



THE MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA

Opening the Door for  
the Aspiring Workforce:

# Employment for People Living with Mental Illness

## What's the issue?

**Employment plays a key role in the recovery of individuals living with a mental illness.** It improves their mental health, reduces their need for health services, increases their financial well-being, and creates positive social networks.

**Benefits outweigh the costs of hiring and accommodating individuals living with a mental illness.** Recent research has shown that such benefits can be as high as 7 times more than the costs of accommodations to employers.

Yet, the unemployment rates for people living with a severe mental illness can be as high as 70% to 90%.

## Together, we can open the door to employment for the aspiring workforce.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) coined the term “The Aspiring Workforce” to identify those people who, due to mental illness, have been unable to enter the workforce, are in and out of the workforce due to episodic or persistent illness, or wish to return to work after a lengthy period away from work.



### The Economic Cost

- In Canada, disability income support costs approximately \$28.8 billion each year, with \$9.6 billion of that spent addressing mental health problems or illnesses.
- Almost 1/3 of disability spending from income programs across Canada is for mental health related reasons.



### Labour Market and Employers

- Labour shortages in Canada are expected to reach close to 2 million workers by 2031. People living with mental illness are an underrepresented group that can help fill that gap.
- Many workplace accommodations can be implemented at little to no cost. In studies conducted as recently as 2016, employers report a one-time expenditure of \$500 or less.



### The Human Impact

- People with a job are healthier, have higher self-esteem, and a higher standard of living.
- Barriers to employment for people with serious mental illness include: stigma and discrimination, income security policies that may penalize (or fail to reward) earned income, and lack of sustained support to help people get—and keep—a job.

## What we're doing

### The MHCC is working with:

- **Polymakers** to inform policy at all levels of government
- **Employers and Employment Agencies** to promote employment for people living with a mental illness; and
- **Job-Seekers and HR Professionals** to share promising practices and help to maximize employment outcomes for individuals living with a mental illness.

In 2013, the MHCC released a research report, *The Aspiring Workforce: Employment and Income for People with Serious Mental Illness*, which made recommendations to reduce employment barriers for people living with mental illness and identified innovative practices to help them secure and sustain meaningful employment. The report can be viewed at:

<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/aspiring-workforce>



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada

Suite 1210, 350 Albert Street, Ottawa, ON K1R 1A4 • Tel: 613.683.3755 • Fax: 613.798.2989  
[info@mentalhealthcommission.ca](mailto:info@mentalhealthcommission.ca) • [www.mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca)

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