



# INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Audit, Finance and Administration Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	November 5, 2020
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2019-2021) (HUR20009) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
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<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Lora Fontana Executive Director Human Resources
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

## COUNCIL DIRECTION:

At its meeting of May 16, 2019, the Audit, Finance and Administration Committee approved Report HUR19010 which included the following directions:

- (a) That staff be directed to execute the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2019-2021), that continues to foster, promote and support overall health and wellbeing, encourage dialogue and remove stigma associated with mental illness; and
- (b) That staff report back to the Audit, Finance and Administration Committee on the progress made on implementing the strategy on a periodic basis.

## INFORMATION:

The City recognizes that mental health and wellbeing is fundamental to overall health, and that the workplace has an important role to play in maintaining and promoting mental health and wellness. Human Resources has established a comprehensive strategy aligned with best practices and national standards.

Human Resources last reported to Committee on May 16, 2019. The following report highlights the activities undertaken to execute our workplace mental health and wellbeing strategy.

To assist in our efforts to create a workplace that promotes mental health and wellbeing, in 2016 we adopted 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 actions an employer can take to enhance and protect employee psychological health and safety. The actions are evidence-based, practical and flexible.

In 2016, Council and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) approved a Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2018. The strategy set out specific objectives for the organization and included the establishment of a Workplace Mental Health Action Committee (WMHAC) to advise on implementation of the strategy and make recommendations to improve our policies and programs.

In 2019, the WMHAC provided SLT with recommendations. In response to the recommendations from MHAC, SLT supported taking specific actions that form the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2021 approved by Council:

1. SLT to complete either one of the Leadership Mental Health Training Modules - The Working Mind people leader training or Mental Health@Work certificate program.
  - The majority of SLT has now completed one or both of the Leadership Mental Health Training Modules. Our senior leaders have used the skills and knowledge they've acquired to respond to issues in their departments including development of action plans to address concerns raised by staff in the Our People Survey. Senior leaders have also been visible in identifying mental health issues and communicating resources available to staff during the pandemic response.
2. Mental health and wellbeing considerations will be incorporated into change management training and processes and sufficient resources allocated to mitigate mental health hazards associated with workplace change.
  - The response to the impact the pandemic had on staff and their families is a good example on how mental health and well-being has come to the forefront in our decision-making process. Early on, existing resources were enhanced with new information focused directly at front-line staff and those in leadership roles. As the pandemic continues, we are working to ensure resources are available to reduce anxiety and increase resiliency in all roles.
3. Mental health promotion and stigma reduction campaigns to be held annually in May and October with SLT visible participation.

- Our internal Shifting Minds campaign focusses on how employees think about themselves and others and how employees seek the required support they need. The video-based campaign includes modules that cover:
    - Respect
    - Rethink
    - Reconnect
    - Renew
    - Resources
  - Senior leaders will look for ways they can raise their visibility to coincide with the anti-stigma campaigns.
4. Undertake review of questions and ensure that key indicators are incorporated into the questions within Our People survey in 2020
- The employee survey has been rescheduled to 2021. The content and design of the survey will continue to address indicators of employee mental health and well-being and ensure resources are in place for leaders to respond to survey results for their teams.
5. Human Resources to review the non-union benefit package and consider adding more flexibility in choosing benefits that will improve access to psychological services.
- The non-union benefit package was redesigned in 2019 to offer improved access to psychological support by increasing the annual benefit amount from \$100 to \$1,000, removing the cap on per-session billing amounts and changing eligible services to include Clinical Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Psychotherapist, or Social Worker. These changes results in increased benefit use by staff and eligible dependants. Enhancements were also made to the benefits programs for those unions having more recently negotiated renewals to their collective bargaining agreements, including CUPE 5167 and Hamilton Fire, with similar increases in usage.
6. SLT to set targets to train more employees in The Working Mind or Road to Mental Readiness training programs.
- This program was developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and helps all employees in the workplace better understand mental illness and poor mental health, the stigma surrounding mental illness and its effect on individuals and the workplace. There are two sessions in the program: one for employees without direct reports and one for People Leaders.

- In 2019 and 2020, 165 front-line workers and 50 People Leaders were trained in the program.
  - To date, 228 People Leaders and 658 frontline staff have received the training.
  - The program was designed for classroom delivery and no sessions were scheduled after February 2020 due to restrictions on gathering in response to the pandemic. In the meantime, the Mental Health Commission of Canada developed an online version of the training program, which our trainers attended online, and are now certified to deliver the new web-based sessions.
  - Hamilton Paramedic Services and the Hamilton Fire Department have committed to providing the Road to Mental Health training for first responders to all of their staff.
  - Additionally, the Mental Health@Work Certificate Training for Leaders is provided through Queen's University and Mounreau Shepell and follows the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. The program helps People Leaders better understand mental illness and poor mental health, the stigma surrounding mental health and its effect on individuals and the workplace. Its primary objective is to increase their comfort level in discussing mental illness and give them skills to improve their mental health and support each other. To date, 350 People Leaders across the organization have been certified through the program.
  - The program was offered by a combination of in-class and online modules. The program was adapted in 2020 and can now be offered completely online.
7. Human Resources to examine current recruitment, job design and return-to-work processes and update where applicable to include cognitive demands.
- Interview questions have been reviewed to ensure questions are used to probe managing cognitive demands where applicable. Return to Work Services is undertaking cognitive demands analysis, when required, during the return-to-work and accommodation processes.
8. Promote the Manager Mental Health Toolkit through Howi and other platforms.
- The WMHAC developed a tool kit for People Leaders that identifies available resources to help them deal with situations in the workplace that could contribute to stress and poor performance. The topics include:

- Workplace Stress
  - Relationship Building
  - Communication (difficult conversations, discussing sensitive topics)
  - Managing workload, priorities, poor performance
  - Bullying (co-worker)
  - Interpersonal Conflict (defusing situations)
- The tool kit was given prominence under People Leader Resources in Howi. Any upcoming redesign of the web site will ensure that the tool kit remains a highlighted resource for People Leaders.
9. Human Resources to begin tracking nature of illness and injury, when available for short-term sick absences using current disability management software.
- Short-Term Disability analysis has been piloted and information provided to work groups where the volume of mental health related absences is high. The data indicates that mental health is a leading cause of absences.
  - Mental health continues to be the top diagnostic category representing 36% of all long-term disability claims received by the city in 2018-20. This is in line with the industry comparison group of 35%.
10. Replace the existing Zero Tolerance Program with a new program targeting, preventing and responding to bad behaviour, harassment and violence against staff and users of city services.
- A task force was struck to develop policies that will cover expectations for the public and staff behaviour in our workplaces and procedures to respond to acts of unwanted behaviour, harassment and violence. An updated program will be put in place and communicated in late 2020 or early 2021.
11. Develop and distribute checklists that staff can use to assess their individual and group respectfulness and civility in order to build better working relationships on their teams.
- A tool has been drafted and Human Resources is reviewing the content and the context in which it will be used with staff. There are several venues that the checklist could be used at including corporate training and team exercises, including initiatives put in place in response to Our People Survey team results.
12. Human Resources to identify best practices by benchmarking with other municipalities through established networks like the Single-Tier Municipal Group and Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

- Human Resources has contacted municipalities in Ontario and elsewhere in Canada along with local public organizations to assess how our strategy compares to others. A survey was undertaken early in 2020 that identified that our programming and priorities is in line with other similar employers. There is consistency as we are all following the national standards for workplace mental health.

13. Corporate Communications to include workplace mental health in its development of improved communication channels, to ensure that mental health and wellbeing resources are known and easy to find.

- Corporate Communications and Human Resources have worked closely together to ensure important mental health and well-being messaging reaches its intended audience. An example of the collaboration is the response to employee anxiety during the pandemic by identifying key resources for staff and People Leaders, compiling them in a central, accessible location and providing direction on how to access and use the resources. The strategy allowed the resources to reach both staff that have online connections and those that don't.

- Examples of such resources include:

**Employee Resources**

Managing Stress & Anxiety  
Mental Health  
Resilience  
Work-Life Balance & Parenting  
Working from Home

**Leader Resources**

Transitioning back to work  
Leading a Remote Workforce  
Leading through Crisis & Change  
Maximizing Team Performance  
Recognizing Employees

- Corporate Communications has also aligned its internal and external mental health and well-being messaging to support staff and the public.

14. WMHAC to remain in place, meet quarterly and mental health and wellness champions to be recruited and supported

- The WMHAC met four times in 2019. In 2020, the committee has been unable to meet due to the pandemic. The committee is scheduled to meet virtually before the end of the year. Recruitment is underway for additional champions.

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Responding to the Impact of the Pandemic on Staff**

While responding to the pandemic presented many challenges for delivering our mental health programming, having resources in place, established partnerships with service providers and higher levels of skills among staff through previous training, allowed us to quickly and effectively respond to the needs of our employees and their families.

Human Resources and Corporate Communications collaborated on pulling together resources that would help employees and their families in the short and long term. As demands changed, we anticipated needs and ensured resources and assistance were available to staff. For example, as the new school year was approaching, we identified that many employees would be facing challenges when deciding whether to send their children to school or keep them home. We provided our People Leaders with the tools they needed to support their teams and to deal with requests for flexibility and accommodation.

Our Senior Leaders reinforced the importance of looking after our own mental health and well-being while we assisted our community and consistently provided valuable service.

The concern and support for staff well-being was repeated in email messages, town-hall meetings, virtual team meetings and through individual contact.

A good example of matching the needs of staff to just-in-time supports is the increased usage of LifeSpeak On Demand. This web-based program is an expert-led online streaming video resource dealing with a wide variety of health, family, eldercare, personal growth and development, and work-life balance topics. Employees and their families are able to access the support they need to overcome hurdles and accomplish goals. The resource was highlighted in much of our communication to staff.

In 2019, the top 5 training topics accessed by staff were

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|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Professional Development       | 1,000 |
| 2. Leadership & Management Skills | 441   |
| 3. Preventative Health            | 401   |
| 4. Stress Management & Resilience | 353   |
| 5. Mental Health                  | 260   |

In the first six month of 2020, the top 5 topics accessed by staff were:

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|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Mental Health                  | 1,966 |
| 2. Physical Conditions & Diseases | 1,105 |
| 3. Professional Development       | 724   |
| 4. Leadership & Management Skills | 688   |
| 5. Parenting and Caregiving       | 508   |

Employees accessed the online support program to help improve their mental health and to take care of their physical health. As well, we experienced an overall increase in usage of 200% and an 800% increase in accessing Mental Health modules.

Human Resources continues to monitor the state of mental health and wellbeing of the organization with a view to adjusting services and supports in response to the changing needs of employees and their families. These adjustments are particularly crucial as we cope with the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

#### **APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Not Applicable