

Addressing Workplace Mental Health

DESCRIPTION

Entrepreneurs create the vast majority of new jobs, pull economies out of recessions and create prosperity. We need a healthy, mentally well workforce to lead economic resurgence.

Despite their importance to the country, entrepreneurs struggle silently with elevated levels of stress, anxiety and depression due to the high stakes of starting a new business.

BACKGROUND

There is no question that COVID-19 has gravely impacted the mental health of Canadians, with the greatest impacts on the workforce age group of 15 to 64 years old. Statistics show that those already experiencing poor mental health before COVID-19 were impacted even more by the pandemic. Since the onset of COVID-19, fewer Canadians report having excellent or very good mental health (55 per cent in July 2020 down from 68 per cent in 2019). Those reporting poor mental health are up to four times more likely to report increased substance use since the pandemic began.

A 2017 study by Bluteau DeVenney showed that 72 per cent of entrepreneurs live with some form of mental illness, 40.5 per cent report their mental health had worsened since becoming entrepreneurs and 47.3 per cent report a decline in their overall health. Entrepreneurs are 3.5 times as likely to experience mental illness and five times as likely to contemplate suicide as the general public.

These issues have a high cost to business and the economy. According to a 2011 study by the Canadian Mental Health Association, the economic burden of mental illness in Canada was estimated at \$51 billion per year. This statistic is a decade old and new data is necessary to guide legislation and investments. This stark number, includes health care costs, lost productivity, law enforcement, corrections and reductions in health-related quality of life. In any given week, pre-pandemic, at least 500,000 employed Canadians were unable to work due to mental health problems. It is estimated this number is now much higher. The cost of a disability leave for a mental illness is about double the cost of a leave due to a physical illness.

In addition to lost productivity, Canadian businesses, through employee assistance programs, healthcare benefits and disability costs also bear a significant cost for mental health care in this country. In fact, with medication, psychologists and specialized



treatments, including therapies for PTSD, not typically covered by government-funded health care, many Canadians turn to their employers' benefits programs for help. Costs related to mental health for employees were escalating pre-COVID-19 and are growing at exponential rates. Prevention and management is essential.

In 2010, the Mental Health Commission of Canada conducted a pan-canadian study of mental health that estimated over the next 30 years the total cost to the economy could reach to more than \$2.5 trillion if focused action is not taken to address issues related to mental illness.

The impact of mental health problems and illnesses is especially felt among working aged people. People in their early and prime working years are among the hardest hit by mental health problems and illnesses. About one person in five of the working population in Canada experience mental health problems and illnesses, which can affect their productivity. Mental health problems and illnesses account for approximately 30% of short – and long-term disability claims and are rated one of the top three drivers of such claims by more than 80% of Canadian employers. The scope and cost of allowable Workers' Compensation claims has broadened across the country. Increasing claims of workplace mental health injuries are causing rates to rise crippling some businesses.

Action to develop an updated mental health strategy for Canada, dedicated to research and data collection measurement and tracking of incidence rates, broadly sharing treatment techniques, and creating awareness will assist government bodies in developing legislation and regulation. Wide-sweeping impacts of mental illness must be addressed collectively with support of academia, government, health professionals and private business.

It is essential to provide improved access to mental health supports for entrepreneurs to support growth in Canada's economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Government of Canada:

1. Work with provinces and territories, municipalities, First Nations, business, labour, academia, health care leaders and individual citizens to update a national strategy on mental health including best practices of current programs in an effort to improve the management of mental health in the workplace. This would include collection of pan-Canadian and international statistics to compare benchmarks, proven examples of prevention, early action to combat stress and early identification of problems focused on increasing worker productivity, along with support for entrepreneurs and employees while highlighting the impact of mental illness on the economy.



2. Ensure funding committed to health in federal budgets continue to provide dedicated amounts for provincial/territorial plans to address mental health challenges within their health care systems.

3. Review government benefits compensation programs for individuals with mental health issues to ensure they are relevant to today's needs and do not disproportionately place the cost burden on employers.

Sponsored by the Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce

Co-sponsored by the Pictou County Chamber of Commerce, Amherst & Area Chamber of Commerce, The Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Atlantic Canada Chamber of Commerce

ENDORSEMENTS

The National Workforce Policy Committee supports this resolution.