 30% of disability claims and 70% of disability-related costs result from poor mental health or mental illness.⁵

Poor mental health is a challenge for both employees and employers. A mentally unhealthy labour force is less productive and will struggle to advance a corporation's objectives.⁶ It is estimated that poor mental health and mental illness can reduce work productivity by almost 40%.⁷ The primary cause of this reduced productivity is "presenteeism" – the state of an employee being physically present at work but mentally absent.⁸ Besides presenteeism, poor mental health in the workplace can result in economic loss from an increase in the number of sick days employees take, higher rates of employee turnover, a failure to retain or attract top talent, increases in insurance premiums, and rising disability claim costs. One estimate suggests that mental health issues cost the Canadian economy approximately \$50 billion each year.⁹ Given the economic stakes involved, business leaders ought to keep the mental health of their workforce top of mind.

TAKEAWAY

Poor mental health is proven to have a high burden of cost for employers and investing in programs that improve mental health will deliver a strong ROI.



The Current Landscape of Mental Health Supports



It is puzzling that so many Canadians today are struggling with their mental health. Despite its many problems, Canadian society has levels of social stability and wealth that have rarely been achieved in human history and that correlate strongly with emotional well-being.¹⁰ And yet, these societal characteristics have not translated into well-being in the workplace.

Over the last decade, companies across Canada have taken workplace mental health seriously. Currently, 28 million Canadians have access to mental health supports at work through Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), paramedical benefits, and health care spending accounts.¹¹ Some of the biggest and most profitable corporations in the country, including Bell, BMO, CAA, and GE Canada, have developed their own workplace mental health programs.¹² This trend is not unique to the Canadian economy. In the US, corporate wellness programs now make up an \$8 billion industry¹³ and 97% of companies with over 5000 employees offer EAPs.¹⁴ Globally, 90% of organizations offer some kind of wellness program or service to their employees.¹⁵

What makes the current state of poor workplace mental health even more puzzling is the fact that, according to the peer-reviewed literature, EAPs are quite effective in improving mental health outcomes and worker productivity. Studies have found that employees who access EAP services are less likely to miss work,

less likely to be disengaged while at work, and more likely to report higher levels of productivity.¹⁶ Other research has found that EAP use contributes to improvements in personal health and reductions in levels of clinical distress.¹⁷ EAP use can significantly improve levels of productivity by as much as 43% and generate returns on investment ranging from 3:1 to 9:1, depending on the size of the company.¹⁸

In addition to EAPs, many organizations support employee mental health via extended health benefit plans. These plans are meant to cover additional health services that aren't covered by the provincial government and mental health usually gets lumped together with services such as massage therapy, physiotherapy, and chiropractor care.

When we look at Extended Health Benefits,

83%

of group benefits providers are providing mental health programs as part of their services to employers, and almost

67%

of providers expect to increase their programs and services¹⁹.

The average rate for paramedical reimbursement is usually \$500, and for a long-time employers saw low usage and didn't think the rate was a problem²⁰. However, further analysis showed that since an employee couldn't get a full course of treatment for that amount, they chose not to seek help. As a result, companies started increasing that amount to closer to \$1000 - \$1500/year and breaking out mental health services from the other services lumped into paramedical.

If corporations are taking mental health more seriously, and if EAPs and paramedical benefits that cover mental health are effective in improving mental health outcomes, what then explains why so many Canadians are still struggling with their mental health at work?

Top Four Problems with the Status Quo



Among Canadian workers, it is estimated that only

11%

use the EAP services that are available to them

PROBLEM

1

EMPLOYEE USAGE OF PRODUCTS IS LOW

As we described above, available evidence shows that EAPs and related mental health services can effectively improve employee mental health and productivity. The problem, however, is that they are too rarely used. Among Canadian workers, it is estimated that only 11% use the EAP services that are available to them,^{21,22} which looks at all utilization including those beyond mental health, despite much higher rates of reported poor mental health. In the US, only 5.5% to 7% of employees use the EAP services available to them.²³ This is consistent with the fact that the overwhelming majority of people in need of mental health assistance do not receive it.²⁴ These low utilization rates mean business leaders can find themselves in a paradoxical situation in which a highly effective EAP exists alongside a workforce characterized by high rates of poor mental health.

The reasons for low EAP utilization rates may vary between individuals and workplaces. One common cause is that many workplaces have sought to address mental health issues by purchasing products and services without also building an

organizational culture that promotes emotional well-being and help-seeking. In the absence of such a culture, employees in need of help are less likely to tap into the available resources and services available to them.

However, a 2018 study found that only 53% of employees have used their paramedical benefits in the year²⁵, and that 53% could have been for a range of services outside of mental health including massage therapists, physiotherapists, and chiropractors to speech therapists, naturopaths, and dieticians.

Psychiatrists reported that wait times to see a psychiatrist in Canada range from,

59 WEEKS

in Newfoundland to

15 WEEKS

in Ontario

A cause could be that specialists that are covered by these benefits have extremely long wait times. The Fraser Institute conducts a regular survey on wait times through Canadian Medical Association (CMA) members. Of the 236 responses in the 2015 survey²⁶, psychiatrists reported that wait times to see a psychiatrist in Canada range from 59 weeks in Newfoundland to 15 weeks in Ontario. This is an increase of more than one week from 2014. They also reported that, after seeing a specialist, additional wait times to start a course of brief psychotherapy range from three to 22 weeks and from five to 14 weeks to access an assertive community treatment or a similar program, depending on which province is providing care. So, while the benefits plan would cover the session, the wait time could discourage the employee from seeking help.

Other reasons why an employee might not use an EAP, Extended Health Benefits, or other mental health services, include:

- **They are not aware that their employer offers an EAP or mental health services;**
- **They are aware of the EAP and Extended Health Benefits and admit they need help,** but their community discourages help-seeking on mental health issues;
- **They are aware of the EAP and Extended Health Benefits but:**
 - » are unwilling to admit they are struggling and in need of help;
 - » find them inapplicable or inappropriate to the issues they are facing;
 - » are confused or uncertain about how to access them or what's right for them;
 - » concerned that their use of it will not be kept confidential;
 - » cannot access them because of several factors, including location, language or cultural barriers, lack of privacy at home, lack of time because of personal and family responsibilities, among others;
- **They are aware of the EAP but do not use them because:**
 - » they cannot choose the therapist or counsellor with whom they are comfortable working.
 - » they don't know how to choose the therapist or counsellor that can both help with their specific issues and with whom they are comfortable working.
- **The Extended Health Benefits only cover psychologists,** but they are interested in working with social workers, family therapists, psychotherapists, marriage counsellors, or clinical counsellors.
- **The Extended Health Benefits covers only the cost of a few appointments,** so they are worried that they will have to pay out of pocket to complete the treatment and it's going to be cost-prohibitive.

PROBLEM

2

THE PRODUCTS OFFERED DON'T COVER ALL THEIR NEEDS

According to Statistics Canada²⁷, when it comes to mental health-related disabilities, four of the most frequently reported mental health-related conditions are anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and stress disorder. These chronic conditions require treatment to reduce symptoms so they can go back to work. EAPs do not offer adequate treatment for these most prevalent mental health conditions related to disability.

Table: Level of need for mental health services²⁸

	Proportion in the Population	Common Mental Health Concerns	Degree of Disability (Contribute to STD/LTD Claims)	Effectively treated in the short-term	Longer term treatment beneficial
Mild	15%	Anxiety, depressive, impulse control and substance abuse disorders; adjustment/psychological distress	Mild to None but at risk	✗	✗
Moderate	10%	Anxiety, depressive, impulse control and substance abuse disorders	Moderate to Mild & Episodic	✗	✗
Serious	3.5%	Other mental disorders with comorbidity	Serious & Acute and Chronic		✗
Severe	1.0%	50-50% non-affective psychotic disorders/bipolar disorders and 50% other mental disorders	Severe & Chronic and Acute		✗
Severe & Persistent	0.5%	Psychoses	Severe & Persistent over Lifetime		✗

As a result, a second reason why current workplace mental health approaches are not doing enough to address the existing need is that they tend to only offer short-term supports. Most times, they provide employees with two to three sessions with a therapist or counselor before they run out of coverage and must pay out of pocket for additional help. Some companies are offering EAPs with more therapy sessions, but this is far from the norm. The result is that many employees struggling with issues that require long-term attention and care cannot get the help they need. It also doesn't make a dent in employee absences, short-term and long-term disability costs, which most times are the foundation of the business case to make these investments.

Many employees also have sub-clinical mental health issues that don't necessarily need costly therapist interventions. Having mental wellness supports that help strengthen overall employee mental health and help to prevent more serious issues is a key part missing from many strategies. This is an area that can have the widest reach in terms of its impact on workplace culture and happiness of all employees.



PROBLEM

3

LACK OF TOOLS NEEDED TO TRACK EFFICACY

A third reason for the inadequacies of many current workplace mental health approaches is that their utilization and performance are not being systematically tracked by employers.²⁹ Utilization and performance tracking is essential if an employer is to understand the effect that the mental health services offered are having on their staff and the extent to which the services are generating a positive return on investment.³⁰ In the absence of such tracking, employers do not have a clear sense of whether the services they offer are helping and how they can adjust the services if necessary. This misperception can stand in the way of a more thoughtful, evidence-based workplace mental health strategy that can help ensure the actual needs of the workforce are being met.

Checklist! Select all the metrics you currently are tracking with data from mental health providers.

- Program Engagement (landing page visits, use of mental wellness content, events attendance, email opens/clicks)
- Utilization rates of services and treatment
- Anonymized employee demographics of those utilizing programs (Age, Gender, Location)
- Primary and secondary mental health issues and concerns treated
- Symptom severity before and after treatment
- Time to service
- Changes in rates of absenteeism and disability costs
- Levels of employee satisfaction with the program
- Overall mental health wellness status

ASK YOURSELF

1-What's missing?

2-How frequently do you get these metrics?

3-Are you able to adjust your services to improve metrics?



PROBLEM

4

A PRODUCT APPROACH VS A WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

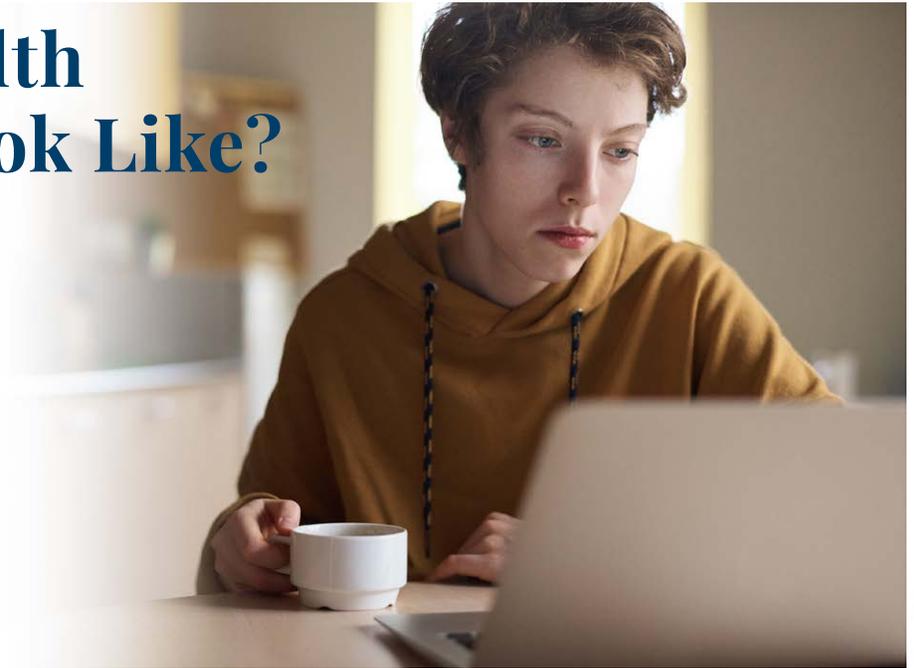
EAPs and paramedical benefits provide employees access to mental health services, however they should not be confused with having a Workplace Mental Health Program or Strategy. This is like saying purchasing your LinkedIn recruiters license provides you with a recruitment strategy. There are so many other pieces that are needed to attract talent, and similarly, there are many other elements needed to help provide mental health supports.

While the services you offer are the front-line delivery mechanisms for the support, they won't ever get accessed without the right program elements in place.

What are those elements?

In the next section, we will walk you through best practices on how you can develop both your Workplace Mental Health Strategy and Program.

What Does an Effective Workplace Mental Health Strategy Look Like?



THE 5C MODEL OF STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Designing an effective workplace mental health strategy is difficult. For one, mental health issues can be complicated to address. Needs among employees may differ widely, making it hard to design a strategy that accommodates everyone. And, perhaps most importantly, time and resources are finite and there never seems to be enough of both. It is hard enough to attract and keep clients, survive in a competitive marketplace, and earn a profit, let alone improve the emotional well-being of your employees.

In this section, we offer some practical advice that can help you build an effective mental health strategy for your workplace. We outline steps and potential design features you ought to consider as you embark on your path to building a mental health strategy that serves the unique needs of your workplace.

A Way to Think About Workplace Mental Health Strategy Development: The 5C Model



Before you consider what specific components a mental health strategy ought to comprise, it is important to take a step back and develop a framework that can help guide you through the strategy design process. To build a skyscraper, developers dig a deep and robust foundation to sustain the growth and health of the structure. This holds true when considering how to implement best practices in workplace mental health. At Starts With Me, we have developed a 5C Model that provides clients with the tools needed to develop a workplace mental health strategy that supports the creation, implementation, and sustainability needed for a successful plan.

The model comprises five key components: clarity, courage, creativity, constancy, and compassion. While space prevents us from describing this model in full, below we outline the importance of the first two Cs – clarity and courage - without which the goal of developing an effective workplace mental health strategy is not likely to be achieved.

1 Clarity

To create a workplace mental health strategy, you must know where you are going. A common mistake is to overlook where you stand. Without such knowledge, which comes directly from a thorough and robust inventory, the proposed solutions will not address the underlying problems regardless of the intentions and expectations.

In the clarity step, the goal is to develop a strong understanding of how mental health affects your workplace. It involves an inventory that collects crucial data regarding the emotional well-being and psychological safety of your people. With a better understanding of the work environment, you can develop tailored solutions to address the specific challenges you discover. This step is analogous to the step that business leaders take to better understand their clients and customers, and thus how to measure key performance indicators.

Using qualitative and quantitative methods, you can collect the data needed to orient your plan to address the specific outcomes revealed through your inventory. For a list of suggested KPI's see the Deloitte Insights on "The ROI in workplace mental health programs: Good for people, good for business" or you can consult the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

From here, you can develop the KPI's and track the relevant data to know where you stand and where to begin the design and implementation process.

2 Courage

The second C in our model is "Courage." This step involves cultivating the strength required to address the problems and opportunities identified in the clarity process. It is one thing to assert the intention to improve the current circumstance, it is another thing altogether to face the inevitable discomfort of knowing about and looking at our blind spots. Most of us, if not all, have a strong tendency

towards “habitual defensiveness” when confronted with any form of criticism.³¹ This response is instinctive and subsides when we can think a bit more clearly about what is being said and what kinds of opportunities the criticism might present. But, to do this requires courage - the willingness to experience and work through discomfort. When courage is part of the process, it becomes far more likely that a workplace mental health strategy will effectively address the complex and diverse needs of your organization.

Developing clarity about existing problems and the courage to address them are essential first steps in the development of a workplace mental health strategy, but they are just two pieces of the larger 5C model. The strategy development and implementation process also require three other Cs.

3 Creativity

Using imagination, creativity, and ingenuity to create your organization map for the change process that meets the diverse and idiosyncratic needs of the organization and its people.

4 Constancy

Maintain patience and perseverance amidst the inevitable struggles of the change process. This involves implementing the plan and the tracking of new KPI's, measuring progress, and iterating as needed.

5 Compassion

As the result of the transformation process, sharing your expertise and experience with other organizations, and participating in purpose-driven activities that serve the unique values of your organization.



FOUR ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

The purpose of the 5C model is to guide the mental health strategy development process. But the model itself does not tell us what specific elements should make up your workplace mental health program. While you should tailor your mental health strategy to the specific needs of your organization, below we outline four key elements as essential aspects of a workplace mental health program.

1

A Mental Health Program Should be Multi-Faceted

Effective mental health programs are multi-faceted. This means that the program comprises several components that work together to achieve the goal of improving the well-being and productivity of all employees.

Building a workplace mental health program is taking a holistic approach from mental health prevention and awareness to mental illness treatment, disability management and return to work programs. It is all tied together with proper communication, management training, year-long campaigns, and supports that span the entire continuum of care and lifetime journey of an employee. A program is something that an employee can connect with, feel part of, rather than being offered a product they did not choose.

A multi-faceted strategy is important because, as we noted above, utilization rates of mental health services and products are quite low. The reason for this may have to do with the design and nature of the services or products themselves, but it might also have to do with features of the workplace that inhibit utilization. Purchased products ought to be part of a larger mental health program ecosystem that comprises different measures and tactics to encourage and facilitate product usage for all employees. The specific measures adopted to encourage product usage should directly address the obstacles to help-seeking that were identified in the clarity stage described above.

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2

The Services Offered Should Be Inclusive, Flexible and Meet Employees Where They Are At On Their Mental Health Journey

To increase utilization rates among those employees who need help, workplace mental health strategies should reflect the diverse ways in which employees may experience mental health issues and the barriers they may face in accessing services. When employees feel heard, understood, and represented by the services made available to them, they are more likely to use them and to engage in behaviours that ultimately lead to their enhanced well-being.

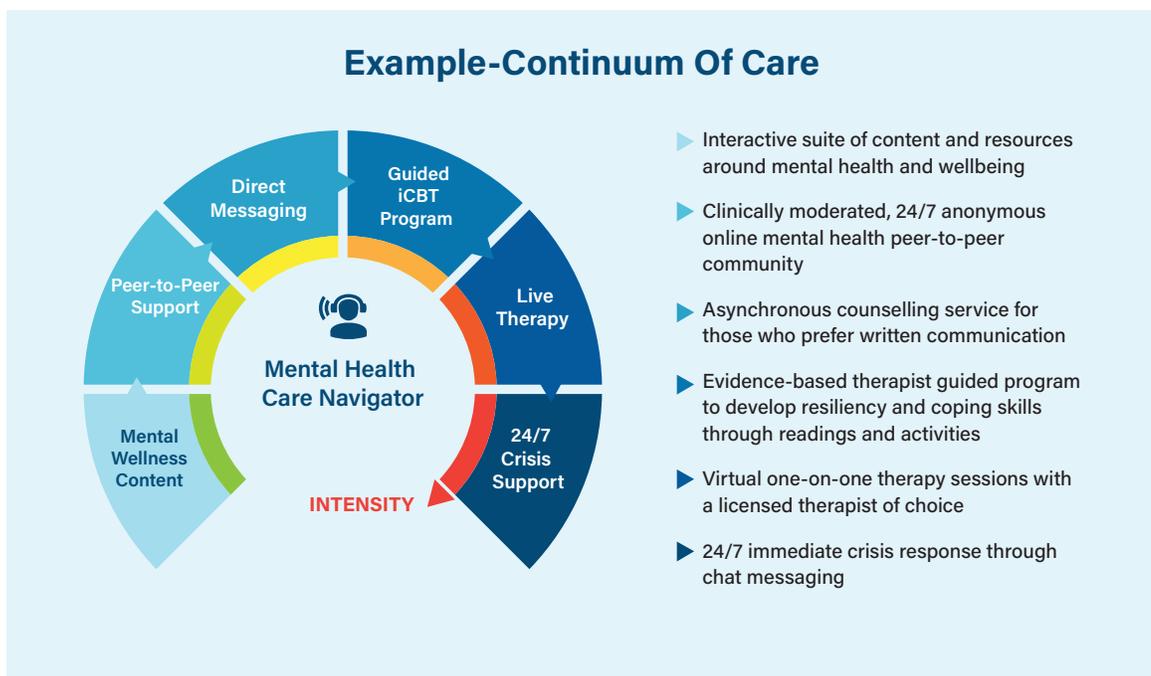
These supports can include online and in-person services available to employees, peer-to-peer support networks in which employees can share their thoughts and concerns or events and campaigns to boost utilization of these products and services. At a leadership level, it can include training sessions for leaders and HR managers

on how to spot mental health issues and how to encourage help-seeking behaviour, and workshops and lunch & learns with mental health experts on various mental health topics.

Not all employees will experience mental health challenges in the same way. Some may be perfectly comfortable speaking up and connecting with a therapist when they need one. Others may be less comfortable speaking to a therapist and instead may prefer online wellness content. Others still might be completely unwilling to seek any help at all. The reasons for these differing approaches are many and may have to do with one's personal and family background and cultural, ethnic, religious, racial, and socioeconomic factors. Some other barriers diverse groups face include language, circumstances at home, stigma, cultural barriers, expected time commitment, being unable to select a therapist, cultural mistrust of healthcare providers, lack of culturally responsive evidence-based care, history of maltreatment, lack of therapist diversity, and a general lack of workplace psychological safety. A lack of choice and options prevents these groups from seeking help.



Besides differences in willingness to seek help, employees can also differ in the kinds of support they need or want. An individual struggling with depression and substance abuse will require a distinct set of supports from those feeling burnt out or overwhelmed by work and family difficulties. Preferences regarding the style of mental health support can also vary between employees. Some may seek therapists who practice Cognitive Behavioural Therapy while others might prefer Acceptance & Commitment Therapy. Preference regarding service delivery might also vary, ranging from online asynchronous content to synchronous virtual sessions or in-person sessions.



By providing services that reflect the variety of challenges people face and the different forms of service delivery they require, your workplace mental health strategy can prevent employees from falling through the cracks and suffering in silence. Ultimately, the goal is to serve the diversity of people and needs that are present, to ensure desired outcomes and to promote the effectiveness of your organization's purpose.

3

The Program is Frequently and Effectively Communicated

To be effective, workplace mental initiatives need to ensure the services are consistently and well communicated to employees. Research shows that organizations and businesses that seek to change successfully must engage in continual communication.³² To change mental health outcomes in the workplace, employees must know about, be reminded of, and know-how to access the resources available to them.

Many employees report feeling overwhelmed and unsure about the benefits they have, not knowing what they cover , or not knowing where to find reliable information. Stigma in the workplace can prevent many employees from asking a member of their team or an HR person for help to find the right support. To address this problem, a workplace mental health strategy ought to include navigation assistance to help employees find the service that fits their needs confidentially. Whether it is delivered via webchat or short appointments, an employee shouldn't have to spend hours researching or reading through benefits booklets to understand the support available to them.

The programs, resources and services should be communicated in a way that is most suitable for the unique workplace. Start with what you know already works for your organization and insert mental health communications there. If you have regular company meetings you ought to dedicate a portion to mental health each month. If workshops and lunch & learns are how employees are used to picking up new skills, talk about developing mental health skills there. Wherever pamphlets and posters are regularly posted, make sure your mental health services are posted there too. Don't re-invent the wheel when it comes to program communication, just go where your employees are already. Considering that HR rarely has the time or expertise to build effective mental health awareness campaigns that run year long, look at providers that can offer this as part of their turn-key workplace mental health program solutions.

Workplace leadership plays a vital role in promoting help-seeking behaviour and creating a culture that promotes emotional well-

being. Make sure leadership and people managers know how to identify when a team member needs support and how to communicate what's available to help them in an empathic and understanding way. When managers set an example by taking vacation time, their team members are likelier to follow suit. The same goes for mental health. If management talks about taking time to focus on themselves and their mental health, employees will feel like they have permission to do the same.

Lastly, people need to be continually reassured of their privacy and confidentiality when they access these services. It ought to be mentioned in every communication.

4

The Program is Data-Driven and the Services Offered Should Have a Showed Track Record of Effectiveness and Be Periodically Re-Evaluated to Ensure Efficacy and a Positive ROI

Beyond offering services and supports that are inclusive, flexible, and well communicated, a workplace mental health strategy ought to also offer services that have a showed track record of success in improving mental health outcomes. Consumers often need evidence of effectiveness before they decide to use a particular product or service. Therefore people often look to Google reviews or the experience of their friends and family before making a purchase. The same is true of employees. Having effective services can help enhance their willingness to use them.

Periodically, business leaders should re-evaluate the services they offer their employees to ensure that they are meeting their desired goals, such as improving emotional well-being and generating a positive return on investment. In the next section, we identify some of the key performance indicators that workplaces can track to assess the state of mental health among their employees and the effectiveness of their mental health strategy.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: STRATEGY + PROGRAM + SERVICES

Too many organizations focus only on the mental health services they provide to employees and do not build the holistic program or the higher-level strategy that we've just outlined. Workplace Mental Health Services need to be wrapped in a program and supported by a high-level strategy and culture.

Let's start with the strategy. Senior leadership needs to make it a priority to think about the 5C's and how they are going to build a culture of trust that supports good mental health. Very few organizations start with this important step.

Table: Shows the components of a comprehensive Workplace Mental Health program, strategy and services



Many just jump to services and what can we purchase to support employees. So, let's go there next. We know that more than 90% of employers offer an EAP³³, so employees have access to immediate crisis support, short-term counselling, and some mental wellness content if they visit the EAP website.

Almost all organizations have some Extended Health Benefits that include either paramedical coverage or a Health Spending Account that will cover a few appointments with a licensed professional either for a short-term issue or to start a longer treatment. (Knowing that the full treatment would likely have to be paid out of pocket depending on the coverage amount and severity of the concern).

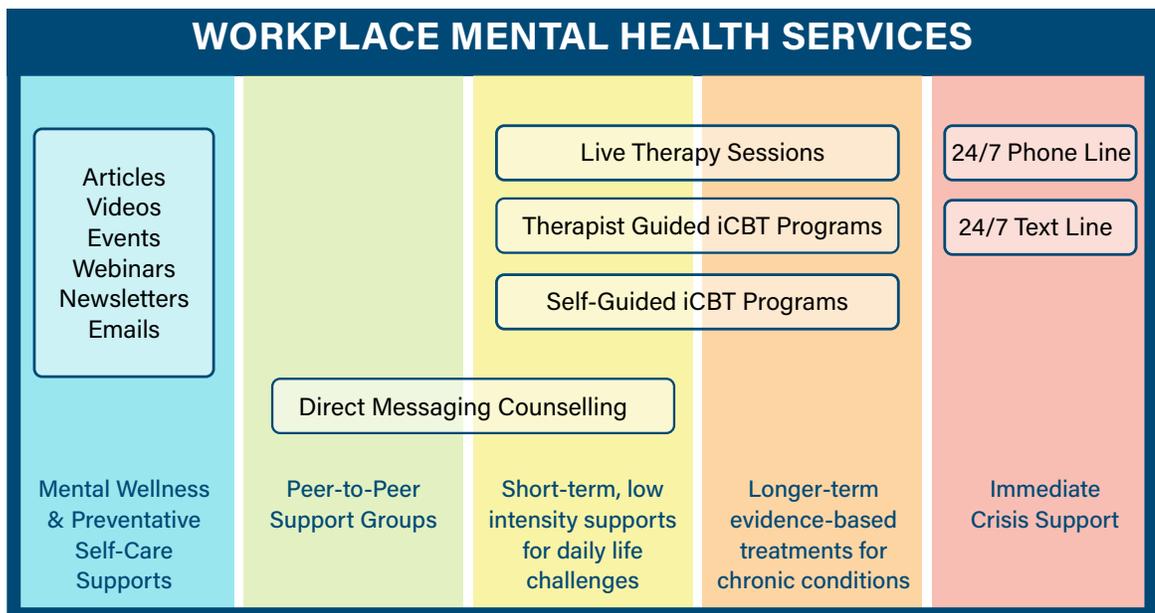
Table: Shows what EAP and EHCs cover and the gaps in the offerings



If the coverage of the above dots is where your strategy ends, you are missing out on the opportunity to maximize the investments you have already made.

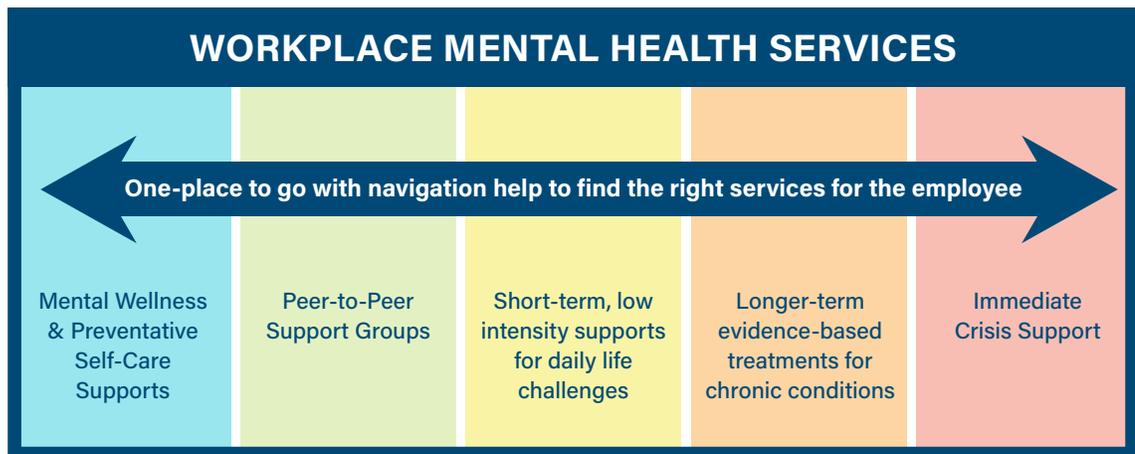
First, to ensure that your program is multi-faceted you'll need to ensure there are service options that address employees across the entire continuum of care from low-intensity to crisis. You'll also want to make sure that those services are inclusive and give employees the choice in how they communicate (Read, Type, Talk, Anonymous) when (scheduled or appointment-free), and where they access support. (Online or In-Person).

Table: Shows a sample list of mental health offerings and the severity levels they address



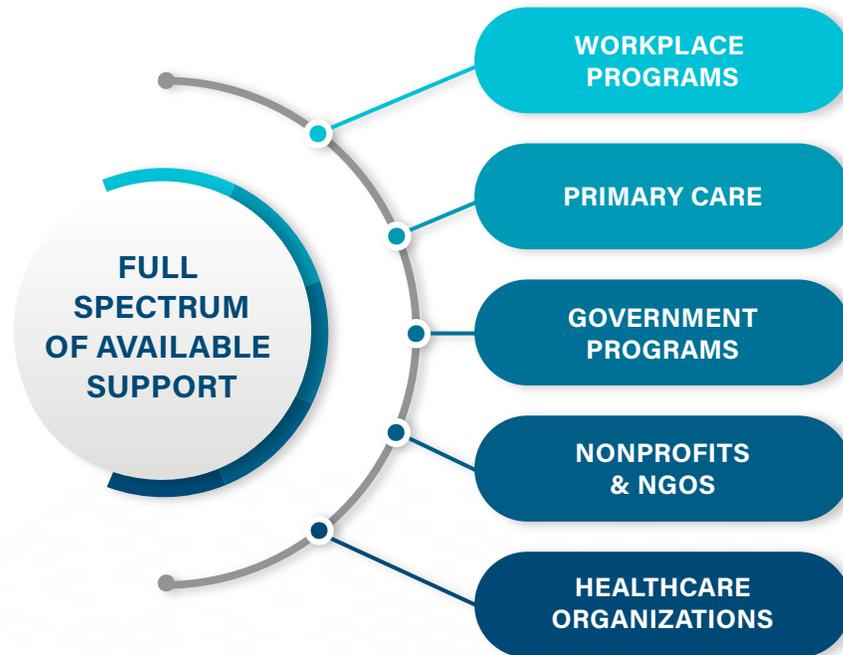
Once you've added a lot of variety in services, you'll also add in the opportunity for employees to get confused and overwhelmed. Employees really need support with navigating all the mental health supports that you offer. They aren't the experts and have very little time to put towards researching the differences between them. Having one-stop for them to go where someone can help them understand what's available, what's suitable, and what's covered is key.

Table: Shows navigation across all services



The workplace is also not the only place they access mental health support. The navigator should be able to coordinate mental healthcare information as it relates to support available from primary care, non-profits, government programs, and healthcare organizations to provide the employee with the most effective, timely, and relevant information.

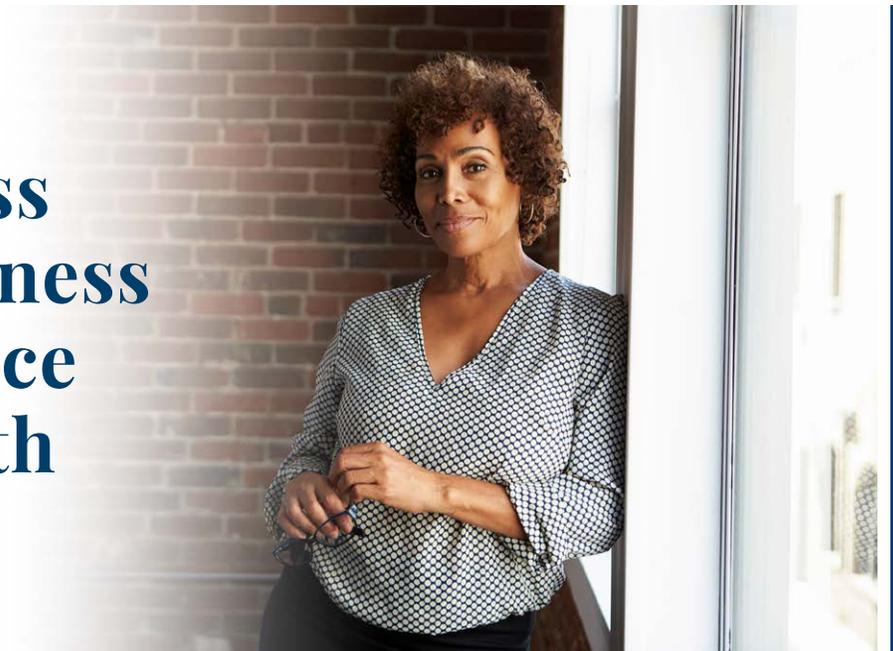
Table: Shows the components of a navigation service which should extend beyond the services available via the workplace



From there, you want to ensure that you implement a stellar communication strategy focused on sustained awareness throughout the year. Too many organizations launch it and then forget it. Mental health concerns can change throughout the year. This provides you with a variety of opportunities to engage your people in creative and relevant ways and to remind them of the available supports.

Lastly, you need to measure your strategy. Having a data-driven approach is what separates the programs that work from the programs that just eat up precious financial and human resources. The next section dives deeper into how to assess the effectiveness of your strategy.

How to Assess the Effectiveness of a Workplace Mental Health Strategy



As with many parts of a business, workplace mental health and the efficacy of strategies to improve it can be measured and assessed using data. Longitudinal data can be useful to identify trends over time and to measure the effectiveness of the mental health initiatives that have been implemented. The systematic use of data to measure and assess performance is crucial for the design of an effective workplace mental health strategy that promotes well-being and offers a positive ROI.

To assess the performance of a mental health strategy, we believe that business leaders ought to measure the following eight indicators:

1 Utilization and program uptake

Utilization refers to the percentage of employees that have used a specific service, while program uptake is a measure of employee participation during a specific reporting period. By comparing utilization and uptake rates over time, business leaders can determine changes in the extent to which a product or service is being adopted.

2 Changes in rates of absenteeism and disability costs

Looking at the rates of absenteeism and the disability costs before and after the adoption of a workplace mental health program, and tracking the changes over time, can help business leaders measure the success of a program and the extent to which it is providing a positive or negative ROI. While adding another mental health service may look like an added cost, a decrease in reported absenteeism and in disability claims can produce positive investment returns.

3 Levels of employee satisfaction

Employee satisfaction assesses if users of the mental health services and products find them helpful. It is often measured through the use of surveys but can also be measured through interviews and focus groups. These tools will often examine an employee's overall experience with the service or product, its helpfulness in addressing their specific challenges, and what skills they gained as a result.

4 Time to service

This metric measures the time between when an employee first requested access to a product or service and when they were able to receive it. This indicator is important for determining whether or not employees are receiving support in a timely fashion.

5 User demographics

This metric captures anonymized specific characteristics of the users themselves, including age, gender, language, among many others. Demographics of program users can inform employers about who is accessing the mental health programs the most and who is not. Having access to this information can help identify which groups might be facing obstacles to mental health supports and can aid in the development of strategies to reduce these barriers as much as possible through inclusion initiatives, enhanced protection of privacy, and educational programs, among other efforts.

6 Primary health concern

This indicator identifies the primary concerns employees have when seeking mental health support. This anonymized data can help employers learn more about their employees at a high level and become better leaders.

7 Symptom severity before and after treatment

This metric measures the changes in the severity of an employee's mental health symptoms before and after they use a product or service, from subclinical to severe. By measuring before and after effects, this metric offers some of the most robust and reliable evidence on product efficacy, which is useful for determining the most efficient allocation of resources and in influencing leadership's commitment to certain mental health initiatives.

8 Overall Mental Health Status

This metric measures the overall mental health status of employees and allows for general impressions to be made about the overall psychological safety of the workplace and the extent to which current mental health programs are working.

In measuring these eight indicators, it is important to collect data consistently (i.e. wording survey questions in the same way) to ensure apples are being compared to apples. This will ensure that trends over time and differences between employee groups can be accurately identified and addressed.

But Why Focus So Heavily on Mental Health?



Focusing on what drives up costs and makes the biggest impact to your workplace, has the potential to provide the highest financial and non-financial ROI. Mental illness is the fastest growing disability claim type^{34,35}. Today, 30% of disability claims and 70% of disability-related costs result from poor mental health or mental illness³⁶. Despite all the investments made for mental health, Canadians overall are not feeling better, and in fact, seem to be doing worse. Addressing the stigma, barriers, and systematic issues around mental health in workplaces and creating programs that work for ALL employees, no matter where they are in their mental health journey, is the key to achieving mentally healthy workplaces. This will also make programs more sustainable and in turn will result in mentally healthier employees while lowering turnover, absenteeism and presenteeism.

Achieving a mentally healthy workforce is not an overnight event. Workplace mental health programs deliver greater returns as they mature³⁷. So, the time to start is now, because mental health is health.

About the Authors

If you are a business leader concerned about the mental health of your employees, and think that a mentally healthy workplace is congruent with your company values then you are in the right place.

We hope you have found this booklet insightful and a source of inspiration to make your organization a leader in workplace mental health.

About Starts with Me



Starts With Me is a consultancy specializing in workplace mental health. We help executives and HR leaders create mentally healthy teams that are connected, effective, and purpose-driven. We have worked with some of the world's biggest brands, like Amazon, Hyundai, the City of Toronto, and Canada's largest school boards. Starts With Me believes corporations have an incredible opportunity and a responsibility to positively impact the world's number one cause of disability, "mental health".

Reach out to mike@startswithme.com for a free 30-min consultation around workplace mental health strategies, coaching sessions and leadership training for your teams.

About MindBeacon



MindBeacon is an organization that is entirely focused on mental health. It is all that we do. Mental health is a very broad category and encompasses a broad range of conditions, severity levels, and care strategies. There is no simple solution that fits all employees. It requires ongoing support, with different approaches over the employee's lifetime journey to better mental health. MindBeacon is solving this problem every day by offering employers holistic programs that are proven to work. With one of Canada's largest networks of registered mental health professionals, MindBeacon's methods work, and we have the data to prove it.

Reach out to maya.rozanes@mindbeacon.com for a free gap analysis to identify how you can improve your workplace mental health program.

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A Stronger Workforce.

A Stronger Business.

Absenteeism
STD & LTD claims
Drug spend
Turnover

Productivity
Performance
Employee
Engagement

Despite the investments employers have made in mental health, it continues to be the primary driver of absenteeism and turnover in Canada.

Mental Health is the fastest growing category of disability claims in Canada, accounting for 30-40% of the claims and 70% of the costs.

STATUS QUO ISN'T WORKING

60% of Canadians are currently experiencing mental health issues, but 2 out of 3 will not get the support they need.

- ✓ Traditional methods do not address barriers of stigma, access, time and cost
- ✓ Conventional programs like EFAPs do not provide treatment for mental illness

WE ARE MENTAL HEALTH. IT IS ALL WE DO, AND WE GET RESULTS.

With one of Canada's largest networks of registered mental health professionals,
MindBeacon Can Help.

Our methods work, and we have the data to prove it.

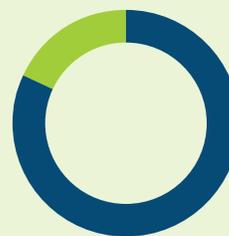
UNMET NEED



73%+
self-report at moderate to high severity

Yet **50%**
have never sought treatment before

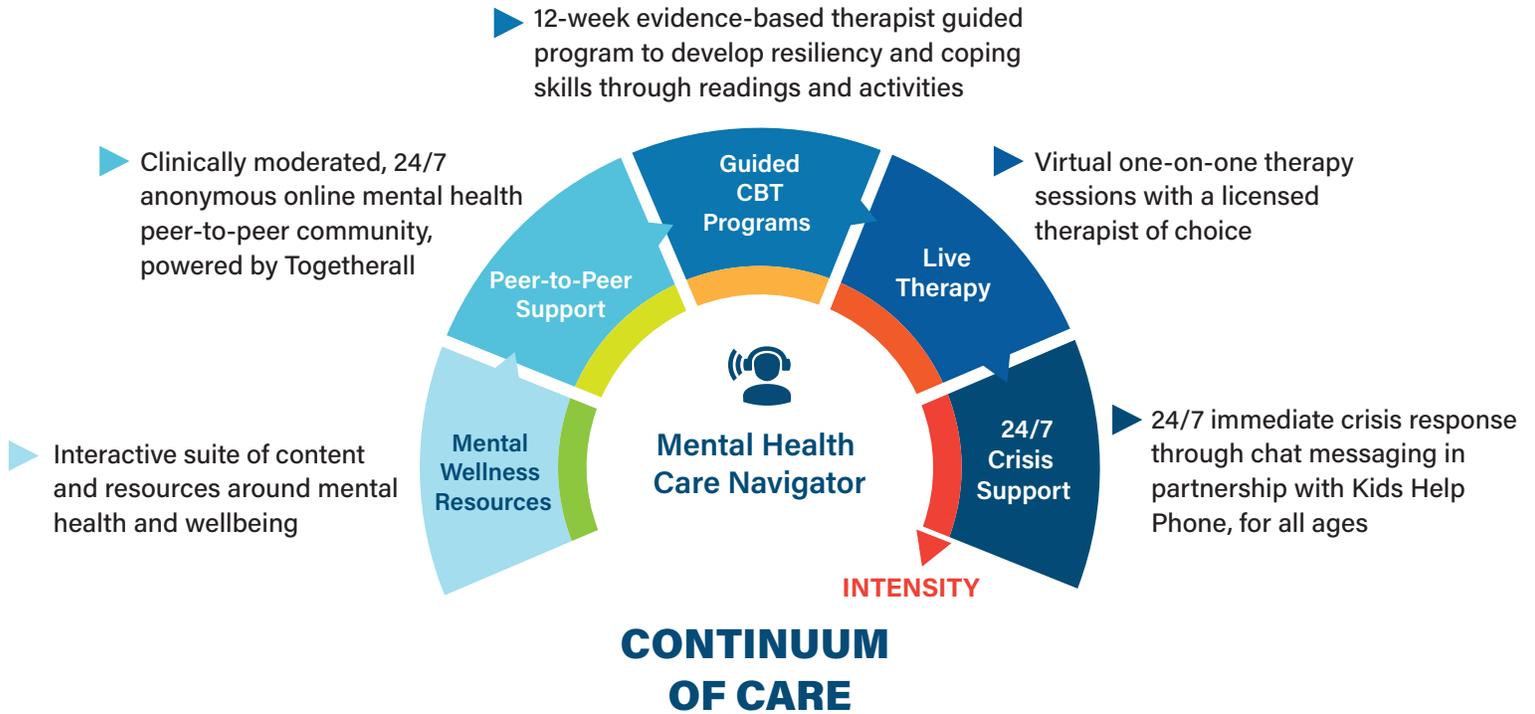
AFTER MINDBEACON



82%
experienced improvement
2 out of 3
experienced clinically significant improvement*

*25% or greater reduction in symptom score

You want measurable outcomes.
Your employees want choice, flexibility and accessibility.



We connect your employees to the support that's best suited to their unique needs, all within one platform.

- ✔ Depression
- ✔ Social Anxiety
- ✔ Generalized Anxiety
- ✔ Panic Disorders
- ✔ Chronic Pain
- ✔ PTSD
- ✔ Alcohol Use
- ✔ Insomnia
- ✔ Stress & Burnout
- ✔ Health Anxiety

PROGRAM SUPPORT

<p>Comprehensive Strategy & Launch plan</p> <p>Culture and communication assessments and customized program launch & awareness strategy</p>	<p>Insights Reports</p> <p>Leverage analytics on program adoption and effectiveness – how it's helping your people</p>	<p>Management & Leadership Tools</p> <p>Leadership newsletter, articles and videos to help train and empower your people managers</p>	<p>Year-Long Campaign Support</p> <p>Turnkey workplace mental health program – events, articles, posters, meeting slides and more – as an extension of your HR team</p>
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You are in great company:



Let's build a transformational mental health program together.
Learn more at www.mindbeacon.com/workplace

MindBeacon Therapist Guided Program Managing Alcohol Use

WHAT IS MANAGING ALCOHOL USE ABOUT?

Alcohol is a legal depressant drug. Similar to most other countries, Canada publishes its own drinking guidelines under the Canada Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking (LRAD) guideline to inform the public about the limits at which people can keep their drinking at the safest possible levels.

Gaining control over drinking habits leads to improved health, reduced depression, and anxiety as well as a boost of confidence and self-esteem. It may also help people get back to living the life they want to have. Unfortunately, many people who have alcohol use problems never seek treatment.

ALCOHOL USE IN CANADA AND THE WORKPLACE

According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA)¹, at least 20% of Canadian drinkers consume alcohol above the levels recommended by the LRAD guidelines. The pandemic has further exacerbated this with Canadians consuming more alcohol, as evidenced by retail alcohol sales data. According to Statistics Canada², "if this trend continues, sales for the year ending March 2021—the first full year of alcohol sales that reflect pandemic-related purchasing habits—will have increased significantly from the year before."



There currently aren't any provisions in the Canada Labour Code addressing the use of alcohol at workplaces. However, employers are required to develop Hazard Prevention Programs which may include policies related to alcohol use.³ As a legal drug, alcohol is usually consumed at events at workplaces including after work drinks, happy hours, birthdays, promotions, and others.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Managing Alcohol Use program is based on principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). The program provides 12 weeks access to our platform and includes exercises, information and reading materials, and worksheets, as well as an alcohol consumption tracker. The entire program is completed under the guidance of a therapist who helps to tailor the material to individual clients so that they are empowered with a toolkit of skills to carry into the future.

¹ Canadian Centre of Substance Abuse and Addiction. (2017). *Canada Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines*. <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-07/2012-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-Brochure-en-0.pdf>.

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WHO SHOULD ENROLL?

This program is for individuals looking to change their relationship with alcohol. This includes individuals who regularly consume alcohol above the amounts recommended by the LRAD guidelines.

This program is not for individuals where the use of alcohol interferes with daily activities or there is a physical dependency which will require the support of a physician or other medical expert.



MANAGING ALCOHOL USE PROGRAM TOOLKIT & MODULES

Topics covered in the Managing Alcohol Use program include:

- ✔ Understanding alcohol
- ✔ Assessing readiness for change and understanding vulnerabilities and triggers
- ✔ Setting individual goals
- ✔ Redirecting attention and strategies for coping with cravings
- ✔ Breaking cycles of thinking and behaviours that perpetuate alcohol use

RESEARCH BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM

MindBeacon is committed to evidence-based care. Our programs are developed by clinical psychologists with expertise in CBT, research evidence, and the issues we address in therapy. Developed in consultation with experts at The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), this program uses the principles of CBT and a harm reduction approach to manage alcohol consumption and develop strategies to cope with cravings. The managing alcohol use program is a new offering developed using best practices in treatment for alcohol use.



ALCOHOL FAQs – YOUR MOST COMMON QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Is there a safe level of drinking?

While consuming alcohol is never particularly “safe”, governments establish guidelines around “safe drinking.” These are guidelines for consuming alcohol at the safest possible levels which include minimizing the risks of consumption. Canada publishes this under the “Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines.”

What are the current Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (LRAD)?

Currently, women are advised to keep to fewer than 10 drinks per week with no more than 2 drinks per day on most occasions. Men, on the other hand, are advised to keep to fewer than 15 drinks per week with no more than 3 drinks per day on most occasions. There is also a warning included mentioning that non-drinking days should be planned to avoid developing a habit.⁴

What are the regulations around alcohol in the workplace?

There currently aren’t any provisions in the Canada Labour Code addressing the use of alcohol at workplaces. However, workplace Hazard Prevention Programs may include policies around alcohol use.

How do I know if I have an alcohol culture at my workplace?

Alcohol is a socially accepted drug in many circles. This can be associated with social pressure to consume alcohol at casual or formal workplace functions, normalizing drinking as a coping mechanism, and minimizing alcohol-related harms. In addition, if you have a culture of long work hours that are associated with stress and anxiety, encourage alcohol consumption at workplace events, or haven’t established alcohol consumption policies (whether for work onsite or from home), you may be contributing to an alcohol culture at your workplace.

Does alcohol affect everyone the same way?

The way alcohol affects a person can vary greatly depending on:

- ✔ age, sex and body weight
- ✔ sensitivity to alcohol
- ✔ type and amount of food consumed prior to drinking
- ✔ alcohol consumption frequency and habits
- ✔ history of alcohol use
- ✔ the environment around the person
- ✔ expectations around the effects of alcohol
- ✔ use of other drugs in tandem with the consumption of alcohol (illegal, prescription, over-the-counter or herbal).

How does alcohol affect stress, anxiety and depression?

Alcohol may be consumed as a coping mechanism for stress, anxiety, or depression. While it may provide a sense of relief in the short term, it can make things more difficult in the long run. Increased alcohol consumption leads to greater tolerance, which means that over time it takes more alcohol to achieve the same effect. And alcohol is a depressant, which means that increased use tends to make anxiety and depression worse over time.

What happens if there is a relapse?

Changing a person’s relationship with alcohol can take time and hard work. For many, particularly during the first year of reducing alcohol consumption, challenges can arise that lead to a lapse (temporary setback) or a relapse (full return to previous drinking patterns). In either case, it is important to recognize triggers, cope with the emotional impact, and plan to get back on track. The skills taught in MindBeacon’s Managing Alcohol Use program can be used in cases of lapses and relapses.

⁴ Canadian Centre of Substance Abuse and Addiction. (2017). Canada Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines. <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-07/2012-Canada-Low-Risk-Alcohol-Drinking-Guidelines-Brochure-en-0.pdf>.