




INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Audit, Finance and Administration Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	May 18, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023 – 2026) (HUR23007) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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COUNCIL DIRECTION

To provide Council with an update on the ongoing work of the Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for City of Hamilton staff since initiated in 2016. The Information report includes also includes the most recent iteration of the strategy, Maintaining Workplaces that Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing, Strategy and Guide for the City of Hamilton 2023-2026.

INFORMATION

In 2016, the Senior Leadership Team and Hamilton City Council approved its first Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy along with a Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The strategy was updated in 2019 to address recommendations put forth by the organization's Workplace Mental Health Advisory Committee.

The Senior Leadership Team has approved a new strategy framework to guide us for the next four years. The strategy is captured in the document, Maintaining Workplaces that Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing, Strategy and Guide for the City of Hamilton 2023-2026, attached as Appendix "A" to report HUR23007.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

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The goals of the strategy will guide our mental health programs:

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

At the core of our strategy is a desire to help our employees achieve optimal mental health and wellbeing and foster psychological safety in our work and workplaces.

The strategy is also guided by these principles:

- The strategy and programs are based on evidence-based best practices
- The strategy aligns with our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility work
- 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 health and behaviour
- Creating a workplace that supports mental health and wellbeing is only possible if aligned with our Culture Pillars
- Sensitive employee health information will remain confidential

Our strategy is aligned with the elements outlined in the *National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace*. The standard is a set of guidelines, tools and resources focused on promoting employees' psychological health and preventing psychological harm due to workplace factors.

To assist in our efforts in creating workplaces that promote mental health and wellbeing, 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 based on 6 key elements.

Policy - Commitment by organizational leadership to enhance psychological health and safety through workplace interventions

Planning - Determination of key psychological health indicators across the organization, selection of actions, and specification of objectives

Promotion - Actions taken to promote the general psychological health of the workforce

Prevention-Actions taken to prevent the occurrence of significant psychological problems or mental disorders

Process-Evaluation of implementation and results of actions taken to enhance psychological health and safety.

Persistence-Sustainment of effective actions in a process of continuous improvement.

Our strategy has moved from the initial stage of creating towards maintaining workplaces that promote mental health and wellbeing by building on the programs, policies and practices that have been established and adding new initiatives and enhancements that address gaps and emerging issues.

Why is it important?

Mental health is fundamental to overall health and wellbeing.

Good mental health allows an individual to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and contribute to their workplace and community (adapted from World Health Organization). Good mental health makes us more resilient to everyday stresses and hardships and can help to reduce the risk of developing or worsening mental health problems and illnesses

Mental illness affects all Canadians.

At some point in our lifetime, either directly or indirectly, or through a family member, friend or colleague mental illness will affect us. In any given year, it is estimated that 1 in 5 people in Canada experiences a mental health problem. The total becomes about 1 in 3 if those suffering from addictions are included.

Cost of ignoring workplace mental health issues is high

A workshop held with our People Leaders and Dr. Linda Duxbury, a leading researcher on employee wellbeing and work-life balance, identified a number of negative impacts on the organization if employee mental health and wellbeing is ignored. The impacts include:

- Increased absenteeism
- Poorer physical health
- Greater use of our health care system
- Greater use of prescription drugs
- Higher benefits costs
- Declines in creativity and innovation
- Lower levels of commitment and job satisfaction

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- Higher intent to turnover
- Loss of talent, expertise and related expenses to training replacements
- Recruitment and retention problems
- Overtaxing internal services and supports (i.e. Return to Work Services, Labour Relations, Health & Safety, Leader workload, associated team workload due to absent team member)
- Poor reputation of the City

What Have We Done?

Since our initial strategy was initiated in 2016, a number of important programs, resources and initiatives have been put in place that provide a strong foundation on which to build a new strategy. Some examples include:

- A new Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy was approved by Senior Leadership Team and Council in 2016.
- A Workplace Mental Health Advisory Committee established 2017 with representation from departments and employee groups across the organization. The committee reviews and provides recommendations on our progress in implementing the strategy.
- New flexible work, work for home and disconnecting from work policies were introduced to support employees with work and non-work demands.
- Annual Anti-stigma Campaigns are directed at staff to help them identify changes in their behaviour that can help reduce stigma on mental illness. For example, Human Resources provided a part video campaign called Shifting Minds.
- Human Resources reviewed our employee health benefits plans and increased employee medical benefits for psychological services in a number of plans.
- Employees are offered access to enhanced depression and trauma services through our Employee & Family Assistance Program in addition to traditional counselling services (n=147).
- Human Resources delivers an in-house workshop-based program on Chronic Pain Self-management for employees seeking assistance with the impact of chronic conditions (n=101).
- Critical Incident Peer Support teams are now in place for Hamilton Fire, Hamilton Paramedic Services along with a corporate Critical Incident Peer Support Team.
- Employees and their families now have access to LifeSpeak, a web-based program with expert-led online streaming videos that deal with a wide variety of health, family, eldercare, personal growth and development, and work-life balance topics (2,275 sessions annually).

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- Our Employee and Family Assistance Program services were enhanced by our provider, Homewood Health (12.38% usage rate). Enhancements included:
 - Online Cognitive Behavior Therapy
 - Family and relationship support
 - Solutions for stress, burnout, financial and other challenges
 - Access to mental health supports including immediate counselling and online booking
 - On-demand health and wellness resources workshops on mental health topics
- People Leaders are provided with access to Mental Health@Work Certificate Training through partnership with LifeWorks and Queen's University (n= 580).
- In-house instructors deliver The Working Mind (Mental Health Commission of Canada) training to People Leaders and employees (n= 800).
- Respectful workplace training (It Starts With You) required for all employees with enhanced sessions for People Leaders
- Our People Survey was completed in 2017 and 2021 and included important questions to gain insight into employee mental health and wellbeing and areas where work groups can improve their efforts at creating and maintaining mentally healthy workplaces and teams.
- Human Resources benchmarks with other municipalities to share best practices, identify success factors and look for opportunities for improvement to our workplace mental health and wellbeing programs.

Moving Forward

It's important to ensure the investments we've made in supporting workplace mental health and wellbeing continue to be impactful and achieve the goals of our strategy. We will be looking to *Future Proof* our investments in mental health by,

- Maintaining what's in place that's working by preserving dedicated funding and resources
- Enhancing, expanding and adding to what we've introduced and established by adopting new best practices
- Evaluating our efforts to maintain a workplace that promotes mental health and wellbeing by measuring against standards and benchmarking with other workplaces

In addition to sustaining our current efforts, the strategy will focus on four key areas over the next four years.

- 1. Embedding the Strategy into Our Culture** - Living this strategy daily is critical in improving the overall health of employees, facilitating healthy and safe returns to work, and ensuring that both physical and psychological health and safety are taken into consideration.
 - Update the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
 - Evaluate hybrid work models that allow working from home and the impact of work-life balance
 - Keep positive mental health and wellbeing at top of employee's mind
 - Enhance supports by incorporating Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) to remove barriers to resources
 - Integrate strategy into a broader Employee Wellness Strategy
- 2. Leadership Support** - Leadership is expected to model and support these activities daily through various modalities: team meetings, education, participation, active acknowledgement of mental health and wellbeing being a priority.
 - Create People Leader training that augments existing programs and can be delivered on-demand
 - Develop supports for mental health-related action plans arising from Our People Survey
- 3. Employee Accountability** - Staff are accountable for taking advantage of supports available to ensure workplace wellness is a key priority for themselves and their coworkers.
 - Raise awareness of supports available to employees with caregiver responsibilities
 - Increase knowledge of de-escalation techniques with staff
 - Update the existing Zero Tolerance Program
- 4. Facilitating Access to Key Resources** - Staff are made aware of resources through ongoing communication and provided with straightforward access to the resources when they need them.
 - Centralize on-line resources
 - Develop guidance documents for stakeholders involved in current employee mental health disability management
 - Research application of Peer Support resources into areas outside of current programs

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” to report HUR23007- Maintaining Workplaces that Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing, Strategy and Guide for the City of Hamilton 2023-2026