

DCIF – Culture Tool 8: Focusing on Health and Wellness in the Workplace

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Tags

Who is this tool for?

High Level Priority:

- DEI and HR professionals

Practical Information:

- Direct Line Managers

What guidance does this tool provide?

- Understanding health and wellness as essential components of an inclusive workplace
- How to develop and implement workplace wellness programs
- How to become more disability and mental health confident

Take home messages:

- When developing a wellness program, a culture that is focused on inclusivity and accessibility must be at the heart of your strategy
- Managers typically have close relationships with their team members and are in an optimal position to observe and support employees who may be experiencing barriers to health and wellness
- Review attached Mental Health resources for additional guidance

Focusing on Health and Wellness

What is Workplace Wellness?

Workplace wellness, sometimes referred to as 'corporate wellbeing,' is any health promoting activity, policy, or practice that supports healthy behaviours within the workplace. The concept of workplace wellness is closely tied with a culture of health.

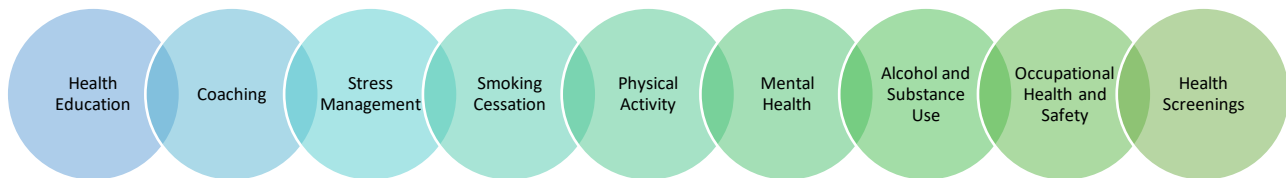
Most adults spend a majority of their waking hours at work. Prioritizing and addressing health and wellness in the workplace, whether it be in-person or remote, is an essential practice of a disability confident organization. Focusing on health and wellness can:

- Improving company morale and employee engagement
- Reducing absenteeism and staff turnover
- Developing positive working relationships
- Decreasing conflict and grievances in the workplace

Most importantly, you adopt a preventative approach to disability. You show workers that you care about their health and wellbeing – not because you have to, because you want to.

Developing Workplace Wellness Programs

There are a wide variety of topic areas that workplace wellness programs can focus on. Here is a starting point of wellness areas you can consider when designing new programs:



When selecting the focus of a wellness program, make sure it is tailored towards the health of the workforce:¹

- Consider factors such as employees' personal wellness interests and needs, or the health risks of the workforce
- Determine how you will collect this type of data on employees' preferences – it could be a survey, an open drop-in meeting, or even multiple focus groups

Comprehensive workplace wellness programs include the following elements:^{1,2}

1. Health education, focused on skill development and lifestyle behavior change along with information dissemination and awareness building.
2. Supportive social and physical environments, reflecting the organization's expectations regarding healthy behaviors and implementing policies promoting healthy behaviors.
3. Integration of the worksite program into the organization's benefits, human resources infrastructure, and environmental health and safety initiatives.
4. Links between health promotion and related programs like employee assistance.

5. Screenings followed by counseling and education on how to best use medical services for necessary follow-up.

When developing a wellness program, a culture that is focused on inclusivity and accessibility must be at the heart of your strategy:¹

- In addition to identifying wellness programs most suitable for the workforce, ask questions about how to implement them in an accessible and inclusive way so that all workers, especially persons with disabilities, can fully participate
- Here are some suggestions to help you plan an inclusive program:
 - Ask the person in charge of developing the program to adopt an **intersectional** approach
 - Double check that a speaker or presenter is **disability confident** or has been trained in areas such as disability awareness, sensitivity, **intersectionality**, and communication
 - Ensure that the content and guidance posed within the wellness program is widely applicable to workers of all backgrounds
 - Invite persons with lived experience (e.g., experts, disability organizations, workers) to identify potential barriers and ways to overcome them when accessing or participating in the wellness program
 - Think about the presentation of information in the wellness program – are the PowerPoints, handouts, and materials accessible? Are alternate formats available?
 - Plan an accessible event, for more details, click [Communication Tool 4 - Hosting Inclusive Virtual Meetings](#)
 - What alternatives can be offered to workers who may not be able to access the wellness program?

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' wellness program, as each will vary over time based on organizational capacity, budget, and resources.

If you still aren't sure how to get started, review this list of promising practices that **disability confident** organizations are implementing to support health and wellness.³ Can you bring these to your workplace?

- **Change the physical working environment:**
 - Provide sit to stand desks, install more windows, create a room for wellness (e.g., for meditation or prayer during the workday)
- **Develop new workplace policies:**
 - Create a policy where employees are given paid time off to attend medical appointments and health services
- **Hold informative seminars:**
 - Bring in qualified health professionals to speak about healthy lifestyle choices, and present information in a variety of ways such as lunch and learns, webinars, etc.
 - Build out an employee-led seminar series on different wellness topics
- **Deliver company events focused on wellness:**
 - Plan friendly competitions or team-building activities so employees can get to know their colleagues better
 - Participate in organization-wide initiatives such as an annual [Mental Health Week](#)
 - Post resources in a common area so workers have easy access to help, if needed
 - **Create an employee peer-to-peer support program where managerial involvement is not required⁴**

Implementing Disability Confident Workplace Wellness Programs

You have the idea now – the next step is bringing it to life. Without a doubt, there are policies, practices, and initiatives that are currently in place at your company to support workplace health and wellness. Who and what have made these successful?

Involvement of Senior Leaders and Managers:

Like with any business initiative, getting leadership on board is critical. Senior leaders have the platform to inspire change across an organization. They can act as role models by participating in wellness programs and encourage employees to get involved as well:⁵

- Show leaders the rationale for disability confidence [for more details, click [Corporate Strategy Tool 1 - Building Your Understanding of Disability Confidence](#)] and make the link between workplace wellness programs and disability prevention

Creation of a Wellness Committee:

Gathering additional buy-in across the organization is an important next step. The development of an employee-led wellness committee, or health and safety committee, can lead this initiative⁴. When building a wellness committee, consider the importance of cross-level and intersectional representation:

- Put out an open call to all workers to join the wellness committee
- Highlight that you are seeking cross-level and intersectional representation, and that there is room for everyone at the table
- Develop initiatives that target all corners of your organization, and as a committee, provide social support, motivation, and encouragement of health behaviours at work

Make a Budget:

Carve out time to plan your budget for a wellness program. While common line items like service or provider fees, cost of participation, marketing, program design, and planning may weigh you down, think outside the box for how additional funding can be found. Things like building a collective activity fund, volunteering in the community, planning low-cost activities (walking groups, internal events), or forming partnerships with insurance providers that offer wellness initiatives.

Connect with an Employee Assistance Program:

An employee assistance program (EAP) is a voluntary and confidential service that is offered to employees, and any individuals who are dependent on them, with access to accredited professionals to cope with work and personal challenges.⁶ Often, an EAP offers educational and practical content that focuses on health and wellness:

- Look to your EAP to see if there is parallel content on the wellness area you intend to improve at your organization
- Refer workers to the EAP for additional resources and support
- If your company does not have an EAP, bring it up with management or senior leaders

Resources that may help you build workplace health and wellness

Alberta Blue Cross has developed a toolkit to support employers and organizations who are interested in taking steps towards promoting workplace wellness. For more information, please visit:

<https://www.workplacewellnessonline.ca/pdfs/workplace-wellness-toolkit.pdf>

Wellness Works Canada provides resources, education, and tools to help employers build workplace health. For more information, please visit: <https://www.resources.wellnessworkscanada.ca/resources>

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety has dedicated programs and resources to support health and wellness in the workplace. For more information, please visit: <https://www.ccohs.ca/topics/wellness/>

Becoming A Disability and Mental Health Confident Manager

To be fully **disability confident**, a manager must be confident in supporting the mental wellness of workers as well.

Managers typically have close relationships with their team members and are in an optimal position to observe and support employees who may be experiencing barriers to health and wellness. There are several steps a manager can take to develop a mentally healthy workplace:

1. Educate yourself and your staff about health and wellness
 - Increase your knowledge about mental health and learn about the best way to support those around you
 - Seek out resources in your local area that you can refer to when speaking with an employee
 - Invite your staff to participate in emotional health and wellbeing training [\[link to training landing page\]](#)
 - Provide educational materials within the workplace to increase awareness and confidence
2. Create spaces to engage in dialogue about mental health
 - Develop opportunities where team members can openly share their personal experiences with one another
 - Participate in national campaigns and awareness weeks such as the Canadian Mental Health Association hosts Mental Health Week in the first week of May each year – for more information, please visit: <https://www.mentalhealthweek.ca/>
 - Research business-led story telling campaigns among other organizations and seek to create similar dialogue and initiatives at your company – for inspiration, please visit: <https://home.barclays/who-we-are/our-strategy/diversity-and-inclusion/disability/this-is-me/>
3. Communicate with and provide support to your team
 - Regularly check in with your employees to gauge how they are feeling at work
 - Make adjustments to employee's roles and find ways to support their growth and skill development
 - Provide flexibility and workplace adjustments wherever possible to prioritize the mental health and wellbeing of employees
4. Set the precedent for respectful and supportive attitudes and behaviour within the workplace
 - Model healthy work habits and encourage all workers to prioritize mental health in the workplace
 - Actively combat stigma and foster a culture that does not tolerate harassment, bullying, and discrimination in the workplace
 - Establish a process to assess and resolve conflict among employees

5. Remain aware of potential stressors in the workplace
 - Co-develop a list of workplace stressors with your employees, considering organizational, operational, environmental, and individual factors that may impact mental health and wellness
 - Monitor and manage workloads and create proactive solutions to mitigate risks in collaboration with your staff
6. Work with your team to develop a plan
 - Identify the needs of your specific team and create strategies to protect the mental health of staff and promote wellbeing
 - Empower employees to provide input on how tasks can be completed
 - Design inclusive policies and practices for the return to work

Additional Resources in Canada for Mentally Healthy Workplaces

Disclaimer: The following are readily available resources focusing on mental health in the workplace. Depending on your organization, these may be helpful starting points for supporting emotional health and wellbeing. We invite you to move through these resources with an **intersectional** approach.

The National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

Developed by the Canadian Standards Association, the world's first **"Standard" for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace** provides a voluntary framework as well as tools and resources to support psychologically safe and healthy workplaces.

- The standard helps an employer build a foundation, identify opportunities, create objectives, and implement a plan for achieving a national standard for psychological health and safety in the workplace.

The Takeaways Toolkit

To support the implementation of the standard, the Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Canadian Mental Health Association collaborated to develop the **Takeaways Toolkit** – which includes a practical guide and overview of the standard, along with a plethora of resources to help organizations create more mentally healthy work environments.

Canadian Mental Health Association's Not Myself Today Initiative

Not Myself Today was created by the Canadian Mental Health Association to help reduce stigma and support mental health at work. It is not meant to provide services for people who are in crisis or are seeking support. If you are looking to support the mental health of your employees, CMHA's Not Myself Today workplace mental health program can help.

The Centre of Additional and Mental Health's Mental Health Playbook for Business Leaders

The Centre of Additional and Mental Health (CAMH) developed a first-of-its-kind **user-friendly playbook to advance the movement for workplace mental health across Canada**. It hinges upon 5 key plays:

1. Create a long-term, organization-wide mental health strategy
2. Institute mandatory mental health training for leadership
3. Develop tailored mental health supports
4. Prioritize and optimize your return-to-work process checklist
5. Track your progress

Each play has been formulated based on the best available evidence, feedback, and recommendations from business leaders, as well as CAMH researchers, clinicians, and experts.

References

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