

# Minding mental health

A new resource will be available to help you identify and address psychosocial risks in the workplace

MENTAL ILLNESS is often described as “invisible” because you can’t see it the way you can see a physical illness or injury, such as a broken arm. But the impact of mental illness is anything but invisible.

According to the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, mental health disorders are the fastest-rising cause of short- and long-term disability claims in Canada, and are expected to exceed 50% of all claims within five years. Mental illness in the workplace costs the Canadian economy more than \$30 billion per year. Nearly one-third of this amount comes from direct healthcare costs, while the remaining two-thirds come from indirect costs in the forms of absenteeism, lost productivity (presenteeism), wage replacement, benefit and disability payments, and expenses associated with legal, pension and severance requirements.

Given the impact, there is a strong need to systematically identify and address mental health risks in the workplace. Changes in policy and legislation at the provincial and federal levels—as well as recent court rulings in Quebec and Saskatchewan holding employers accountable for the psychological health of workers—have placed increasing responsibility on employers to adequately deal with mental health risks.

According to a 2007 Ipsos Reid survey, employers in Canada are aware of the prevalence and impact of mental illness, but many don’t know how to deal with this problem. How do employers determine what psychosocial risks exist in their workplaces? How do they determine what programs, policies or services will best address those risks? How do they determine which interventions work?

To help answer these questions, a team of academic researchers from the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver is developing a new resource tailored specifically to Canadian employers, called *Guarding Minds @ Work: An Employer Guide for Psychological Health and Safety*. This resource, which will be freely available online in both English and French by 2010, will fill a significant gap for employers and contribute to the collective effort to better serve the mental health needs of Canadians. It will do this by providing:

- evidence-based strategies to identify and assess psychological



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risk factors within the workplace;

- evidence-based criteria for selecting the best programs, policies or services to address these risks; and
- a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of employers’ efforts.

As we work to bring this new resource to you, we are engaging employers, researchers and other workplace health stakeholders in an ongoing discussion to ensure that *Guarding Minds @ Work* meets the needs of Canadian employers. To provide your feedback, please participate in our online survey at [guardingmindsatwork.com](http://guardingmindsatwork.com). 



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