

City of Hamilton  
Human Resources



Hamilton

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# Creating Workplaces that Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing

Strategy and Guide for the  
City of Hamilton  
2016-2018

May 2016

## Workplace Mental Health: Why it Matters

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Mental illness affects all Canadians at some point in their lifetime, either directly or indirectly, or through a family member, friend or colleague. In any given year, it is estimated that one in five people in Canada experiences a mental health problem. The total becomes about one in three if those suffering from addictions are included. The World Health Organization predicts that by 2020, the second most common disability after heart disease will be depression. Due to its prevalence, mental illness is one of the most pervasive and difficult workplace issues faced by employers today.

Mental health is fundamental to overall health. Good mental health allows an individual to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and make a contribution to the workplace and community.

A workplace that supports mental health and wellbeing is respectful and supportive of its employees.

Workplace promotion, prevention and anti-stigma initiatives, training for management, and employee assistance programs all have a role to play in maintaining mental health and wellbeing. Employers need to encourage work-life balance and make sure employees are engaged in their work. Implementing policies and practices to deal with bullying and harassment related issues will also help to reduce the risks for mental health problems.

*“Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community.”*  
WHO

Good mental health makes us more resilient to everyday stresses and hardships and can help to reduce the risk of developing mental health problems and illnesses. When someone develops a mental health problem or illness, they can still achieve good mental health and recovery with the right supports. The goal is to promote mental health and prevent mental illness.

Positive mental health improves the quality of lives and is integral to overall health and well-being. There is growing recognition that improving the state of mental well-being for the whole population brings social and economic benefits to society. Since most people of working age spend a great part of their time at work, the role of the workplace in promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental illness is vital.

Cost of ignoring workplace mental health issues:

- Increased absenteeism (mental health days)
- Poorer physical health
- Greater use of Canada’s health care system
- Higher intent to turnover
- Higher benefits costs
- Greater use of prescription drugs
- Lower levels of commitment and job satisfaction
- Recruitment and retention problems
- Declines in creativity and innovation
- Reputation of the firm

Workplace issues that affect mental health include:

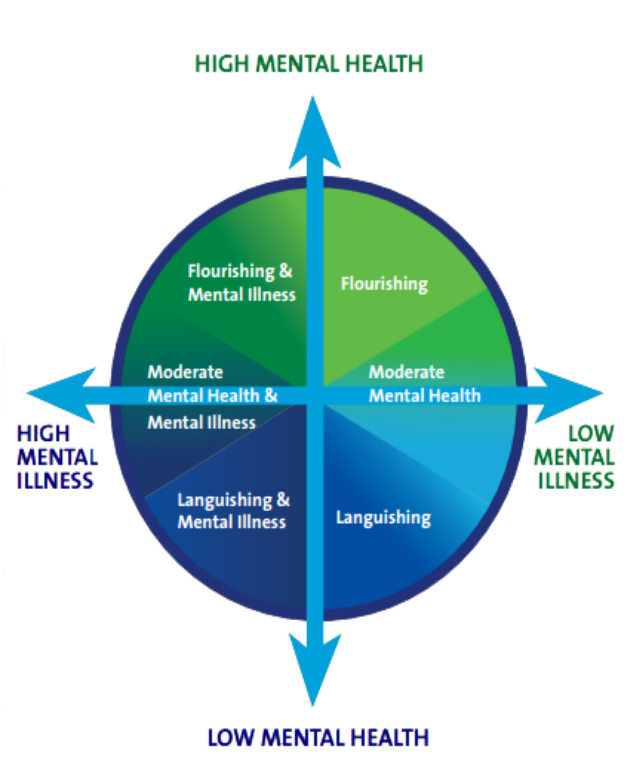
- Stigma and discrimination
- Demand/control and effort/reward relationships
- Presenteeism
- Job burnout
- Harassment, violence, bullying and mobbing
- Substance use, misuse and abuse at work

***Mental health...is about fostering the development of positive mental health by supporting individual resilience, creating supportive environments and addressing the influence of the broader determinants of mental health within the workplace.*** Adapted by Carleton University from, *Improving the Health of Canadians: Exploring Positive Mental Health, Summary Report - CIHI, 2009*

At work, mental health issues can significantly decrease a worker's productivity, and increase absenteeism. As a result, such impacts must be addressed with a view to lowering such factors that may contribute to these mental health issues.

Mental illness often is particularly challenging to recognize and accommodate in the workplace given that it can be either or both hidden and episodic. Stigmatization associated with mental illness may prevent employees from seeking medical treatment and, in the workplace, the fear of being ostracized may deter employees from seeking accommodation.

### Mental Health Continuum (developed by Dr. Corey Keyes)



Keyes model identifies mental health and mental illness as separate but correlated axes—one representing the presence or absence of mental health; the other, the presence or absence of mental illness.

The absence of mental illness does not imply the presence of mental health, or vice versa. The complete mental health model combines mental health (flourishing, languishing, moderate mental health) with the presence or absence of mental illness to classify individuals into one of six states.

Complete mental health means both flourishing and being free of mental illness. States other than complete mental health have been associated with limitations in activities of daily living, missed days of work, physical conditions, and greater use of acute health care services and prescription medication.

..... (H. Gilmour - Health Analysis Division at Statistics Canada)

## Guiding Principles

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- The strategy and programs are based on evidence-based best practices
- Employee mental health and wellbeing is a key consideration in decision making
- Everyone in the workplace has a role to play in creating and maintaining a workplace that promotes mental health and wellbeing
- Each employee has responsibility for their own health and behaviour
- Creating a workplace that supports mental health and wellbeing is only possible if aligned with our Culture Pillars
- Sensitive employee information will remain confidential

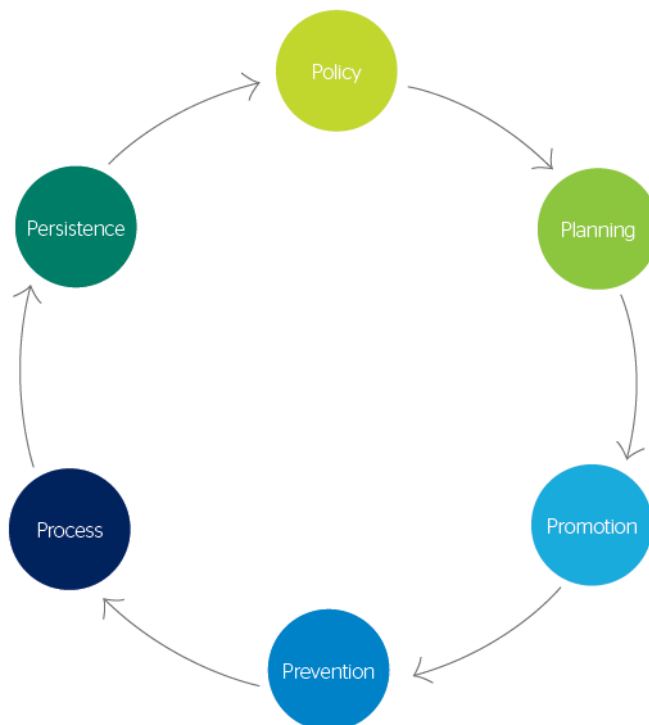
At the core of our strategy is a desire to help our employees achieve optimal mental health and wellbeing.

## Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Framework for Change

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To assist in our efforts to create a workplace that promotes mental health and wellbeing, we are adopting the framework from the *Psychological Health and Safety: An Action Guide for Employers (2012)*. This guide, created by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, identifies 24 actions an employer can take to enhance and protect employee psychological health and safety. The actions are evidence-based, practical and flexible.

### P6 Framework



<p><b>Policy</b></p> <p>Commitment by organizational leadership to enhance psychological health and safety through workplace interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Obtain endorsement from our senior management team.</li><li>• Establish an advisory committee to guide strategy development, implementation and evaluation</li><li>• Develop and communicate the policy to all employees</li></ul>
<p><b>Planning</b></p> <p>Determination of key psychological health indicators across the organization, selection of actions, and specification of objectives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather the facts by looking at all sources of employee data</li><li>• Survey our employees to get their feedback and ideas</li><li>• Measure readiness to change for all workplace parties</li></ul>
<p><b>Promotion</b></p> <p>Actions taken to promote the general psychological health of the workforce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build employee resilience through workshops and self-help resources</li><li>• Create respectful workplaces</li><li>• Enhance mental health knowledge</li></ul>
<p><b>Prevention</b></p> <p>Actions taken to prevent the occurrence of significant psychological problems or mental disorders – may occur at the primary, secondary or tertiary level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a mental health and wellbeing lens for job design and employee selection</li><li>• Provide stress management training to all employees</li><li>• Support work-home balance through policies and procedures</li><li>• Provide manager training on workplace mental health</li><li>• Provide early intervention through employee and family assistance program</li><li>• Support staying at work strategies to keep employees with mental health issues actively at work</li><li>• Ensure access to psychological treatment when appropriate</li><li>• Provide coordinated disability management to support employees off work and in their return to work</li></ul>
<p><b>Process</b></p> <p>Evaluation of implementation and results of actions taken to enhance psychological health and safety.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan an evaluation of the effectiveness of our interventions</li><li>• Measure the implementation process to ensure programs are reaching employees</li><li>• Measure short - and longer - term outcomes</li></ul>
<p><b>Persistence</b></p> <p>Sustainment of effective actions in a process of continuous improvement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support champions and communities of practice</li><li>• Create a culture of psychological safety</li><li>• Conduct quality improvement cycles</li></ul>

## Goals/Priorities

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1. Raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing and reduce stigma associated with mental illness
2. Align strategy with workplace culture development
3. Provide people leaders with the skills, knowledge, tools and supports they need to create a workplace that supports positive mental health and wellbeing.
4. Provide employees with the skills, knowledge, tools and supports they need to improve personal resilience and achieve optimal mental health and wellbeing.
5. Create a sustainability plan

## Programs and Supports Already in Place

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The Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy is built on important resources, supports, programs and initiatives already in place. There are a number of such examples currently at the City:

- Our Employee and Family Assistance Program
- Mental Health@Work Certificate Training for Leaders
- Flexible work arrangements including telecommuting
- Respectful workplace training
- Critical Incident Peer Support team
- Bullying and harassment prevention policies
- Chronic pain support program
- Resiliency workshops
- Departmental Wellness Committees
- Sprout physical activity and mental health tracker

## Year One Actions

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The first year will focus on the Policy, Planning, Promotion and Prevention elements of the P6 Framework: The City will:

- Consolidate and analyze the 2014-15 employee data from our benefits provider, Employee and Family Assistance Program provider, long-term disability cases along with ongoing analysis of our short-term disability and workers compensation claims experience to inform and monitor our Strategy that will support plan for future years:
- Establish an advisory committee on Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing composed of stakeholders from across the organization including departmental and union leadership and Human Resources
- Establish a communication strategy to reach all employees
- Promote our Employee and Family Assistance Program and mental health supports
- Provide education for our people leaders on creating a psychologically safe and healthy workplace

- Provide targeted workshops for our employees based on needs identified through Return to Work Services and our EFAP provider
- Assess our efforts at protecting our first-responders from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and supporting employees in accessing treatment and make improvements as required
- Provide educational resources for all employees that promote good mental health and remove the stigma of mental illness
- Monitor the outcomes of our programs provided to our employees
- Get a measure of the prevalence of employees who are dealing with mental health issues and to monitor their perception of the City's support in creating a psychologically healthy and safe workplace; ask employees a series of evidence-based questions as part of the City's organizational culture survey.

### Future Actions (2017-2018)

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In subsequent years, we will add focus on Process and Persistence while continuing to provide prevention activities already in place.

1. Evaluation
2. Implement continuous improvement
3. Support for champions
4. Benchmark with other organizations
5. Celebrate successes