

NEW MENTAL HEALTH PLAYBOOK IMPORTANT HOLIDAY WEEKEND READING FOR EMPLOYERS NEEDING REAL HELP WITH MENTAL WELLNESS TOOLS IN THE WORKPLACE

Ottawa Board of Trade and Ontario Chamber Release “[Mental Wellness in the Workplace: A Playbook for Employers](#)” while reminding people to have important conversations about mental health

PLAYBOOK TACKLES ACTION GAP ON MENTAL HEALTH

(Ottawa, October 8, 2021) – With many gathering in small and safe groups this holiday weekend and giving thanks, it is a good time to discuss the important issue of mental health, particularly in the workplace. While the topic of mental health predates the COVID-19 pandemic, it has exacerbated the problem. Many employers have been left struggling to develop strategies to bridge a mental health gap.

Says Sueling Ching, President and CEO of the Ottawa Board of Trade (OBoT), “Many employers are under intense pressure. At OBoT, it has been incredibly important to us to provide tools and resources for mental health, not just for the business, but for them as people. We think this tool enables them to go home this weekend and take comfort there is a mental health playbook just for them to help their employees.”

With support from Sun Life, the Ottawa Board of Trade and Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) have released resources to help them close the gap: [Mental Wellness in the Workplace: A Playbook for Employers](#) and [A Playbook for SMEs](#). These resources provide employers of varying sizes with strategies and supports—from fostering a health-focused culture and effectively communicating with employees, to encouraging staff to access free government resources.

According to the OCC’s 2021 Business Confidence Survey, 89 percent of employers believed spending on employee health and wellbeing was a good investment. Yet, only 53 percent said they had a formal strategy in place¹, a situation the OCC refers to as the mental health action gap.

“While these numbers have improved since the Chamber’s 2016 survey, the action gap remains,” says Ching. “We know that mental health can be a challenging topic for businesses, but employers play a critical role in the employee health equation. We also know that inaction comes with a real cost.”

Prior to COVID-19, poor mental health in the workplace accounted for:

- \$50 billion in direct costs per year, including health care, social services, and income support like short- and long-term disability claims
- \$6.3 billion in indirect costs from lost productivity
- 500,000 Canadians missing work each week due to mental health issues or illnesses

“Many employers are looking for practical steps they can take and resources they can easily leverage to develop psychologically healthy and safe workplaces. We’re pleased to release these tools during Mental Health Awareness Month in partnership with Sun Life to help businesses address this action gap,” added Rocco Rossi, President and CEO of the OCC.

To support employees’ mental health, the [Playbook for Employers](#) encourages businesses to focus on five key areas:

- **Develop a mental health strategy.** This strategy should be linked to an organization’s equity, diversity, and inclusion plans and include performance measures to monitor progress.

- **Build a psychologically healthy and safe workplace culture.** Training and employee engagement can create a positive workplace culture.
- **Communicate widely and regularly.** Continuous, two-way communication between leaders and employees is key to destigmatize mental health and encourage employees to access supports.
- **Ensure adequate resources for employees and their families.** Supports should be varied, visible, and accessible—both in-person and virtually.
- **Prepare for hybrid work (if applicable).** Consider what steps need to be taken in the long run for a hybrid work environment. Hybrid or flexible work environments can benefit employee mental wellness, but it is important to equip leaders and employees with the resources needed to thrive in this new way of working.

“Creating mentally healthy workplaces is critical to Canada’s long-term recovery,” said Jacques Goulet, President, Sun Life Canada. “Businesses have an opportunity to reimagine their roles, including how they support employees’ physical and mental wellness and improve company culture going forward. This [Playbook for Employers](#) serves to empower businesses and build a healthier, more resilient Canada.”

Read the [Mental Wellness in the Workplace: A Playbook for Employers](#).

Read [A Playbook for SMEs](#).

Thanks to our Exclusive Landmark Partner, Sun Life, as well as OCC members and mental health experts, who contributed to the development of this resource.

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ⁱⁱ The 2021 Business Confidence Survey (BCS) was conducted between October 8 and November 3, 2020, with 873 respondents across the province.