

Mental Health Commission of Canada
Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance
Pre-Budget Consultation – August 5, 2016

Executive Summary

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) is pleased to provide the following brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance outlining the next set of opportunities to invest in mental health system innovation.

The MHCC would welcome the opportunity to increase employment opportunities for Canadians living with mental illness who are underemployed or unemployed. This initiative would implement inclusive hiring practices, integrated disability management programs, and workplace accommodation processes within a range of employment settings across Canada. These changes would support the mental health of all workers and grow employers' options to accommodate the special needs of people living with mental illnesses. This increases retention and decreases absenteeism; improving overall productivity. In turn, healthier and more engaged workers will have a positive impact on our communities as a whole.

Objective: In order for businesses to prosper and innovate and communities to thrive, Canadians must be mentally healthy. As the Mental Health Commission of Canada begins its new mandate, it proposes to initiate a project to boost the Canadian economy by assisting employers to increase the participation of employees with mental illness in the workforce. These measures will also improve Canadian employers' capacity to address and support mental health in the workplace.

Renewal of the Mental Health Commission of Canada

The MHCC's current agreement expires on March 31, 2017, and it is looking forward to beginning a new mandate at this time. The MHCC will be guided by *Advancing the Mental Health Strategy for Canada: A Framework for Action*, which identifies actions for the MHCC in areas of mental health leadership and funding; prevention and promotion programs; increasing access to high-quality mental health services; and an expansion of mental health data and research.

Increased Economic Growth through Improved Mental Health

Background

Increasing workforce participation and creating psychologically healthy workplaces is an important aspect of growing Canada's economy. The total cost of mental health problems and mental illness to the Canadian economy is conservatively estimated at \$50 billion a year¹. Over the next 30 years, the cost of lost productivity due to presenteeism, absenteeism, and turnover associated with mental illness is estimated to be \$198 billion².

Additionally, persons with mental illness are often unable to find stable and meaningful employment. The employment rate of people aged 15-64 who reported having a mental health disability is almost 40% - half the employment rate of those reporting no disabilities³. Furthermore, only 15 - 20% of people with serious mental illness ever achieve employment⁴.

The solution is clear. Canadians living with serious mental illness can play an important role in addressing the projected shortage of workers and contribute to a strong Canadian economy⁵. Employment is also a key aspect of recovery for people living with mental illness⁶. The MHCC has been a leader in this area; producing the *Aspiring Workforce: Employment and Income for People with Serious Mental Illness* report, which identifies best practices for supporting Canadians living with a mental illness who want to join the workforce.

The MHCC has also championed the development of the *National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* (the *Standard*), together with the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and the Bureau de la normalisation du Quebec (BNQ). The *Standard* is the 'go-to' guide for employers who are making their environment more supportive of workers' mental health. Canadian employers must be equipped with easy-to-use tools to understand the factors that support workplace mental health so they can recruit qualified workers and keep them employed.

Implementation

The MHCC proposes to undertake a five-year research and implementation project that will enable 200 small, medium, and large-sized businesses across Canada to engage and retain the employment of persons living with mental illness in psychologically healthy workplaces.

¹ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada.

² Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada.

³ Statistics Canada. (2014). *Mental health-related disabilities among Canadians aged 15 years and older, 2012*.

⁴ Bond, G. & Drake, R. (2014). *Making the Case for IPS Supported Employment*, Administration & Policy in Mental Health, Vol 41, p 69-73.

⁵ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). *The Aspiring Workforce: Employment and Income for People with Serious Mental Illness*.

⁶ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2015). *Guidelines for Recovery Oriented Practice*.

The project aligns with the MHCC's *Strategic Plan* and its objectives, encouraging actions that advance the *Changing Directions, Changing Lives: the Mental Health Strategy for Canada*, and sharing innovative knowledge. This high-impact initiative will build on momentum for improved mental health and inclusivity across the public and private sectors, bringing these efforts together in a cohesive project.

The objectives of this project are to:

1. Demonstrate the business case for adopting best practices in hiring candidates living with mental illness;
2. Develop resources for employers to recruit individuals living with mental illness who are unemployed;
3. Ensure that employees who are at risk of leaving the workforce due to a mental illness maintain their employment while they recover, by putting in place formal stay-at-work processes in the workplace; and
4. Help employees who are on a leave of absence due to a mental illness return in a more timely and sustained manner by teaching employers how to implement a formal return-to-work process.

These objectives will be accomplished through the following activities:

A) Supported Employment

During this project, employers will receive individualized support to utilize inclusive hiring practices and provide integrated disability management programs. Employers will receive tailored support to assess their workplace, develop customized action plans, and implement practices and programs. In turn, persons living with mental illness will be recruited by employment support workers to connect with employers. The project will build momentum to increase the number of employers across the country who are making their workplaces more diverse and inclusive. This project would work closely with grassroots groups who provide peer support to people living with mental illnesses, as well as experts who are continuing to research best practices.

B) Complementary Workplace Mental Health Measures

To retain the employment of workers living with mental illness, Canadian employers also need to bring in measures to ensure their workplaces are psychologically healthy. The MHCC will assist employers to assess the health of their workplace and look at areas for improvement, using the *Standard*. The MHCC will then provide guidance and resources so that employers can create mental health promotion programs and stay-at-work and return-to-work processes tailored to their needs.

Cost, Timeline, and Scope

The total project cost is \$20 million over five years. This funding will cover the training, tools, and resources offered to employers during this study, in order for organizations of all sizes to be able to participate in the project.

The project consists of three distinct phases and will be overseen by an advisory body made up of researchers, human resource experts, and persons with lived experience of serious mental illness.

Year 1: Assessment and Recruitment. During this phase the MHCC will recruit participating organizations, audit these organizations' current practices, and develop individualized action plans with them. The MHCC will also establish an evaluation framework based on the project's objectives.

Year 2-4: Implementation. This second phase will involve the enactment of inclusive hiring practices, integrated disability management programs, and workplace accommodation processes.

Year 5: Analysis and best practice sharing. The third and final phase of the project will analyze the data collected throughout the project and widely disseminate the findings. These findings will be translated into knowledge exchange activities and tools to guide widespread uptake.

The MHCC will conduct a comprehensive outreach process to recruit organizations to the project. These organizations will be from both public and private entities, across a broad range of sectors (similar to the MHCC's workplace Case Study project, which has recruited variably-sized organizations from the health, education, resource, and telecommunications sectors). Organizations will be spread across all 13 provinces and territories, in urban and rural areas. Indigenous peoples and organizations will be invited to partner with the MHCC on the project and lead efforts that would be beneficial to their communities.

Outcomes

This project will have significant benefits for Canadians living with mental illness, employees, and communities as a whole. For example, if the MHCC collaborated with 50 small, 50 medium, and 100 large-sized organizations during this project, the overall outreach – through supported employment and workplace mental health measures – would impact more than two million Canadians.

Thousands of Canadians living with mental illness will have greater opportunity for employment - it has been shown that people with serious mental illness who receive individualized supports to find employment are three times more likely to be in competitive employment⁷. By leveraging a supported employment model, the MHCC will work to build on previous programs which have raised employment rates for persons with serious mental illness to 60%⁸. The project will increase employers' knowledge and uptake of supported employment practices, improving their ability to recruit critical talent.

⁷ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). *The Aspiring Workforce: Employment and Income for People with Serious Mental Illness*.

⁸ Bond, G. & Drake, R. (2014). *Making the Case for IPS Supported Employment*, Administration & Policy in Mental Health, Vol 41, p 69-73.

The uptake of these good practices will help turn the productivity cost curve due to mental illness for employers. Currently mental illness is rated by Canadian employers as one of the top three drivers in 80% of short- and long-term disability claims⁹. In Australia, an analysis has shown that for every dollar spent on workplace mental health initiatives, there is an average return of \$2.30 in gains.¹⁰ As employees are more likely to remain employed and find success in an environment supportive of their mental health, employers and governments also find fiscal benefits.

Finally, communities will benefit from mentally healthier workplaces. There is evidence that the “social and psychological dynamics of the workplace are determinants of population mental health: the net societal impact of workplace mental injury can be estimated as an etiologic fraction of total costs due to mental disability arising in the workplace (25%-33%) and as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (1%-3%)”¹¹. These measures give organizations a competitive advantage, benefit the Canadian economy, and most importantly, enable citizens to be healthier and more engaged.

Conclusion

Continued investment in mental health will reap strong returns for Canadians. It will help businesses to prosper and innovate and communities to thrive. We need our greatest asset – people – to be mentally healthy so Canada can be a global economic leader.

The MHCC has significant experience as a leader in innovative national research demonstration projects, such as *At-Home/Chez Soi* and the Case Study Research project. The MHCC has a strong record of developing world-class tools to support the uptake of policies and programs.

The MHCC would welcome the opportunity to appear before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance to speak further about this submission and the opportunity it presents for Canada.

⁹ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada.

¹⁰ Beyondblue. (2014). Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace: Return on Investment Analysis. Australian Government.

¹¹ Shain, M. (2016). The careful workplace: Seeking psychological safety at work in the era of Canada’s national standard.