

# Backgrounder: Building Workplace Mental Health

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## Backgrounder

From [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)

## Description

People typically spend one-third of their lives at work and, during their working years, may spend more than half their waking hours in the workplace or doing work related to their job.

Workplaces always play a significant role in our mental health. On the positive side, they offer us the opportunity to feel productive and contribute to our sense of well-being. However, they can also be stressful and contribute to mental health problems and illnesses. No workplace is immune to these risks, and we need to recognize that occupational health and safety extends beyond physical health.

Understanding this, the MHCC has been at the forefront of efforts to support and enhance workplace mental health since its creation in 2007, calling on government and business leaders to recognize workplace mental health as a significant issue with social and economic implications.

Employers need to realize what having a workplace mental health strategy means: setting guidelines and expectations to create and sustain a psychologically healthy and safe organization for all employees.

The MHCC has developed a number of programs and tools to support these efforts.

### [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#)

The MHCC led the development of this groundbreaking standard to provide employers with a framework they can use to create psychologically healthy and safe workplaces. Following the publication of the Standard in 2013, the MHCC supported the development of [Assembling the Pieces: An Implementation Guide to the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) and led a three-year case study. This project involved 40 organizations across Canada that adopted the Standard and resulted in the identification of nine promising practices. We have also worked with key partners to develop resources for advancing psychological health in the health care field. As of December 2019, the Standard has been downloaded more than 40,000 times. The MHCC is continuing to provide support for its implementation.

### [Mental Health First Aid](#)

Because workplace first aid should include mental health, the MHCC developed Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), which trains people to assist a person who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis (or failing mental health). A recent Canadian study found that 82 per cent of responding organizations ranked mental health conditions in their top three causes of short-term disability (72 per cent for long-term). In addition, 30 per cent of all short- and long-term disability claims are due to mental health

problems and illnesses. Several versions of MHFA have been developed to meet more specific needs of certain populations. To date, more than 500,000 people in Canada have been trained in the program.

### [Opening Minds Workplace Mental Health Program](#)

The Opening Minds workplace mental health program helps organizations develop and conduct an effective and sustainable workplace mental health strategy. By engaging with employers, executive leadership teams, and staff, this process is designed to build or improve on any strategies that may already be in place.

### [The Working Mind \(TWM\)](#)

The Working Mind (TWM), an evidence-based program to promote mental health and reduce the stigma around mental illness in the workplace, is growing internationally. Between April 1 and Sept. 30, 2019, more than 36,000 Canadians received this training, while about 19,000 participated in The Working Mind First Responders courses. To date, more than 200,000 people in Canada trained in TWM, including approx. 110,000 first responders

### **Workplace mental health in the Age of COVID-19**

As we navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic and begin to think about how to recover our operations and the economy, it is critical to reflect on how to build mental health into our emergency management and business continuity plans. The MHCC has been working to help employers understand how to incorporate mental health measures into their emergency planning and is developing tools to help workers manage the stresses and anxieties of a work environment radically altered by the pandemic.

In response to added pressures on essential workers during COVID-19, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has also developed a trio of free crisis response training programs designed to help front-line workers deal with the stress of these exceptional circumstances.

The three new [online programs](#) — Caring for Yourself, Caring for Your Team, and Caring for Others — are designed to help people deal with these new challenges and are based on the MHCC's successful in-person courses: Mental Health First Aid and The Working Mind. More than 3000 people have taken these courses.

Other COVID-19 workplace mental health resources include:

- [Building Mental Health into Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs: Pandemic Response](#)
- [How to Support the Mental Health of Workers in Times of Change and Uncertainty: Responding to a Pandemic](#)
- [Best Practices for Supporting the Mental Health of Healthcare Workers During Covid-19](#)
- [Prioritize your mental wellness while working from home](#)

All of these resources can be accessed directly through the MHCC [COVID-19 Mental Health and Wellness Resource Hub](#)



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