



Mental health at work

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Mental health impacts every workplace across every sector in Ontario. Small business operators play an integral role in preventing mental harm to workers and providing a psychologically safe work environment.

A psychologically safe and healthy workplace is one that promotes employees' psychological well being and actively works to prevent reckless, negligent, or intentional acts that can cause harm to psychological health. To achieve this, employers must create a workplace culture where workers can speak their minds and are encouraged to report harmful conditions, acts, or behaviours.

This is simply an extension of regular health and safety prevention.

All owners and operators should be working towards both physically and psychologically safe workplaces free from physical and mental harm.

Key considerations for workplaces

There are several challenges and mental health risks that are unique to the construction sector, including:

- Nomadic nature of work
- High exposure to physical health and safety hazards
- Physically demanding work
- Social and generational cultural norms
- Psychosocial risks, such as stress and fatigue

Several workplace factors can have negative mental health impacts on workers, including:

- Lack of social support
- Trauma exposure
- Bullying and harassment
- Lack of understanding of the impact of behaviour and bias on mental health
- Lack of trust in others

As a result, workers in the construction industry are experiencing:

- Higher than average substance use disorders
- Higher than average rates of overdose deaths
- Higher rates of suicide
- Low help-seeking behaviours

Improving psychological health and safety helps everyone in an organization live a healthier life and can improve financial outcomes. Investing in mental health can bring about positive returns in the form of higher productivity and decreased absenteeism. For small businesses, these returns can make a big difference in overall business outcomes. Learn more about the business case at [Think Mental Health](#).

This document will provide small businesses with examples of what to include in a workplace psychological health and safety policy or workplace mental health policy. Ideally, this information can help your business develop a system to assess and address risks of mental harm in the workplace, support the mental health recovery of workers, and promote mental well-being.

What can I do?

Workplace mental health policy

A **workplace mental health policy** is an official statement outlining an organization's commitment to improving strategies that support worker mental wellbeing and psychological safety.

Sample:

_____ recognizes the importance of psychological health and safety in the workplace. The organization will promote a positive working environment where management and employees collaborate to achieve the organization's goals while promoting the physical and mental health of all employees. _____ is further committed to promoting mental health and psychological well-being and to actions that prevent harm to worker psychological health through appropriate policies, programs, and services.

"At this early stage [of creating a mental health policy], the goals are to open communication and establish a foundation you can build upon later. This will entail beginning some informed and meaningful conversations with your staff around the topics of mental illness and workplace mental health. These early awareness sessions and discussions will make it clear that it's safe to talk about mental health in your company, promote positive health actions, and begin reducing the stigma associated with psychological disorders" - **Think Mental Health** (Ontario's Health and Safety System Partner)

Workplace mental health plan

After you create a workplace mental health policy, you can work on a **workplace mental health plan**. A workplace mental health plan outlines the strategies and activities that will implement the workplace mental health policy. The plan provides an overall concept and provides specific steps organizations can take to ensure their policy works.

- Check out IHSA's [Mental Health Employer Toolkit](#) before you build your strategy.

Here is a sample of an opening statement and items generally included in a plan:

At _____ we care about the mental health of our workers, we support employees who face mental health problems, we proactively identify issues and work to resolve them. It is our goal to create a respectful workplace where all parties work in collaboration and support of each other.

How to get started

Keep the conversation going:

- Have discussions at work. Use [safety talks](#) for lunch and learns on various topics.
- Challenge stigma. One great way to do this is through contact-based education, which involves learning about mental illness from people with first-hand experience. Contact-based sessions must be employed by people who have lived experience but are in recovery. To learn more about addressing stigma, check out episode 35 of IHSA's [Health and Safety Podcast](#).

Educate:

- Inform people about the impacts of workplace risks that affect mental wellbeing, strategies for reducing these risks, and the role of all workers in maintaining a psychologically safe work environment.
- Inform people of the means and methods available to reduce stress and improve mental health.
- Incorporate mental health learning opportunities into meeting agendas.
- Compile and share helpful resources that are available to everyone, such as articles, videos, podcasts, and webinars.

The following IHSA resources can help support your early discussions and education:

- Facilitator’s guide to delivering mental health safety talks
- Multiple mental health and addictions safety talks
- Various mental health themed episodes of the IHSA Safety Podcast
- Opioid employer toolkit
- Workplace violence and harassment toolkit
- Free on-demand webinars to expand your understanding of key topics
- Mental health worker toolkit

These resources can be found at <https://www.ihsa.ca/Workplace-Mental-Health/>.

Support:

- Always treat mental illness as you would any other illness. Allow time for recovery and offer supports as needed.
- Mental illness is a protected ground under human rights legislation in Ontario. Know your responsibilities and your right to accommodate those experiencing mental illness in the workplace.
- Identify issues proactively and try to resolve them. Use IHSA’s [supporter toolkit](#) to give managers and supervisors the skills they need to support someone who may be struggling on the job.
- Provide clear information on what community-based assistance and support is available to workers and whom they can connect with at work to access any internal resources.
- Create psychologically safe workplaces that support inclusion of all workers. Do this in collaboration with owners, managers, employees, and unions.
- Support staff experiencing stress in their personal and working lives (i.e. bereavement, divorce, illness, layoffs, workplace bullying concerns, etc.)
- Support employees who have been on sick leave and help to facilitate their return to work.
- Promote peer-to-peer discussion and support.
- Support supervisors and managers and coach them on how to recognize and respond to employee mental health concerns.
- If you have an Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) you should include this information in your plan.

Assess, plan, and communicate:

- Assess particular issues or risk factors for mental health (consult with employees and joint health and safety committees/health and safety representatives in this process if possible).
- Consider using [this tool](#) from Workplace Safety and Prevention Services, IHSA’s occupational health and safety system partner, to help you create and implement strategies, programs and policies related to psychological health and safety.
- Identify workplace opportunities for change and/or current strengths on which to build. Consider doing a workplace audit to determine these opportunities.
- Monitor workloads, overtime requirements, and vacation allotments.
- Communicate the mental health policy and plan to management, workers, and joint health and safety committees/health and/or safety representatives.

For more tools, resources, education, and supports from IHSA and our health and safety system partners, visit [IHSA.ca/workplacementalhealth](https://www.ihsa.ca/workplacementalhealth).

