
RELEASE

Mental health in the workplace: Employees report support from leaders is lacking

Leaders give themselves an “A”, but employees report support from leaders falling short

Today marks the start of Mental Health Week in Canada – which has been marked by the Canadian Mental Health Association for 71 years. As we open the conversation to how we can #GetReal about how to help, new research shows that in the workplace, while leaders gave themselves an “A” for their support of employee mental health, the responses from employees show more work needs to be done.

In a comprehensive study – commissioned by Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, compliments of Canada Life, and conducted by Mental Health Research Canada – employees were asked to rate the extent to which their leaders engaged in strategies to support psychological health and safety. The survey included a series of statements about how well employees feel their leaders manage in a psychologically safe way. The results show employees think leaders can do better.

While almost two thirds (67%) of employees agree that their leader effectively supports their mental health, the report shows there are a few key areas where employees feel their leaders are lacking:

- Only 25% indicate their leader supports and encourages work/life balance
- Only 27% say their leader requires them to take their required breaks and time off
- Only 21% felt appreciated by their leader
- Only 15% say their leader helps them manage their workload demands
- Only 20% indicate their leader always communicates changes that may impact their work

“The message is clear: Many employees are not feeling as psychologically safe as their supervisors or managers think they are,” said Mary Ann Baynton, Director of Collaboration and Strategy, Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. “Leaders don’t have to be mental health experts to create psychologically safe workplaces. It can be as simple as encouraging employees to take their breaks every day or helping to set priorities, so employees are less likely to feel overwhelmed or exhausted.”

It’s important to focus on the solutions instead of the problems, says Baynton. Mental health challenges, including stress and burnout, can distort perceptions and heighten emotional reactions. Efforts should be focused on clarifying expectations and reducing mental pressure at work to help employees be successful. Small actions can have big impacts – simply telling someone they’re appreciated can go a long way.

The research also compared an earlier study in which leaders were asked how they perceived the psychological support they provide to employees. The results clearly showed that leaders rated themselves higher than employees in this area. Some reasons for this can include a lack of authentic communication or interaction with the leader, rather than any specifically harmful practices. It may be that the employees don’t feel support because they don’t experience it personally.

“It wasn’t necessarily surprising that leaders scored themselves higher when it came to protecting psychological safety,” said Michael Cooper, Vice-President, Mental Health Research Canada. “But what we found was that when leaders indicated they weren’t providing a high level of support, employees overwhelming agreed – scoring leaders even lower in those same areas.”

Employees and leaders can find free tools and resources to support improving their mental health and protecting psychological safety at work by visiting [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#).

You can see how employees across Canada rated their leaders’ skills in psychologically safety by reviewing the [2022 employee survey results](#). The 2021 leader survey results are also available to review on that page.

About The Canada Life Assurance Company

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About Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Established in 2007, Workplace Strategies for Mental Health is a leading source of free and practical tools and resources designed to help with the prevention, intervention and management of workplace mental health issues. Around the world, Canada is recognized as a leader in workplace mental health. Many individuals and organizations contributed to this distinction, and it’s been a privilege to play a part in many important initiatives. For more information, visit the website at [WorkplaceStrategiesforMentalHealth.com](#).

About Mental Health Research Canada

Mental Health Research Canada ([MHRC](#)) is a national, charitable organization dedicated to improving the lives of the **1 in 5 Canadians living with mental illness**, as well as their families, caregivers and communities. We advance evidence-based mental health knowledge that is problem-solving and applicable in the real world.

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