

THE ROUNDTABLE NEWSLETTER

Tools, news and ideas for people on the front line of workplace mental health

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Workplace mental health gets report card

First-ever survey of major BC and Alberta employers shows 40% have begun to engage needs of employees in distress

The Roundtable and the Business Council of British Columbia have released the results of a December, 2006 survey of workplace mental health practices of 33 major BC and Alberta employers. It shows some lights and some shadows.

“Both the Roundtable and the Business Council felt it was time to benchmark what major employers are actually doing to build mentally health workplaces,” says Roundtable Chair Lloyd Craig. “Many employers say they care about this issue. We thought it was time to measure action.”

Forty percent of employers who responded to the survey have taken concrete steps to build mentally healthy workplaces.

‘TRAILBLAZERS’ TAKING FIRST STEPS

- Policies that declare workplace mental health to be an organizational priority;
- Research into employee mental health needs (eg. analysis of disability numbers, employee depression screening, etc.);

- Steps to educate employees about mental illness;
- Training managers and supervisors how to recognize and help employees in distress.

BC Business Council Human Resources VP Doug Alley says ‘trailblazers’ tend to have clear policies (eg. job accommodation for people recovering from mental illness) and strong communication to employees. “Actions like this send a message that the company is serious about improving its performance,” he said.

‘TRAIL FOLLOWERS’ NEED SUPPORT

Many employers who have yet to engage the issue of workplace mental health, said they are interested in doing more but are held back by:

- A lack of practical information on how to move forward (including research on the impact of mental illness on the bottom line);
- Briefing materials for CEOs;
- A lack of assistance from HR organizations;
- Practical, affordable training courses for managers and supervisors.

See inside for detailed findings

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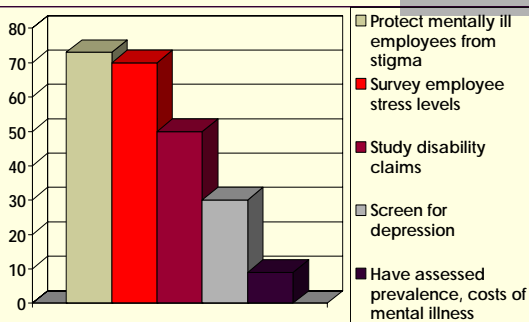
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Benchmarks of trailblazing employers (40% of respondents)

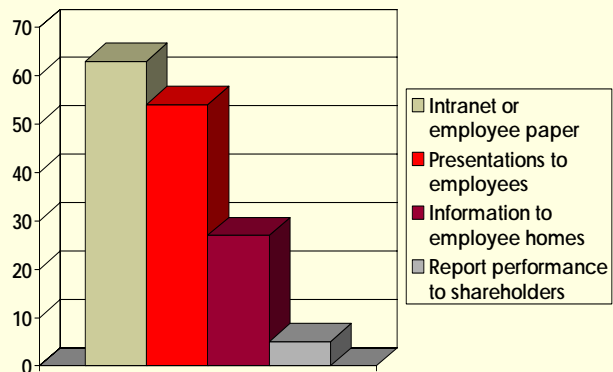
- Usually these employers have made workplace mental health a formal policy.
- Many have supported policy with research (eg. depression screening, analysis of disability claims to quantify the extent of psychiatric disabilities such as depression or addiction); with concrete business targets (eg. reduce disability claims due to mental illness); with employee education about mental illness; and by training supervisors and managers in how to recognize and assist employees in distress.

Trail blazers take actions

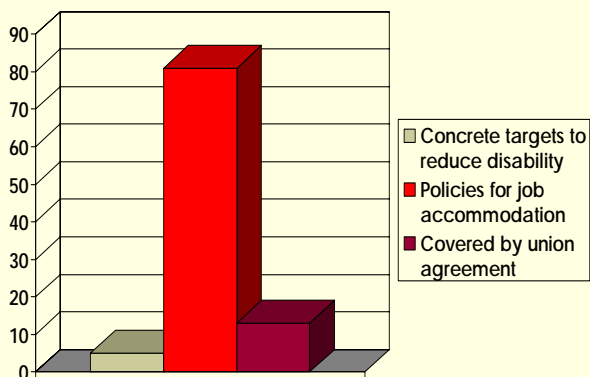


[Do you have anti-stigma policies in place; in past two years have you surveyed employee stress levels, screened for depression or studied disability claims to determine incidence of mental illness; have you carried out a full study of the prevalence and cost of mental illness in your firm?]

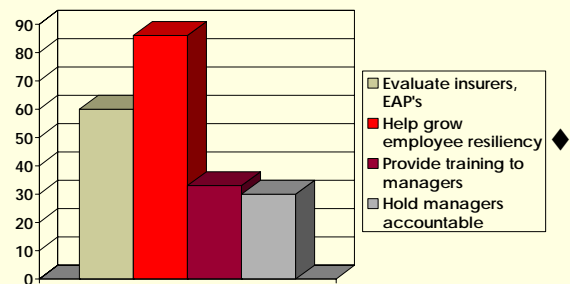
Trail blazers communicate



Trail blazers manage results



Trail blazers train, manage



[In past two years have you evaluated insurers, EAP's in managing mental illness-related disability? Do you provide information to employees to increase their resiliency and ability to manage mild depression and anxiety? Do you hold line managers accountable to implement mental disability management and prevention? Are they provided training?]

◆ “Mental resiliency” training gives people skills for managing stress, low mood and mild depression

What's holding many employers back (60% of respondents)

These respondents say their firms need more leadership; more bottom-line information for the CEO; more access to supervisory training; more expert advice and support for HR staff

Have no declared policy toward workplace mental health

- Give different reasons:
 - “We are focussed on achieving economic goals”
 - “Nobody has suggested it to management”
 - “Unaware of practical information to assist management in engaging this issue”
 - “Perceived privacy or human rights considerations”
- Want and need more information:
 - “We would join a free, confidential online support group of HR professionals engaged in this issue”
 - “We need studies that quantify the effect of untreated mental illness on the bottom line”
 - “We would welcome an informal, free consultation with a non-profit organization committed to workplace mental health”

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN ACT ON THESE FINDINGS

Detailed management guidelines can be found at:

<http://www.mentalhealthroundtable.ca/>

Several studies are available. See www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/workplace.shtml

Are interested in tools to move forward

Tool or Resource	% expressing interest
Courses to assist managers and supervisors to recognize employees in distress and respond appropriately	87%
Briefing materials for the CEO on the cost of untreated employee mental illness and how it impacts the bottom line	61%
A confidential “best practices” audit of your current workplace mental health practices by an objective third party	44%
Do any HR organizations provide this assistance to you now?	65% said “no”

Canadian Mental Health Association offers an excellent supervisors’ training workshop. See www.cmha.bc.ca/services/mentalhealthworks/workshops

See <http://psychservices.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/abstract/52/12/1639>

The Roundtable has created an online peer advice and assistance Forum for HR professionals. It is called “Front Line.” Visit www.bcmentalhealthworks.ca

What does it mean? And what next?

Roundtable Chair Lloyd Craig fields questions



In BC and Alberta at least, this survey is the first measurement of corporate performance on workplace mental health. Is it good news?

“Thirty three BC and Alberta employers is quite a lot of companies — not enough to support an extrapolation to the whole business community, but enough to give us a pretty good idea of the temperature of the water. I have my opinions but I’d like others — for example the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Business Council itself — to be involved in the analysis and give us their perspective.”

Having said that, is the glass half-full or half empty?

“That depends on how far along the path of change you think the business community should be on this issue. I’m very happy that 40 percent of the employers who responded — the people we call Trailblazers — are getting serious about workplace mental health. They’re making it a matter of policy, they’re taking at least first steps toward educating their employees and training their managers and supervisors, they’re examining their disability costs and in some cases researching the number of employees who are in some form of distress. That’s positive. To me that says that a significant number of employers are beginning to ‘get it.’”

What about the 60% who apparently still aren’t getting it?

“The fact that many employers haven’t progressed beyond lip service tells us that we still have a lot of work to do in terms of ‘reaching’ business leaders with information about the impact of mental illness on their bottom line. I won’t kid you: sixty percent is an intimidating number. However, there’s room for optimism in the fact that many of these people say it’s an information problem. They don’t have good information about the cost of mental illness. They don’t have good information about how to move forward. We’ve got that kind of information, we just have to find new ways to get it in front of business leaders.”

Will information alone move people to act? What about executive leadership?

“It’s true that whether a company moves forward on this front often comes down to whether the CEO or senior executive thinks it’s important and necessary. I guess there’s no magic answer on how to do that. I think the act of doing this study, and now publishing the results, is an important step toward getting executive buy-in. I hope every CEO who sees this study will ask whether their organization is a trailblazer, or a follower — or whether it’s not even on the charts.”

Will the Roundtable be taking any steps to work with these employers?

“Absolutely. Many of these companies cite their need for confidential advice on how to move forward. We’ve created ‘Front Line’, an online, confidential discussion forum where HR and other people interested in moving forward can get advice and information from their peers. It’s available on our website now. And that won’t be the end.”

Lloyd Craig is President and CEO of Coast Capital Savings