Mental Health Commission of Canada

Commission de la santé mentale du Canada

A Clear Business Case for Hiring Aspiring Workers:

Findings from a research project that looked at the costs and benefits of recruiting and retaining people living with mental illness

Summary Report February 2018

Acknowledgments

Ce document est disponible en français

Citation Information

Suggested citation: Mental Health Commission of Canada.
*A Clear Business Case for Hiring Aspiring Workers: Findings from a research project that looked
at the costs and benefits of recruiting and retaining people living with mental illness.* (2018). Ottawa, ON:
Mental Health Commission of Canada.
Retrieved from **www.mentalhealthcommission.ca**

Copyright

Executive Summary

Labour shortages in Canada are projected to reach close to two million workers by 2031, costing the Canadian economy billions in lost GDP annually. Additionally, rising rates of absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover are now requiring employers to use innovative ways to recruit and retain a qualified labour force.

Most people living with a mental health problem or illness want to work and can make important contributions to the workforce if they are adequately supported. This report presents the business case for employers to actively recruit and accommodate people living with a mental illness through an in-depth examination of the financial, social and organizational costs and benefits. The focus is on *Aspiring Workers*, those people who, due to mental illness, have been unable to enter the workforce, who are in and out of the workforce due to episodic illness and are struggling to remain in the workplace, or who wish to return to work after a lengthy period of illness.

Methodology

Five Canadian businesses that have championed workplace mental health and taken active steps to hire and support the Aspiring Workforce were selected to carry out the research. Within each organization researchers spoke to a diverse group of stakeholders, including workers living with serious mental illness, co-workers, managers, human resource professionals, and individuals who have championed hiring and supporting people living with mental health problems and illnesses. Data was gathered through three main approaches: 1) qualitative interviews 2) interviews with individual stakeholders about the costs and benefits of accommodating

a worker living with a mental illness, and 3) workplace observations and a review of key organizational documents. A comprehensive economic analysis was carried out to calculate the total costs and benefits over a five-year (projected) time frame to estimate net benefit and benefit-to-cost ratios for workers and employers.

Findings

Across all five organizations, the research revealed that attending to healthy workplace culture is critical to supporting the diverse needs of workers. As well, the research found that many workers living with mental illness seem to rely on informal processes for securing workplace accommodations, either by drawing on universally available supports such as sick days, or negotiating an individual arrangement.

The economic data from across the different organizations highlight the significant return on investment for both accommodated workers and employers. These findings were validated from diverse workers, in diverse settings, from diverse perspectives and highlight a win-win proposition. Calculations include monetary and non-monetary costs and benefits that can be showcased to present a compelling business case for strategically hiring and accommodating people from the Aspiring Workforce.

Recommendations

The findings highlight several recommendations for organizations seeking to innovate around hiring and accommodating workers living with a mental health problem or illness.

1. *Build an inclusive workplace culture that values diversity, embraces open communication and worker engagement by drawing on existing resources such as the* National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety **in the Workplace.**

2. *Develop standards and guidelines for proper communication that foster workplace civility.* All members, including leaders and managers within the organization, should model civility in their interpersonal interactions. Short, focused training modules that are delivered on-line or in-person can be effective in helping identify language that can be (unintentionally) offensive, rude, or disrespectful.

3. *Attend to workplace physical and social environments and ensure they allow for adequate flexibility to meet the needs of people living with a mental health problem or illness,* such as sufficient sunlight, designated areas respecting a worker's privacy, office configurations for those with difficulty concentrating that avoid excessive stimulation, and opportunities for peer support and collaboration.

4. *Offer and strengthen supports and benefits (such as sick days) available to all workers* as an important way to accommodate many mental health issues in the workplace. Our findings and other research indicate that universal supports for mental health in the workplace can be an effective strategy, including enhanced benefits plans that encompass a range of health supports. Coverage can vary widely among plans so employers are encouraged to confirm inclusion of evidence-based medications as well as access to psychological services.

5. *Build in flexibility where possible – in terms of how, where and when people work.* Managers should be open to a range of work arrangements, and seek innovative and non-traditional approaches to fostering productivity in their particular work sector.

6. *Encourage work teams and groups to connect, support and recognize each other, both formally and informally,* through peer-support initiatives, team-building and worker-recognition events.

7. *Document informal accommodation arrangements in writing, whenever possible,* so that the nature and scope of options are clear, transparent, and stable through organizational change.

Background

The value of quality employment for the maintenance and improvement of mental health for all people is clear and widely understood. Employment not only provides a paycheck, but also a sense of purpose, opportunities to learn and a chance to connect with others through work.[1] More importantly, work offers hope for improved health and functioning, which is vital in the recovery from mental illness.[2] Research shows that individuals living with a disability (including those living with a mental illness) can be just as qualified, reliable, safe, loyal, and high-performing as their colleagues who do not have a disability.[3]

Since its inception in 2007, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has placed a significant focus on the promotion and protection of workers' mental health in the workplace and eliminating barriers to employment for individuals living with mental health problems and illnesses. In 2013, the MHCC and key partners released *The Aspiring Workforce: Employment and Income for People with Serious Mental Illness*. Aspiring Workers are people living with a mental health problem or illness who have been unable to enter or remain in the workforce, are in and out of work due to episodic illnesses, or want to return after a long absence. The intent of the Aspiring Workforce project was to identify existing and innovative practices that would help people living with a serious mental illness to secure and sustain meaningful employment (or sustainable income). Key recommendations from the report include a paradigm shift to de-stigmatize people living with serious mental illnesses,

better collaboration across stakeholders and levels of government, removing disincentives to return to work and increasing the knowledge of both the worker and employer to be aware of their rights and resources available to them to support the Aspiring Workforce.

In an effort to carry out the recommendations in the *Aspiring Workforce Report*, the MHCC hired a research team[4] to study the business case for employers to recruit and accommodate people living with a mental illness through an in-depth examination of the financial, social and organizational costs along with benefits to both employers and workers. This report is a summary of that study. The results of this research present clear advantages for both Canadian businesses and workers: **hiring Aspiring Workers makes good business sense.**

Canadian Business Needs and Opportunities

Mental health problems and illnesses are the leading causes of disability in Canada, affecting almost seven million working age adults.[5] In fact, mental illness costs Canadian employers over $20 billion annually due to losses related to turnover, absenteeism, and presenteeism.[6] Approximately $9.6 billion is spent each year on disability support benefits for people in Canada living with a mental illness who are not working. Meanwhile, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce has identified skills shortages as one of the top 10 barriers to competitiveness in Canada, with one source estimating a workforce shortage of two million by 2031 and a cost to the Canadian economy of billions in lost GDP annually.[7,8] Undoubtedly, there is a need to consider innovative strategies to help businesses actively engage the Aspiring Workforce towards stable, fulfilling employment.

Although there is a general social trend towards inclusiveness, there are numerous barriers that continue to impede the full integration and acceptance of persons living with mental illnesses in contemporary society, including their access to income and employment security. A web of silence often surrounds mental health issues, shaped by lack of knowledge, stigma, confidentiality concerns and workload pressures. These factors often prevent members of the Aspiring Workforce from disclosing their illness, seeking help for themselves or reaching out to others. Mental illnesses can be episodic or recurring, and may result in unexpected and unpredictable behaviours[9,10,11] that make workplace accommodation and acceptance challenging. Once hired, people living with a mental illness are more vulnerable to workplace mistreatment, bullying and harassment than other workers.[12,13]

Despite the costs of mental illness and benefits of building psychologically healthy workplaces[14], little is known about building workplaces that effectively support the Aspiring Workforce. People living with a mental illness are much less likely to be employed. In fact, unemployment rates are as high as 70% to 90% for people with the most severe forms of mental illnesses. Many workplaces have learned how to accommodate workers with physical disabilities[15,16] but still struggle to create integrative and supportive workplaces for people living with a mental illness[17,18]. The *National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* ("the *Standard*") is a promising new development in workplace mental health, providing voluntary guidelines that promote workers' psychological health and prevent harm.[19] Evidence is lacking, however, as to what these guidelines should recommend and how they can be leveraged to attract and successfully employ people living with a mental illness in ways that promote psychosocial health.

There is an urgent need for sound evidence of the costs and benefits of accommodation, with a particular focus on people living with a moderate to severe mental illness. The following sections present a summary of the results of this business case inquiry, including workplace strategies and good practice guidance to assist Canadian employers in this endeavour.

The Study

Goal

The goal of this research was to generate evidence-based recommendations for employers regarding strategies to foster a productive, engaged, and healthy workforce that can meet Canadian business needs and enhance competitiveness in local, national, and global arenas. The key questions were: ***What is the business case for employers to recruit people living with a mental illness and what organizational strategies and practices best promote recruitment and retention of people living with a mental illness in Canadian workplaces?***

Objectives

The specific objectives of the project were to:

1. explore the barriers, opportunities, risks and benefits of hiring and retaining people living with a mental health problem or illness from the perspective of key workplace stakeholders (people living with a mental illness, co-workers, employers) in a range of organizations varying by size and industry;
2. identify and describe the costs and benefits associated with hiring, supporting and accommodating people living with a mental illness; and
3. identify opportunities and strategies for employers to improve their capacity to successfully hire and retain workers from the Aspiring Workforce.

Methodology

To address the research question and objectives, the researchers conducted case studies of five diverse Canadian businesses (see chart) recruited from three Canadian provinces.

Within each organization, researchers spoke with a diverse group of stakeholders, including workers living with a mental illness[20], co-workers, managers, human resource professionals, and "champions" for hiring and supporting people living with a mental illness. Data was gathered using three main approaches: 1) qualitative interviews with individual stakeholders about their experiences working in the organization; 2) interviews with individual stakeholders about the costs and benefits of accommodating a worker with a mental illness; 3) workplace observations and a review of key organizational documents.

A comprehensive economic analysis calculated the total costs and benefits over a five-year (projected) time frame to estimate net benefit and benefit-to-cost ratio for workers and employers. Workers self-identified as having a mental illness that could cause impaired functioning at work.

Thirty-four individuals were interviewed across the five Canadian organizations, including 12 workers with mental illness, 12 managers, seven co-workers, and three additional champions.

ORGANIZATION	TYPE OF BUSINESS	SIZE	SECTOR AND PROVINCE	URBAN OR RURAL	PROFIT ORIENTATION	UNIONIZED
1	CAFÉ	Small	Consumer/ Survivor Run Social Enterprise (Ontario)		Aims for profit	No
2	CATERING	Small	Private Social Enterprise (Ontario)		For-profit	No
3	FARMING	Medium	Private (Ontario)		For-profit	No
4	BANK	Large	Crown Corporation (Alberta)		For-profit	Yes
5	GOVERNMENT	Large	Public (Nova Scotia)		Government	Yes

Notes: Small = < 100 employees. Medium = > 100 < 500 employees. Large = > 500 employees.

Findings

Three overarching themes emerged from the interviews.

The findings highlight how key organizational principles and strategies identified in different workplace settings impact the experiences of people living with a mental illness, their co-workers, and their managers.

These themes describe organizational features that can help or hinder inclusion and support, with implications for people living with mental health problems and illnesses, their co-workers and managers. As well, the themes speak to how the needs of people living with a mental illness are accommodated in workplaces and the strategies and practices to support the hiring of people living with a mental illness.

Theme 1: Culture of Inclusion

"Culture of inclusion" refers to the various ways a workplace achieves inclusion of all workers, through measures such as access to safe spaces and promotion of positive relationships, supportive work relationships, and employee engagement. Inclusion was a common theme discussed by key informants during interviews across all the organizations. Four of five organizations had implemented practices and processes to ensure *psychological safety and respect*, in terms of how workers communicate with one another. In most of the organizations, there were policies for workplace civility to promote courtesy, politeness, and consideration for others.

Examples from interviews that helped foster a culture of psychological safety and respect include:

- ensuring that workers use respectful language that does not stigmatize or belittle others;
- modifying the work environment. For example, having quiet and private space for employees to work;
- checking in with each other and supporting each other during challenging times; and
- providing opportunities for engagement in decision-making. For example, workers can be asked for their opinions and feedback so that they feel recognized, valued and respected.

> *"Every staff meeting starts with a check-in. How's everyone doing? Not just in your jobs, but in your mental health, in your life."*
>
> – Co-worker, Small, Food Services, Social Enterprise

Although an organization might adopt psychological safety and respect as a strategy to promote inclusion, managers' behaviours and practices need to be aligned. One informant described the problem of non-alignment – *"I think that our leaders are on board but I'm not sure that our management is on board and that's kind of where it's hit and miss."*

Recommendations for Employers to Foster a Culture of Inclusion:

- Build an inclusive workplace culture that values diversity, embraces open communication, and promotes worker engagement by drawing on existing resources such as the *Standard*.
- Develop standards and guidelines for proper communication that foster workplace civility. All members, including leaders and managers within the organization, should model civility in their interpersonal interactions. Short, focused training modules that are delivered on-line or in-person can be effective in helping identify language that can be (unintentionally) offensive, rude, or disrespectful.
- Attend to workplace physical and social environments and ensure they allow for adequate flexibility to meet the needs of people living with a mental illness, such as sufficient sunlight, designated areas respecting a worker's privacy, office configurations for those with difficulty concentrating that avoid excessive stimulation, and opportunities for peer support and collaboration.

Peer Support

An important contributor to recovery, **peer support**, is a supportive relationship between people who have a lived experience in common. The peer support worker provides emotional and social support to others who share a common experience, and can help foster a culture of inclusion in the workplace. Despite evidence of the benefits for both individuals and families, peer support programs have yet to receive the focus, funding, and attention needed.

Take a closer look at MHCC's **Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support**.

Theme 2: Accommodations for Workers Living with a Mental Illness

By the time Canadians reach 40 years of age, 1 in 2 has – or has had – a mental health problem or illness.[21] As such, employers are hiring and retaining individuals living with a mental illness. However, only one case study organization described having a formal accommodation plan for mental health disability (which was part of a worker's gradual return to work after disability leave). Rather, many respondents interviewed in the study relied on supports and benefits available to all workers, such as sick days and work-from-home policies to accommodate their needs.

This finding reinforces the need for organizations to ensure that the benefits and supports offered to all workers are sufficient, and to strengthen them where possible. Interestingly, the move towards flexible work could also have negative consequences for people with mental illness. For example, flex time seems to have changed attitudes towards "sick" and "personal" time, as individuals were now expected to "flex" their hours and put in extra time to compensate for time off. Furthermore, under this new approach, there may be an expectation for workers to work

very long hours to complete required tasks without any recognition.

At times, workers make special requests and negotiate with their direct supervisors to access the supports and accommodations they need. When individual accommodations for mental illness were needed, they were typically negotiated informally between workers and their managers. Although many preferred keeping the negotiation of individual accommodations informal, it did create some uncertainty and risk.

Typically, these arrangements were not written down and depended on verbal agreements. They required managers to be sympathetic and understanding of the need for accommodation, and for a culture of support within the organization. Second, the informal nature of these arrangements raised concerns about their sustainability as organizations change and evolve. Although some organizations had work-from-home options available to many workers, this varied across and within organizations. Not every position was conducive to working-from-home options, and often this was approved on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, at times workers had to make special requests and negotiate with their direct managers to access the supports and accommodations they needed.

> *"If the person in a decision-making (position) starts from the place that they want to help… they want to accommodate, but stay true to what they need to achieve as a department… that's kind of the recipe for success."*
>
> – Executive, Mid-sized, For-profit, Rural, Agricultural Business

> *"The fear that somebody might gossip can hold people back from disclosing or divulging information that could be really helpful for them."*
>
> – Champion, Large, Public Sector Organization

Disclosure was not an issue in all of the organizations; however, the invisibility of many mental health problems can create circumstances where co-workers interpret accommodations as special treatment. This lack of understanding of mental illness and workplace accommodations sometimes led to gossip and stigma, and perpetuated the hesitancy to disclose and request accommodations.

Recommendations for Employers around Accommodations for People Living with a Mental Health Problem or Illness:

- Offer and strengthen supports and benefits (such as sick days) available to all workers as an important way to accommodate many mental health issues in the workplace.
- Build in flexibility where possible – in terms of how, where and when people work. Managers should be open to a range of work arrangements, and seek innovative and non-traditional approaches to fostering productivity in their particular work sector.
- Encourage work teams and groups to connect, support and recognize each other, both formally and informally, through peer support initiatives, team building and worker recognition events.
- Document informal accommodation arrangements in writing whenever possible so that the nature and scope of options are clear, transparent, and stable through organizational change.

Theme 3: Hiring People Living with a Mental Illness

The study explored issues around hiring within each organization, given the difficulty individuals from the Aspiring Workforce have in gaining employment. Two organizations had mandates to only hire people living with mental illness or those facing barriers to employment. For this reason, they looked for people with lived experience who could fill vacant positions. Conversely, the other three organizations did not actively recruit from the Aspiring Workforce and only one worker interviewed had identified himself as having a mental illness when he was hired. Although multiple key informants noted that their organizations did not track the hiring of any specific groups, the two organizations that actively hired people with lived experience reported low turnover, which was surprising, given that they were in the food industry, which has a high rate of employee turnover.

> *"For the [food services] industry we have low turnover. Typical restaurant turnover is about 40% annually. Ours is in the 10-15% range. So, people do tend to stay here."*
>
> – Manager, Small, Food Services, Consumer-run Enterprise

Economic Analysis of Costs and Benefits to Workers and Employers for Recruitment and Retention of the Aspiring Workforce

This section presents cost-benefit case studies of accommodated workers within the organizations. An economic analysis was not completed on Organization 3, a mid-sized, for-profit, rural, agricultural business, because of complexities which prevented the recruitment of an accommodated worker. Stylized case studies have been designed to profile the findings from the economic analysis of data collected from multiple stakeholders, including accommodated workers, co-workers, and managers/supervisors. A detailed breakdown of cost-benefit ratio calculations is found in the full report, which is available upon request. The table (next page) shows the generic items that guided the interviews for the cost-benefit analyses.

Benefits are often more difficult to estimate than costs. The study distinguished between tangible and intangible benefits, the latter of which are benefits that cannot be easily measured and quantified.

Costs and Benefits/Impacts Considered from the Organizations' Perspective

ITEMS	COSTS	BENEFIT/IMPACTS (TANGIBLE)	BENEFIT/IMPACTS (INTANGIBLE)
Related to work time and productivity	Time spent to make the accommodation (planning, evaluation, training, maintenance, other time) Cost of providing a flexible schedule for the accommodated worker	Work absences (days, replacement costs) Turnover Productivity at work	
Related to external or material expenses	Professional/Consultant fees Equipment purchases	Insurance and other payroll costs Fines related to compliance violations	
Other	Other costs of the accommodations	Other benefits/impacts	Job satisfaction Intent to stay Organizational citizenship and workers' commitment (accommodated worker, co-workers) Organizational climate

Items used **from the accommodated workers' or the co-workers' perspectives** were different. On the cost side, the study identified unpaid time spent by workers on planning, implementing the accommodation and getting trained to use it, and impacts incurred by the flexible schedule of accommodated workers. On the benefit side, the study identified a variation in workload and productivity at work, a variation in the intent to stay in the organization, the perception of the organization (organizational citizenship, work climate), as well as quality of life at work and outside work, work-life balance, and satisfaction.

More detailed definitions of cost and benefit items used in the economic evaluation are provided in Appendix A.

In the study, total costs and total benefits were computed separately for the economic perspective of the organization and for the perspective of accommodated workers, where data allowed for such quantitative estimates. Total costs and benefits were projected over a five-year period. Net benefit was computed as the difference between benefits and costs. Benefit-to-cost ratio (total benefits divided by total costs) was also computed.

Organization 1 – Small, Food Services, Consumer-run Enterprise

This is a small, consumer-run business that explicitly aims to hire individuals living with a mental health problem or illness (including managers). This organization was established approximately 15 years ago and currently operates four cafés as well as providing catering services across a large city.

The accommodated worker is a cook who prepares food for a café and catering service. When the manager is absent, the cook also takes on the role of assistant manager. The position is part-time, entailing approximately 20-30 hours per week. The person has worked for the organization for six years.

Position	Chef, Assistant Manager
Health Condition	Epilepsy, challenges with short-term memory, episodes of major depression
Accommodation	The manager has accommodated the cook's health conditions by: • writing down daily tasks; • running through the tasks the day before they are to be executed to help her remember details; • sending reminders through text messages and regularly checking in; and • being flexible with scheduling to make it fit with the worker's personal/family needs.
5-year net worker benefits **benefit-cost ratio for the worker**	$44,108 **9.45**
5-year net organization benefits **benefit-cost ratio for the organization**	$55,596 **2.25**

These results show that after a five-year period, benefits amount to almost 10 times the costs from the perspective of the worker, and more than two times the costs from the organization's perspective. From this latter perspective, benefits derive mainly from increased productivity at work due to accommodations. Costs are mainly due to additional supervisory staff and training.

Organization 2 – Small, Food Services, Social Enterprise

This is a small, urban, relatively new for-profit catering company. Most of the workers are living with a mental illness, including the owner, and some workers have other disabilities as well.

The accommodated worker washes dishes, helps with the preparation of food for catering orders, and on occasion assists with serving at events. He is a member of the core staff of the organization. He works an average of 30 hours per week and is paid the minimum hourly wage. This person has worked for the organization for five years.

"As a social enterprise, we see creating accessible and sustainable employment as a beneficial end in and of itself regardless of financial profits – money, time, and resources invested in that effort are never lost! Furthermore, investing in people who otherwise have barriers to the workforce results in loyal and dedicated staff, with less sick days and staff turnover. We have discovered that when you go above and beyond for your staff, they will in turn go above and beyond for you."

– Owner, Small, Food Services, Social Enterprise

Position	Dishes, food prep, serving
Health Condition	Bipolar disorder and intellectual disability
Accommodation	The owner has accommodated the worker by: • allowing him to sit while working; • permitting access to his phone at all times; • offering a flexible pay schedule; • providing support with applications; and • providing assistance getting to appointments.
5-year net worker benefits benefit-cost ratio for the worker	$30,764 **4.23**
5-year net organization benefits benefit-cost ratio for the organization	$134,032 **1.92**

In this organization, the difference in benefit-to-cost ratio between the organization's and the worker's perspective was lower than in the previous organization. From the organization's perspective, benefits mainly came from higher productivity at work due to the accommodations. To a lesser extent, benefits were provided by an increased intent to stay, the supervisor and a lower staff turnover as compared to the average level in the food industry.

Organization 4 – Large, Crown Corporation, Banking

This is a provincial, for-profit Crown Corporation mandated to provide banking services to individual and business customers. It has 5,000 workers in 300 locations across the province.

The accommodated worker is a business analyst at the head office, and she also assists the human resources department with mental health initiatives for the organization. She splits her time between these two responsibilities in a proportion of approximately 80% business analyst and 20% human resources. She began these new responsibilities only a few years ago, but has been with the organization for a decade working as an analyst in another office.

This person is known to be a high performer and has received awards for her work. She is also one of the first people in the organization to disclose her mental health condition. This has given her a high profile in the organization, and she is considered an inspiration and a role model for others in the organization.

"We work hard to create a culture that is inclusive and respectful. By supporting physical, financial, mental, spiritual and overall organizational health while encouraging team members to be accountable to use the tools and resources available, we believe this can positively impact the mental health of all team members. By employing people with mental health issues, we demonstrate this commitment to create a safe and inclusive environment for all team members and future team members to be ALL IN."

– Human Resources Director, Large, Crown Corporation, Banking

Position	Business Analyst
Health Condition	Severe depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder
Accommodation	This worker has been accommodated by: • offering her soft measures such as patience and extra time; • providing her with two computer screens; and • working from home and flex hours (but not currently).
5-year net worker benefits benefit-cost ratio for the worker	Intangible – job satisfaction, quality of life, organizational citizenship
5-year net organization benefits benefit-cost ratio for the organization	$210,804 **7.40**

In this organization, the benefit-to-cost ratio from the organization's perspective is high, as a result of benefits over a five-year period due to a higher productivity at work and a higher intent to stay of the manager. Costs are lower than in the other organizations.

Organization 5 – Large, Public Sector Organization

This is a provincial government agency with multiple sites and 11-12,000 workers, most of whom are unionized.

The accommodated worker is an inspector who has worked with the organization for 12 years. Much of his time is spent in the field, but he needs to check in at the office at the start and end of each day. The hours are set, so there is no flexible schedule, and the work must be done on site. The person experiences severe depression and has episodic anxiety attacks.

"Employment offers people means to support themselves and their families, a feeling of purpose and value….these are things every person should have, including those who have mental health concerns."

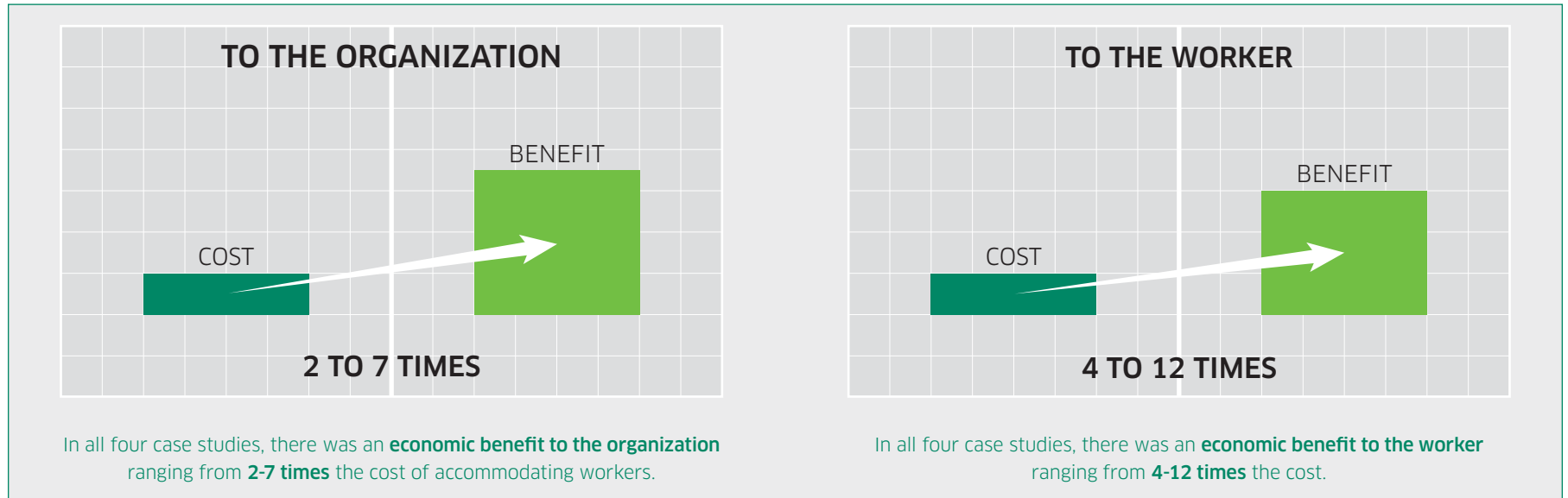– Employee, Large, Public Sector Organization

He is open with his manager and co-workers about his mental illness. His colleagues are supportive of his condition and accommodation needs. In addition, he sometimes uses his sick days and vacation time, and has taken a medical leave of absence, which are benefits available to all employees.

Position	Inspector
Health Condition	Severe depression and episodic anxiety attacks
Accommodation	The manager has accommodated this worker by offering regular check-ins to ensure the accommodation process is working effectively and factors such as attendance and workload are considered.
5-year net worker benefits **benefit-cost ratio for the worker**	$67,171 **12.19**
5-year net organization benefits **benefit-cost ratio for the organization**	$203,650 **7.81**

In this organization, the benefit-to-cost ratio is high, benefits are mainly due to a higher productivity at work.

KEY RESULTS

Economic benefits

TO THE ORGANIZATION

BENEFIT

COST

2 TO 7 TIMES

In all four case studies, there was an **economic benefit to the organization** ranging from **2-7 times** the cost of accommodating workers.

TO THE WORKER

BENEFIT

COST

4 TO 12 TIMES

In all four case studies, there was an **economic benefit to the worker** ranging from **4-12 times** the cost.

Intangible benefits

The intangible benefits identified by respondents listed below are not reflected in the economic analysis, as they are difficult to quantify; however, they are still important and were emphasized by the respondents.

INTANGIBLE BENEFITS FOR THE ORGANIZATION	INTANGIBLE BENEFITS FOR ACCOMMODATED WORKERS
• Increased job satisfaction of workers • Increased quality of work life • Improved organizational climate/culture • Improved relationship between co-workers • Higher degree of organizational citizenship • Increased organizational reputation	• Increased quality of work life • Increased quality of life outside of work • Improved organizational climate/culture • Increased employment opportunities • Increased work-life balance • Higher degree of organizational citizenship • Improved relationship between co-workers • Increased job satisfaction

Conclusion & Next Steps

The strategic decision to actively hire and retain people living with a mental health problem or illness presents clear advantages for diverse Canadian businesses and workers. The findings showcase businesses that have championed workplace mental health and taken active steps to hire and support people with mental illnesses. The business cases presented here provide compelling evidence that the benefits of pursuing healthy work environments for the Aspiring Workforce outweigh the costs. The innovative approach the researchers developed and applied to estimate the costs and benefits of accommodation in this study can be adapted by businesses for use in their own contexts.

The next phase of the research project will involve developing a tool based on the cost-benefit calculations used in this report and seeking feedback from employers and other stakeholders. This tool will be tested to ensure employers at large are able to adopt/use it in their own environments to calculate the costs and benefits of recruiting and retaining workers from the Aspiring Workforce. The MHCC will work with the research team to produce an employers' guide to assist with the practical implementation of this tool and to successfully build an inclusive work environment that includes people living with a mental health problem or illness.

We need to change the conversation about workers with mental illness; we need to recognize that they can be productive, loyal employees with the right supports in place that not only benefit them, but the overall work environment. As one of our employers discovered, *"when you go above and beyond for your staff, they will in turn go above and beyond for you."*

Appendix A

Table 1: Items considered in the economic analysis with managers and supervisors.

COSTS	DEFINITION (used with manager/supervisor)
Planning	people time for planning the accommodations
Evaluation	people time for evaluating the accommodations
Training	people time for extra training or specialized training
Professional/Consultant Fees	costs of services from an outside organization
Equipment Purchases	cost of equipment purchases
Accommodation Maintenance	people time for ongoing meetings to make the accommodations work for the worker
Other Time	people time in other activities related to making the accommodations work for the worker
Flexible Schedule	costs incurred by the organization because the accommodated worker has a flexible schedule
Other Costs	other costs incurred by the organization related to the worker's accommodation

BENEFITS/IMPACTS (tangible and intangible)	DEFINITION (used with manager/supervisor)
Job Satisfaction	your level of contentment and involvement with your job
Intent to Stay	your intentions about staying with your current employer
Work Absences	time the accommodated worker takes off work due to their disability and related health needs
Work Absence Replacement Costs	expenses of replacing the accommodated worker when absent
Productivity at Work (accommodated worker)	quality of the accommodated worker's work output and the time it takes to get things done
Productivity at Work (co-workers)	quality of co-workers' work output and the time it takes to get things done
Organizational Citizenship (accommodated worker)	accommodated worker's commitment to the organization that is over and above their regular responsibilities
Organizational Citizenship (co-workers)	co-workers' commitment to the organization that is over and above their regular responsibilities
Staff Turnover	proportion of workers leaving the organization in a given period of time
Attraction and Retention	ability of the organization to attract and keep workers
Organizational or Work Unit Climate/Culture	workers' opinions and experiences about the organization
Organizational Accountability	the organization's sense of doing what it is supposed to do
Organizational Reputation	how external stakeholders view the organization
Insurance and Other Payroll Costs	payroll expenses such as short-term disability, long-term disability, Employment Insurance, Canada/Quebec Pension Plan
Compliance-related Expenses	fines incurred by the organization and time required to respond to compliance violations
Other Benefits/Impacts	other benefits/impacts incurred by the organization because of the accommodations

Table 2: Items considered in the economic analysis with co-workers.

COSTS	DEFINITION (used with co-workers)
Training	your time in extra training or specialized training
Accommodation Maintenance (meetings with the accommodated worker)	your time in ongoing meetings time to discuss the accommodations with the worker
Other Time	your time in other activities related to making the accommodation work for the worker
Flexible Schedule	costs you incur because the accommodated worker has a flexible schedule as part of their accommodation (flexible schedule includes different hours, working from home, more breaks, etc.)
Other Costs	other costs you have that are related to the worker's accommodation

BENEFITS/IMPACTS (tangible and intangible)	DEFINITION (used with co-workers)
Workload	amount and intensity of your work
Relationship with the Accommodated Worker	quality of your relationship with the accommodated worker
Job Satisfaction	your level of contentment and involvement with your job
Intent to Stay	your intentions about staying with your current employer
Work Life Balance	time and energy you have to do all the things that are important in your life
Quality of Work Life	your opinion about how good your work life is
Quality of Life Outside of Work	your opinion about how good your life is outside of work
Organizational or Work Unit Climate/Culture	your opinions about and experiences with the organization
Productivity at Work	quality of your work output and the time it takes you to get things done
Organizational Citizenship	your commitment to the organization that is over and above your regular responsibilities
Other Benefits/Impacts	other benefits/impacts you have incurred

Table 3: Items considered in the economic analysis with accommodated workers.

COSTS	DEFINITION (used with accommodated workers)
Planning	your time in the planning the accommodations
Evaluation	your time in evaluating the accommodations
Training	your time in extra training or specialized training
Accommodation Maintenance (meetings with supervisor/manager/human resources)	your time in ongoing meetings with your supervisor/manager or human resources to discuss your accommodations
Other Time	your time in other activities related to making your accommodations work
Flexible Schedule	costs you incur because of having a flexible schedule (flexible schedule includes different hours, working from home, more breaks, etc.)
Other Costs	other costs you have that are related to making your accommodations work

BENEFITS/IMPACTS (tangible and intangible)	DEFINITION (used with accommodated workers)
Income from Work	your earnings from work
Job Satisfaction	your level of contentment and involvement with your job
Intent to Stay	your intentions about staying with your current employer
Employment/Career Opportunities	your ability to develop a career and be productive in the paid labour force
Work Life Balance	time and energy you have to do all the things that are important in your life
Quality of Work Life	your opinion about how good your work life is
Quality of Life Outside of Work	your opinion about how good your life is outside of work
Workload	amount and intensity of your work

1. Road to Recovery: Employment and Mental Illness, National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2014.

2. Guidelines for Recovery-Oriented Practice, Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2015.

3. Partnership council on employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. "Employable Until Proven Otherwise" 2017.

4. The full research report includes a list of the entire research team. Gewurtz, Rebecca et. al. "The Aspiring Workforce in Canada: Building the business case for employers to actively recruit and retain people living with mental illness." Final Report. October 2017. Available from MHCC staff upon request.

5. Mental Health Commission of Canada, *Making the case for investing in mental health in Canada.* 2016, Available from http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2016-06/Investing_in_Mental_Health_FINAL_Version_ENG.pdf: Ottawa, ON.

6. Conference Board of Canada, Healthy brains at work: *Employer-sponsored mental health benefits and programs.* 2016, Accessed from, http://www.sunlife.ca/static/canada/Sponsor/About Group Benefits/Focus Update/2016/557/HealthyBrains_Report2_EN.pdf: Ottawa, ON.

7. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce. A Battle We Can't Afford to Lose.

8. Rick Miner "The Great Canadian Skills Mismatch: People without Jobs, Jobs without People and MORE" 2014.

9. Gewurtz, R. and B. Kirsh, *Disruption, disbelief, and resistance: a meta-synthesis of disability in the workplace.* Work: a Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation, 2009. 34: p. 33-44.

10. Lysaght, R., T. Krupa, and A. Gregory, *Employers' perceptions on intermittent work capacity - What can qualitative research tell us?* 2011, Queen's University: Kingston Ontario.

11. Vick, A., *Living and working precariously with an episodic disability: Barriers in the Canadian context.* Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, 2014. 3(3): p. 1-28.

12. Carter, M., et al., *Workplace bullying in the UK NHS: a questionnaire and interview study on prevalence, impact and barriers to reporting.* BMJ Open, 2013. 3(6): p. 245-277.

13. Fevre, R., et al., *Trouble at work.* Vol. 4. 2012, London: Bloomsbury Academy. 245-277.

14. Kelloway, E.K. and A.L. Day, *Building healthy workplaces: What we know so far.* Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 2005. 37(4): p. 223-235.

15. Nevala, N., et al., *Workplace accommodation among persons with disabilities: A systematic review of its effectiveness and barriers or facilitators.* Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 2015. 25: p. 432-448.

16. Tompa, E., et al., *Evidence synthesis of workplace accommodation policies and practices for persons with visible disabilities.* 2015, Accessed from https://www.crwdp.ca/sites/default/files/documentuploader/full_report_-_evidence_synthesis_visible_disabilties_tompa_et_al._2015.pdf: Toronto, ON.

17. Smith, P.M., et al., *Are the predictors of work absence following a work-related injury similar for musculoskeletal and mental health claims?* Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 2014. 24: p. 79-88.

18. Prince, M., *Policies and practices on the accommodation of persons with invisible disabilities in workplaces: A review of Canadian and international literature.* 2015, Accessed from https://www.crwdp.ca/sites/default/files/documentuploader/full_report_-_lit_review_on_persons_with_invisible_disabilities_in_workplaces_prince_2015.pdf: Victoria, BC.

19. Shain, M., *Weathering the perfect legal storm: Navigating requirements of the emerging duty to provide a psychologically safe system of work in the context of the voluntary National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace,* CSA Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803. 2014, Accessed from https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/pdf/weathering_the_perfect_legal_storm_BEV_E.pdf: Toronto, ON.

20. Mental illnesses are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning. (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2015).

21. Smetanin et al. (2011). The life and economic impact of major mental illnesses in Canada: 2011-2041. Prepared for the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Toronto: RiskAnalytica.

Mental Health Commission of Canada

Suite 1210, 350 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON K1R 1A4

Tel: 613.683.3755
Fax: 613.798.2989

info@mentalhealthcommission.ca
www.mentalhealthcommission.ca

@MHCC_   /theMHCC   /1MHCC   @theMHCC
/Mental Health Commission of Canada