

IHSA's My well-being at work toolkit



Well-being in the workplace

We spend a third of our lives at work, and our jobs have a major impact on our mental well-being. Organizations that prioritize mental wellness experience greater employee productivity, engagement, and retention.

Some ways that our work can positively impact our mental health include:

- **Sense of purpose and accomplishment:** Meaningful work provides a sense of purpose and satisfaction.
- **Social connections:** Workplaces can foster supportive relationships among colleagues, which can boost social connections and inclusion.
- **Financial security:** Stable employment can reduce financial strain and stress.
- **Skill development:** Opportunities to learn and grow in your role can boost your self-esteem and confidence.
- **Work-life balance:** Flexible schedules, mental health benefits, or wellness programs can positively affect your well-being.

Some ways that our work can negatively impact our mental health include:

- **Job-related stress:** Tight deadlines, excessive workloads, or job insecurity can cause chronic stress, anxiety, or burnout.
- **Toxic work environment:** Bullying, discrimination, or harassment can harm your mental health and make you feel unsafe or undervalued.
- **Lack of support:** The absence of resources, guidance, or accommodations for personal challenges can exacerbate stress or mental health conditions.
- **Unrealistic expectations:** High demands without sufficient resources or recognition can diminish job satisfaction and impact self-worth.

- **Work-life imbalance:** Long hours or rigid schedules may leave little time for personal relationships or self-care.
- **Physical hazards:** In industries like construction, physically demanding or dangerous work can lead to anxiety about safety and long-term health risks.

Well-being at work is a joint responsibility

Employees must maintain their personal well-being, while workplaces must collaborate to eliminate or control physical and psychological hazards in the workplace. The above are examples of psychosocial hazards. When they are met, they help to improve or sustain workers' well-being; however, when unmet, they can (and often do) erode a worker's well-being and mental health.

Many employers within Canada are now taking steps to control psychosocial hazards, which is called creating a "psychologically healthy and safe workplace". Canada has standard guidelines, such as the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) [CSA Z1003:18 Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#).

Workplace wellness

Workplace wellness encompasses the policies and activities that workplaces can adopt to promote healthy behaviours and improve employee health. It can also be called "corporate well-being."

Examples of workplace wellness initiatives include:

- **Health education:** Workshops, fairs, and other educational programs
- **Exercise:** Time for exercise during the workday, corporate discounts for gym memberships, workplace step competitions
- **Nutrition:** Healthy food options, on-site kitchens, weight-management programs
- **Stress management:** Webinars and counselling services
- **Telemedicine:** Virtual healthcare services for remote workers

Some benefits of workplace wellness activities include:

- Reduced healthcare spending
- Greater employee engagement and retention
- Improved employee well-being
- Talent recruitment
- Positive working conditions

Other aspects of workplace wellness include creating a safe workplace, addressing workplace situations that contribute to poor employee well-being, providing comprehensive mental health benefits, and recognizing and addressing physical hazards.

Assess your personal wellness

You can conduct a baseline assessment of your own personal wellness using the eight dimension wellness wheel: emotional, financial, social, spiritual, occupational, physical, intellectual, and environmental.

Use this [activity template](#) from the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) to help assess your overall personal well-being. Think about how your work life affects each area of wellness. How can your workplace support you in achieving greater wellness in those areas that are "within the control or influence" of the employer? You can also use this template to examine other aspects of your overall well-being outside the workplace.

The mental health continuum

According to [Health Canada](#), mental health, like physical health, exists on a continuum. This means that the state of your mental health can become better or worse under different circumstances. It is easier to treat mental health conditions if you identify them early.

The mental health continuum model helps you identify specific health and performance changes—in yourself or others—in six areas:

- Mood
- Attitude and performance
- Sleep
- Physical health
- Social well-being
- Substance use, gambling, or gaming issues

	HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
MOOD	Normal mood fluctuations Calm & takes things in stride	Irritable/Impatient Nervous Sadness/Overwhelmed	Anger Anxiety Pervasively sad/Hopeless	Angry outbursts/Aggression Excessive anxiety/Panic Depressed/Suicidal thoughts
ATTITUDE & PERFORMANCE	Good sense of humour Performing well In control mentally	Displaced sarcasm Procrastination Forgetfulness	Negative attitude Poor performance/Workaholic Poor concentration Poor decision-making	Overt insubordination Can't perform duties, control behaviour or concentrate
SLEEP	Normal sleep patterns Few sleep difficulties	Trouble sleeping Intrusive thoughts Nightmares	Restless disturbed sleep Recurrent images Recurrent nightmares	Can't fall asleep or stay asleep Sleeping too much or too little
PHYSICAL HEALTH	Physically well Good energy level	Muscle tension Headaches Low energy	Increased aches and pains Increased fatigue	Physical illnesses Constant fatigue
SOCIAL WELL-BEING	Physically and socially active	Decreased activity Reduced socializing	Avoidance Withdrawal	Not going out or answering phone
SUBSTANCE USE & GAMING	No or low risk use of alcohol/cannabis/gambling/gaming	Alcohol/cannabis/gambling/gaming increasingly used to relieve tension/cope with stress	Difficulties limiting use of alcohol/cannabis/gambling/gaming	Unable to control use of alcohol/cannabis/gambling/gaming

If you need immediate mental health support or are considering suicide (i.e., you are in the orange or red zone), [call 9-8-8](#) to connect with a trained mental health professional. If you are at immediate risk of harming yourself or someone else, call 911.

Download IHSA's Suicide Prevention Toolkit, a comprehensive guide that can help you recognize declining mental health and intervene or support someone who may be at risk of suicide. If you are thinking about suicide but have no actual plan to do it, you still need to speak with a mental health professional to explore these thoughts. Remember, mental health exists along a spectrum, and you can improve your mental health with the right care.

Healthy workplace conflicts

We all bring our own unique experiences, ideas, and levels of mental well-being to work. By learning to regulate our emotions and being open to different perspectives, we can all engage with our colleagues in a healthy, productive way, even when we disagree.

Fitness for work

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety says that fitness for duty is about your physical, mental, and emotional readiness to perform your job safely and effectively. If you're fit for work, you are free from impairment caused by substance use, fatigue, medical conditions, or psychological distress.

Your workplace might formally assess your fitness for work if there is reason to believe you are impaired at work. Your workplace might call these assessments functional abilities evaluations or functional capacity evaluations.

Review the following resources to learn more about fitness for work:

à CCOHS's [Health Promotion](#) and [Return to Work](#) landing pages.

Impairment

Impairment refers to any condition that impacts your performance or creates a safety risk at work. (See the Canadian Standards Association's standard, [CSA Z1008:21: Management of impairment in the workplace](#), to learn more.)

Some potential causes of impairment in trade workplaces include:

- Physical and mental fatigue (e.g., burnout)
- Disruption to the body's circadian rhythm caused by shift work
- Stress or trauma from a workplace or personal event
- Medical conditions (e.g., illness, treatment, or medication use)
- Temporary disability
- Injury
- Exposure to extreme temperatures
- Exposure to toxic substances, gases, or fumes
- Recreational substance use, including both legal and illegal substances

Read IHSA's [Impairment at the workplace](#) safety talk to learn more.

Employer responsibilities

Your employer is responsible for keeping you safe at work. This includes protecting you from any workplace factors that could affect your mental health. Workplaces can play a crucial role in supporting workers' mental health and well-being through various policies, programs, and services. Stressful work environments—or ones that offer fewer social or financial benefits—can put employees at greater risk for mental health problems. No workplace is immune to these risks.

Your employer should be aware of common mental health conditions and how the work environment can impact workers' mental well-being. If not, they can use assessment tools to learn more from all workers about what is happening within the workplace. This should be done as part of a healthy and robust Occupational Health and Safety Management System.

Comprehensive Workplace (Occupational) Health and Safety Programs

According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), psychologically safe workplaces are those that promote employees' mental well-being and actively work to prevent harm to workers' psychological health.

One way employers can create psychologically healthy and safe workplaces is by implementing a Comprehensive Workplace Health and Safety Program (CWHSP), often called an occupational health and safety management system. In this CWHSP, employers must:

- Encourage stakeholder participation in all stages of design, development, and implementation of the CWHSP.

- Provide training for all levels of the organization to meet the identified needs of workers, supervisors and senior leaders.
- Remove barriers to participation in training and other areas of the CWHSP, including involvement of workers in planning and evaluation.
- Actively measure and review the program to ensure sustainability and promote continuous improvement.

The duty to inquire

Employers have a legal **duty to inquire** and offer support if they suspect a worker is impaired on the job. Signs of impairment might include sudden changes in behaviour such as frequent absences, mood swings, or poor performance.

If your employer asks you if you need support, you can choose how much or how little to disclose. You can ask for accommodation or support without disclosing exactly why you are impaired or in need of support.

Your employer must also respond if a worker's impairment has created a risk to their safety or the safety of others. For example, employers must determine if a worker can safely perform a job or task (e.g., driving, operating machinery, using sharp tools). This evaluation should consider whether impairment is a side effect of a medical condition, treatment, or substance use. In such cases, the employer may request a formal fit-for-work assessment.

- Review IHSA's [Fit for work policies and impairment disclosure](#) safety talk to learn more.
- Visit the CMHA's [Depression, anxiety, alcohol, and other drugs webpage](#) to learn more about the relationship between substance use and mood disorders.

Do you need help?

If you have attempted to seriously hurt yourself or end your life within the last few hours, or intend to harm yourself, please call 9-1-1 immediately or go to your nearest emergency department. If you are at work, contact a supervisor or a co-worker who you trust to support you and drive you to the hospital if needed.

9-8-8 suicide and mental health crisis responders are available to support you at all times.

- Call 9-8-8
- Text 9-8-8

Want to learn more about the Suicide Crisis Helpline before you call? Check out their [website](#).

Do you need access to culturally appropriate crisis support?

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) offers [specialized resources and crisis lines](#) and supports for various identified groups and multiple language groups.

Are you struggling with thoughts of suicide?

[Hope by CAMH](#) is a free smartphone app with suicide prevention information, tools, and crisis resources to support and guide individuals when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide. One of the key features of this app is the ability for individuals to create a personalized suicide safety plan, which can be done in consultation with their healthcare professional, loved one, or someone they trust. The Hope by CAMH safety plan is accessible at any time—especially if someone is thinking about suicide.

It is now available for download on Android and [iOS](#).

Are you struggling with your general mental health?

If you have been struggling with your mental health, start by reviewing these webpages from Workplace Strategies for Mental Health:

- [Assessing your current situation](#)

- [Self-assessment health tools](#)

Are you thinking about going to therapy?

- Review your employer or union benefits for cost assistance or find free local services.
- Check out [Therapy for Men](#), a Movember project that challenges myths, shares videos of men discussing their therapy experiences, and offers resources for accessing therapy.

Do you need help finding support?

Finding support can be tough. Reach out to your employer (e.g., Human Resources, your supervisor, or your occupational health and safety representative) and union (if applicable) to learn about available support, including Employee and Family Assistance programs and health care benefits.

Before taking time off, remember to ask about the return-to-work process and accommodations, such as staying at work or gradually returning.

If you need additional support, check out the organizations below that can help you navigate services across Ontario.

ConnexOntario

[ConnexOntario](#) provides information for people who are experiencing mental health issues or issues with drugs, alcohol, or gambling:

- 1-866-531-2600
- [Live web chat](#)
- [Email](#)

211 Ontario

[211 Ontario](#) provides information and referrals for community, government, social, and health services across Ontario, including mental health resources. This resource focuses on the Greater Toronto Area:

- 2-1-1 (toll-free: 1-877-330-3213)
- [Live web chat](#)
- [Email](#)
-

Ontario Government

[Ontario.ca](#) provides an extensive list of community-based services to support you and those who you may be helping find support. Bookmark this valuable webpage:

- [Get help. Talk to someone.](#)
- [Children and youth](#)
- [Indigenous communities](#)
- [Resources at work](#)

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) provides a list of resources available for areas in and around Toronto, including several multilingual offerings:

- [Distress lines](#)
- [Mobile crisis response](#)
- [Community crisis supports](#)
- [Specialized resources](#)
- [Additional resources](#)

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

[Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#) offers various community resources for a wide range of mental health concerns.

Peer support networks

- [The Peer Support program from Hard Hats](#) is a construction industry peer support program.
- [Hammer Time, a substance use peer support group](#), is a construction industry peer support program that meets virtually once a week.
- [Buddy Up](#) offers multiple peer support programs for men by men.

Are you interested in in-patient treatment?

In-patient treatment involves staying at a facility for a period of time to receive medical or mental health care. This approach offers a structured and supervised environment with 24/7 support and monitoring. There are many other public and private treatment options available. ConnexOntario can help you find a treatment option that is right for you. Check out the following treatment centres:

- [De Novo Treatment Centre](#) is an addiction treatment centre for Ontario unionized construction workers supported by Ontario's Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council.
- [Homewood Health Centre](#) is an in-patient treatment facility that can often be accessed with employer benefits.

Do you need help finding a therapist?

Use the following search tools to find a therapist:

- [Ontario Association of Mental Health Professionals](#)
- [Ontario Society of Registered Psychotherapists](#)

Remember to connect with your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) if you have one.

Are you returning to work after a suicide attempt?

Check out the following resources to prepare for your return to work:

- [Mental Health – Return to Work](#) (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety)
- [Supporting an employee's return to work](#) (Mental Health Works)
- [Supporting people after a suicide attempt or death](#) (Together to Live, a project by the Centre for Suicide Prevention)

Do you want to be an advocate for change at work?

Check out the following resources if you are wondering whether you can talk about your experience with suicide in the workplace:

- Read the [guidelines for sharing experiences with suicide](#) from the Centre for Suicide Prevention.
- Share your [personal story to inspire hope in others](#).