

Equipping leadership toolkit

Improving mental health and addiction outcomes at your workplace starts with a solid, structured foundation. Whether your company is small, medium, or large, psychological health and safety should be a core part of your **occupational health and safety management system (OHSMS)**.



Every great plan needs a clear focus

Core focus areas of a workplace psychological health and safety strategy

Psychological health and safety management



Manage occupational psychosocial hazards through COR® integration.

Workplace culture



Create a psychologically safe and supportive workplace culture.

Employee wellness and support



Promote resources and mental health support for workers.

IHSA's Mental Health at Work framework can help guide you as you create your OHSMS or integrate mental health policies into your existing OHSMS.

Pillar 1: Psychological health and safety management

Adopt a Comprehensive Occupational Health and Safety Program

A COHSP is a framework that supports employee engagement, productivity, and overall satisfaction while reducing workplace injuries, incidents, absenteeism, and related costs. According to the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety \(CCOHS\)](#), a COHSP has four main components:

1. Occupational health and safety (i.e., the physical work environment)
2. Psychosocial work environment (i.e., organizational culture and the organization of work)
3. Workplace health promotion (i.e., worker health and well-being)
4. Organizational community involvement (i.e., corporate citizenship)

These are not four separate areas. They overlap and work together within an OHSMS.

Select a guiding framework for strategy development

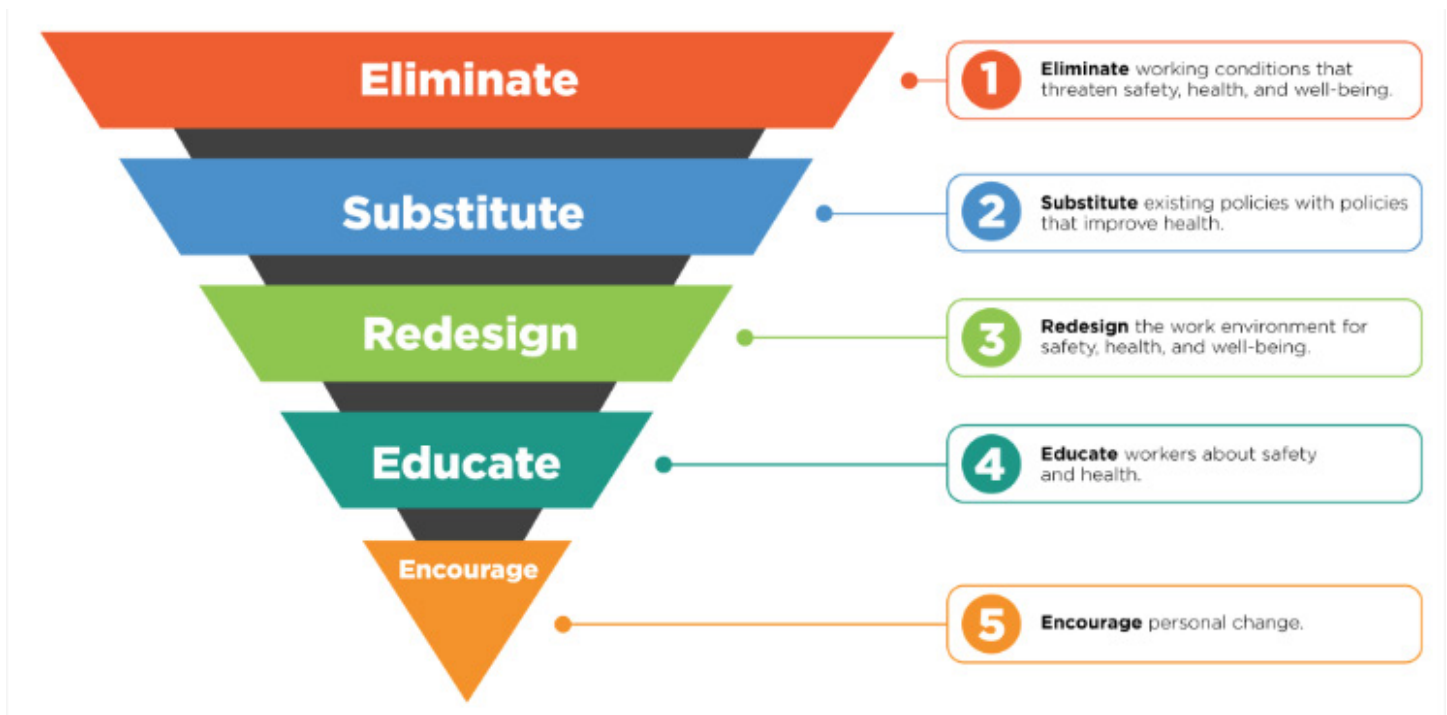
It is better to plan ahead for mental health and safety than to deal with problems as they come up. A guiding framework can help you plan, measure, and track your efforts.

The World Health Organization's Healthy Workplace Framework and Model

The World Health Organization's Healthy Workplace Framework and Model is a flexible tool that can help businesses create psychological safety strategies tailored to their unique needs. It aligns with OHSMS standards, like COR® 2020, and addresses both physical and psychosocial health risks.



The U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) Total Worker Health® program is a set of policies and procedures that focuses on eliminating or controlling hazards that affect overall worker health. This model builds on the traditional hierarchy of controls by adding strategies that enhance all aspects of worker well-being, ranked by their effectiveness.



Build or strengthen your OHSMS using COR 2020® and the Health and Safety Excellence program

The Certificate of Recognition (COR® 2020) is a national standard that verifies an OHSMS. It helps organizations structure their approach to managing risks and controlling hazards—including mental health hazards.

You can also enhance your OHSMS through the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board’s (WSIB) Health and Safety Excellence program (HSEp), which rewards companies for completing safety-related topics. Many of these topics align with COR® 2020.

- [Click here to learn how to verify your OHSMS with COR® 2020.](#)
- [Click here to learn more about HSEp.](#)

Total Worker Health® model

[Total Worker Health® \(TWH\)](#) is a way for workplaces to look at the “big picture” of an employee’s health and well-being. Instead of just focusing on preventing workplace accidents, it brings together safety protection (keeping you safe from workplace hazards) and health promotion (preventing illness and injury) to improve overall quality of life.

Why this approach is different

Traditional safety programs usually focus only on the harms that come from the work itself. TWH recognizes that work influences health in many ways, including things like wages, work hours, stress levels, and how you get along with coworkers. Research shows that workplace stress and environment can contribute to health problems like sleep disorders, depression, and heart disease.

The five main pillars of Total Worker Health®

To make this approach work, an organization focuses on five key areas:

1. Leadership Support: Bosses and managers at every level must show they are committed to safety and health through their actions, not just their words. They should treat worker well-being as being just as important as the quality of their products or services.
2. Smart Job Design: The most effective way to protect workers is to design the work itself to remove hazards. This might mean changing a work schedule to reduce stress or redesigning a workstation to prevent physical strain.

3. **Worker Involvement:** Employees should be active partners in the process. Because workers know their daily tasks best, they are the best people to help identify problems and suggest solutions.
4. **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Any personal health information collected must be kept strictly private. Workers must feel safe knowing their data won't be used against them for things like promotions or job security.
5. **Working Together:** Different departments—like Human Resources, Safety, and Wellness—should connect their systems. When these teams collaborate, they can save money and address complex health challenges more effectively.

How problems are solved

The TWH approach uses a specific “priority list” (called the Hierarchy of Controls) to solve health and safety issues:

- **Top Priority (Most Effective):** Eliminate the conditions that cause illness or injury.
- **Middle Priority:** Redesign the environment or substitute bad practices with health-enhancing ones, like offering flexible work schedules.
- **Lowest Priority (Least Effective):** Simply educating workers or encouraging them to change their personal habits. TWH focuses on fixing the workplace first rather than just asking the individual worker to change.

Integrate psychosocial hazard management into your OHSMS

Preventing harm is the foundation of any effective OHSMS. This includes protecting workers from physical hazards and psychosocial hazards—factors in the work environment that can negatively affect mental health, like harassment, high job demands, or lack of role clarity.

You can avoid some risks (e.g., noise or toxic chemicals), but you must manage others (e.g., shift work or unrealistic deadlines) through proper psychosocial controls. Incorporating psychosocial hazard management into your OHSMS means using a structured system to find, assess, and control these risks—just as you would for physical hazards.

Frameworks, such as the Total Worker Health® model, and standards, such as the Canadian Standards Association's (CSA) CAN/CSA-Z1003-13: Psychological health and safety in the workplace, can help organizations protect and promote psychological well-being. The goal is to prevent mental harm and foster a mentally healthy workplace through clear policies, supportive practices, and continuous improvement.

Build a psychological health and safety management system (PHSMS)

Creating a system to manage psychological health does not have to be overwhelming. Even small steps can lead to meaningful improvements. Here is a simplified version of the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle to guide your efforts:

Step 1: Lead

Supervisors must lead by example and set the tone. Senior management must clearly define and communicate all workplace parties' roles in the internal responsibility system (IRS) and actively support psychosocial health and safety management efforts.

Step 2: Plan

Assess the current state of your psychological health and safety management efforts and set goals and milestones. Consult standards such as CAN/CSA-Z1003-13 for guidance. Start small if needed—any improvement is progress.

Begin by securing support and commitment from all stakeholders through careful preparation and assessment.

Step 3: Do

Put your plan into action. Target key psychosocial risks and apply targeted controls (e.g., training, workload adjustments, or supportive policies, etc.).

Step 4: Check

Record your results. Evaluate whether your actions are reducing risks and improving worker mental health outcomes. Use feedback and data to assess what is working. Consider the following evaluation questions:

- How do you know whether these actions achieved their intended outcomes?
- How do you know whether your investment of time, effort, and money was worthwhile?

Step 5: Act

Use what you learn to refine and improve your strategy. Adjust programs, fill gaps, and stay responsive to emerging needs. Continuous improvement is the goal.

Pillar #1 Psychological health and safety management resources for employers

Psychological health and safety management standards

- [CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013: Psychological health and safety in the workplace](#)
- [ISO 45003:2020: Occupational health and safety management - psychological health and safety at work: Managing psychosocial risks - guidelines](#)

Workplace psychological health and safety assessment resources

- [Mental harm prevention roadmap](#) (Workplace Safety and Prevention Services)
- [Psychological health and safety training and assessment program](#) (Opening Minds/Mental Health Commission of Canada)

Worker psychological hazard assessments models

- [StressAssess: Workplace edition](#) (Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers)
- [Guarding minds at work](#) (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health)
- [Personalized surveys](#) (Descormiers Enterprise)

Guides for implementing CAN/CSA-Z1003-13

- [Assembling the pieces: An implementation guide to the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) (CSA)
- [Assembling the pieces toolkit](#) (CCOHS)
- [Implementing the standard](#) (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health)
- [CSA group standards, research, policy briefs, and other resources](#) (CSA)

Guides for small and medium-sized businesses

- [Mental health at work: A mental health guide for construction small businesses \(W159\)](#) (IHSA)
- [Mental health guide for small business](#) (Workplace Safety North)

Guides for understanding the concepts

- [Takeaways toolkit](#) (Canadian Mental Health Association)
- [Workplace mental health toolkit](#) (CCOHS)
- [Mental health playbook for business leaders](#) (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)
- [Organizational strategies](#) (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health)
- [Hierarchy of controls](#) (NIOSH)
- [Psychological health and safety policy recommendations](#) (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health)
- [Psychological health and safety questions for health and safety committees](#) (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health)

Pillar 2: Workplace culture

Foster a caring and psychologically safe workplace

Caring workplaces value employees as whole people—not just for their performance. When workers feel connected to the organization’s goals and values, they are more engaged, productive, and loyal.

Companies that care about their workers’ overall well-being—including their mental health—experience reduced rates of turnover and absenteeism. Organizations can use a few strategies to support the mental wellness of workers:

- Workload accommodations
- Leaves of absence for mental health recovery
- Flexible schedules to support work-life balance

But care is about more than support—it also means addressing harmful behaviours like bullying, harassment, and violence. Creating a psychologically safe culture requires organizations to recognize what they can control and act on it.

Leaders should take the following steps to build this kind of culture:

- Assess the state of worker well-being and define future goals
- Review and strengthen initiatives that support employee well-being

In unionized environments, management and unions must collaborate. To ensure that worker well-being solutions are fair and sustainable, involve union representatives in decisions related to accommodations, return-to-work plans, and conflict resolution.

Pillar #2 Workplace culture resources for employers

Quick tips

- [Create a mental health friendly work environment](#) (Check Your Health)

Guides

- [Putting organizational culture on the agenda](#) (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health)
- [Mental health works guide](#) (American Psychiatric Association)

Workplace mental health stigma reduction campaigns

- [Not Myself Today by the Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [Movember](#)
- [Bell Let’s Talk](#)

Pillar 3: Worker well-being and support

Promote well-being at work

Creating a psychologically safe workplace goes hand-in-hand with maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. Workplaces that treat mental health as a low priority may see workers struggle to maintain their well-being over time.

1. Remember that promoting wellness is important—but it is not everything

Workplace wellness activities like seminars and newsletters are helpful, but they should not be the foundation of your mental health strategy. Promoting well-being is just one piece of a larger puzzle.

True impact comes from addressing the root causes of stress and involving workers in solutions. Move beyond awareness campaigns by implementing collaborative strategies that are developed with employee input.

2. Take a holistic approach to mental health promotion

Leadership must ask themselves what the organization does to support employees who face mental health

challenges. Are there formal policies, such as accommodations or return-to-work plans? Do you partner with external service providers to expand support options?

Many workplaces offer mental health and addiction support through community resources or Employee and Family Assistance Programs (EFAPs). While these services are important, the most successful organizations also develop internal policies and programs to address mental health proactively. Small businesses can adopt simple, effective strategies to support employees when mental health needs come up.

Pillar #3 Well-being resources for employers

- [Resources for employees webpage](#) (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health)

Return-to-work processes and accommodations for mental health

- [Workplace mental health: Return-to-work checklist](#) (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)
- [Return to work response for leaders](#) (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health)

Resources for understanding the concepts

- [Organizational strategies](#) (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health)
- [Total Worker Health[®]](#) (NIOSH)
- [Five essentials for workplace mental health and well-being](#) (Office of the U.S. Surgeon General)