



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Audit, Finance and Administration Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	November 4, 2021
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2019-2021) (HUR21013) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

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 November 5, 2020. The following report highlights the activities undertaken to execute our workplace mental health and wellbeing strategy.

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.

The goals of the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy remain to:

1. Raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing and reduce stigma associated with mental illness
2. Align the strategy with our People and Performance Plan
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

The strategy is based on the framework from the *Psychological Health and Safety: An Action Guide for Employers (2012)*. This Mental Health Commission of Canada guide, created by the Commission, identifies actions an employer can take to enhance and protect employee psychological health and safety. The actions are evidence-based, practical and flexible.

Due to the demands on all staff caused by the City's collective response to the pandemic, the WMHA Committee was only able to meet once this year. As well, the City's Workplace Wellness Specialist, who would normally oversee the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the work of the WMHAC, was reassigned to COVID-19-related occupational health duties.

In 2019, the WMHAC provided SLT with recommendations. In response to the recommendations from WMHAC, SLT supported taking specific actions that form the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2021 approved by Council. Work has continued to address those recommendations over the last two years.

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.
 - All members of SLT have completed one or both of the Leadership Mental Health Training Modules. New members of SLT will be registered in the program as required.
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.
 - Employee mental health and well being is a key consideration in the Hamilton@Work COVID-19 RECOVERY: Future Work Models & Return to the Workplace Strategy. The strategy recognizes that all employees need support as the City transitions to a return to the workplace and new work models. Leaders must consider the health, safety and psychological well-being of staff both working on or off-site.
3. Mental health promotion and stigma reduction campaigns to be held annually in May and October with SLT visible participation.
 - The City Manager provided messages in support of employee mental health not only during Canadian Mental Health Week but also throughout the year. Key messaging was on the importance of all employees monitoring their mental health and wellbeing and accessing the resources and services when needed.
 - Senior Leadership team also ensured that messages to their department emphasized employee mental health and well-being. It was often a topic at departmental meetings and events.
 - The theme of Mental Health Week was understanding our emotions. Staff was provided an overview of the topic and access to a number of related resources to help improve their mental health and better understand their emotions. Those resources included:
 - LifeSpeak featured modules on resilience and mindfulness
 - Our internal Shifting Minds video-based campaign focusing on how employees think about themselves and others and how employees seek the required support they need.
 - Respect
 - Rethink
 - Reconnect
 - Renew
 - Resources

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- ResilientME online program from the Public Sector Health & Safety Association
 - Webinars and talks from the Canadian Mental Health Association – Hamilton
4. Undertake review of questions and ensure that key indicators are incorporated into the questions within Our People survey (OPS) in 2020
- The OPS was rescheduled to 2021. The content and design of the survey addressed indicators of employee mental health and well-being and ensure resources are in place for leaders to respond to survey results for their teams. The results of the 2021 OPS will be available in Q1 of 2022.
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, CUPE 5167 and Hamilton Fire benefit packages were 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. Use of this benefit by staff and eligible dependants has increased yearly.
 - The redesign of the non-union benefits plan is currently being reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team, and is expected to be launched in January, 2023.
6. SLT to set targets to train more employees in The Working Mind or Road to Mental Readiness training programs.
- The Working Mind program switched to online delivery due restrictions on gathering in response to the pandemic. Due to limited availability of instructors and resources to organize sessions, only on frontline worker program has been delivered so far in 2021.
 - Hamilton Paramedic Services and the Hamilton Fire Department provide the Road to Mental Readiness training for first responders to all of their staff.
 - Additionally, 48 people leaders completed the Mental Health@Work Certificate Training for Leaders is provided through Queen's University and Mournau Shepell in 2021.

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 tool kit has 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.
 - In 2020, Short-Term Disability claims analysis was been piloted and information provided to work groups where the volume of mental health related absences is high. The data indicated that mental health was the leading cause of absences in 2020.
 - In 2021, it is anticipated that mental health will continue to be the top diagnostic category of all long-term disability claims received by Manulife on behalf the City. The City's rate of incidence is approximately 36% versus the industry comparison groups' incidence rate of 38%.
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 working group is developing 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. A new workplace harassment policy has been drafted and will be finalized in late 2021 or early 2022.
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.
 - The resource will be integrated into the new Zero Tolerance Program (Item 10).

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.

- 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 connect employees to mental health resources. Areas on eNet and Howi are dedicated to these internal and external resources.
- Connecting employees to mental health resources will also be an important part of the plans to return remote workers back to the workplace.

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

- Due to the demands on all staff caused by the collective response to pandemic, the WMHA Committee was only able to meet once this year. As well, the Workplace Wellness Specialist, who would normally oversee of Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the work of the WMHAC, was reassigned to COVID-19-related occupational health duties. A meeting is planned to take place before the end of the year.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Responding to the Impact of the Pandemic on Staff

It is important to recognize the impact the extended period of pandemic restrictions, changes to work and home routines, and isolation has had on the mental health and well-being of our employees. Staff at all levels of the organization have experienced anxiety and stress and continue to need support to respond positively to challenges at work and at home. Frontline staff have been given tools to stay resilient and manage stress. People leaders have been given tools manage change and recognize when team members are struggling. These supports are critical as we move into the next phase of our recovery plan.

Our employee and family assistance provider, Homewood Health, has been a key partner in assisting employees in making connections to resources and services that can help them achieve improved mental health and wellbeing. Homewood Health also assists our people leaders in creating supportive, effective teams and workplaces. Homewood Health is developing new tools to help manage a transition back to work and create effective virtual teams.

As new resources are identified and developed, they will be brought online and made available to staff. Our Workplace Mental Health Advisory Committee will help ensure actions are aligned with our Workplace Mental Health Strategy and our goal to create psychologically healthy and safe workplaces.

LifeSpeak

Employees and their families continue to access 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.

It's interesting to compare the 2021 usage and topics to date (Q3) to usage in 2020 and 2019. It would appear that staff has an overall better state of mental health and well being now than during the early stages of the pandemic. After sharp increases in access to modules related to mental health and stress management in 2020, staff are now more likely to access LifeSpeak for professional development and leadership assistance although many are still looking for assistance with stress management and resilience.

Topics	2019	2020	2021 to Q3
Professional Development	1,000	927	1,263
Leadership & Management Skills	441	777	681
Stress Management & Resilience	353	1,214	603
Mental Health	260	2,805	153
Physical Conditions & Diseases	98	1,357	55
Parenting and Caregiving	7	953	49
Other	629	1,474	346
Total usage	2,788	9,507	3,150

Homewood Health

The utilization rate for the City's Employee and Family Assistance Program is projected to be 14.42% for 2021 which is in line with Homewood Health's other municipal government clients. Most individuals are accessing counselling services. Utilization rates for 2020 and 2019 were 13.63% and 14.65%, respectively.

Top 5 Counselling Services Utilized (number of cases to the end of September 2021):

Counselling Services	2019	2020	2021 to Q3
Psychological	448	415	338
Marital/Relationship	143	116	76
Family	76	57	55
Work	73	58	46
Crisis/Trauma	23	34	30
Other	51	711	24
Total usage	814	711	569

There is a marked increase in Psychological counselling services which reflects the continued state of the psychological health of our employees, and likely also reflects increased usage in response to the recently enhanced benefit available for employees.

Homewood Health also delivered online workshops to department teams. The requested workshops included:

- Assertiveness: Negotiating Respectful Interpersonal Boundaries
- Building Resilience: Understanding Challenges, Learning Strategies, and Accepting Change
- Improving Workplace Communication
- The Art of Relaxation
- The Journey to Wellness: One Step at a Time
- The Science of Happiness

Future Strategy Objectives

WMHAC will meet to discuss recommendations and objectives for a strategy going forward. These will be presented and approved by the Senior Leadership Team in the first quarter of 2022. The Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022 – 2024) will be presented to Council in 2022.