

Making the case for psychological health and safety in the workplace

OHS information for work site parties

This resource provides general information about the importance and benefits of addressing psychological health and safety in the workplace. This resource is not intended to be exhaustive or to interpret OHS legislation.

KEY INFORMATION

- Psychologically safe workplaces have a number of health, legal, and financial benefits for all work site parties.
- Employers are required to conduct a hazard assessment of existing and potential workplace hazards, which may include physical and psychosocial hazards.
- Ongoing engagement for workplace mental health benefits everyone.

Case for psychological health and safety

The [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) defines psychological health and safety in the workplace as “the absence of harm and/or the threat of harm to mental well-being that a worker might experience.”

Psychologically healthy and safe workplaces offer many benefits. However, some of these benefits may not be immediately obvious. As a result, people may be reluctant to embrace change if it is needed to create a psychologically healthier and safer workplace.

To make the case for why establishing and maintaining such a workplace can benefit everyone, it can be helpful to look at these benefits from three perspectives: health, legal, and financial.

Health

Links between psychological and physical health have been recognized for decades. As an example, some research suggests people with anxiety or depression are much more likely to develop a long-term medical condition.¹

Furthermore, mental health conditions can reduce a person’s life expectancy by 10 to 20 years.²

Between 2016 and 2020, Alberta Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB) claims for mental health disorders steadily increased; they were the third most common conditions resulting in WCB claims for that time period, and represented almost half of the top 20 claim categories in terms of total claim costs. WCB claims in this category included post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions.

Many jobs require workers to have good concentration and awareness of their surroundings in order to be safe. This concentration and awareness can be affected by poor psychological health. When psychological health and safety is a priority, it can lead to a corresponding reduction in physical injury and incident rates.

Legal

Under Alberta OHS law, employers are required to assess their work sites to identify existing and potential hazards. This may include physical hazards and mental health hazards (known as “psychosocial hazards”), depending on the workplace.

This requirement aligns with the *OHS Act’s* stated purpose, which is to promote and maintain “the highest degree of physical, psychological and social well-being of workers...”

Addressing psychological health and safety can help employers ensure that they comply with OHS laws.

Financial

Employers who provide a psychologically healthy and safe workplace may experience financial benefits due to factors³ such as:

- Increased productivity and worker performance.
- Reduced sick leave, short-term disability, and long-term disability.

¹ Bobo et al., 2022. Association of Depression and Anxiety with the Accumulation of chronic Conditions. [JAMA Network Open 5\(5\):e229817.doi](#)

² Chesney et al., 2014. Risk of all-cause and suicide mortality in mental disorders: a meta-review. [World Psychiatry 13:12 \(153-160\)](#).

³ Psychological health and safety in the workplace – Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation. 2013. [CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013. National Standard of Canada](#)

- Increased worker morale and job satisfaction.
- Decreased turnover, interpersonal conflict, and WCB claims.
- Reduced legal risk (i.e. from human rights complaints or other legal actions).

Having a psychologically healthy and safe workplace can also help attract and retain talented workers.

Given all the benefits of a psychologically healthy and safe workplace, it is important for employers to ask their workers how they are doing and be aware of resources to share with the workers. This ongoing feedback can be used to create a workplace environment that benefits everyone.

About the OHS Prevention Initiative

The [OHS Prevention Initiative](#) is a partnership between the Alberta government, employers, workers, health and safety associations, labour organizations, service providers (consultants, trainers and auditors) and the WCB. Its aim is raise awareness and provide information on preventing workplace injury and illness.

Contributors to this resource

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 Continuing Care Safety Association
 Alberta Municipal Health and Safety Association
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 Energy Safety Canada
 Alberta Motor Transport Association
 Manufacturers' Health and Safety Association

For more information

Assessment and control of psychosocial hazards in the workplace (BP024)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp024

Psychological health and safety in the workplace - barriers(PIS024)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/pis024

National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

mentalhealthcommission.ca/national-standard

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