

# THE MENTAL HEALTH I\$SUE

## TAKING CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AS A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

Congratulations on your election to the 44th Parliament!

Before we talk about how to improve mental health, let's make sure we agree on what we're talking about. Canadians use the terms "mental health" and "mental illness" interchangeably. They mean different things.

**Mental illnesses** involve disturbances in thoughts, feelings and perceptions that are severe enough to affect day-to-day functioning. Some examples are anxiety disorders or major depression. By age 40, about half of people in Canada will have or have had a mental illness.

**Mental health** is a state of well-being. We all have mental health. Some signs of good mental health are enjoying life, having a sense of purpose, and being able to manage life's highs and lows.

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## SUPPORTING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH ON PARLIAMENT HILL

Parliament can be a stressful place, and in your case as an MP, it is also your workplace. Canadians are relying on your leadership to advance mental health care in their communities.

**Being a champion for mental health begins with taking care of yourself.**

Self-care is so much more than taking a day at the spa.

The six pillars of self-care identify six different ways you can care for yourself:



Mental/emotional - identifying how you're feeling in the moment



Physical - regular physical activity or sport



Spiritual - activities that nurture your spirit and give you time to reflect



Social – connecting with friends and loved ones



Intellectual – reading or learning new things



Practical – organizing your office or paying your bills

Think about how balanced or imbalanced your time and efforts are spent on all of these areas. You might excel at physical care but need to work on social self-care. And that's okay! There's always room to learn and improve our ability to care for ourselves. Self-reflection and assessment are necessary parts of that learning process.

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## MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE: WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND WHEN TO SEEK HELP

It's normal to feel some stress, especially at work. Stress related to work can:

- Make you feel overwhelmed
- Make it hard to concentrate and make decisions
- Lead to sweating, racing heart or tense muscles
- Have a big impact on physical health
- Cause headaches and sleep difficulties
- Make you more likely to get sick

Recognizing the signs of stress and taking action are the first steps. Ignoring the effects of stress can lead to other mental health or physical health problems. It is therefore important to know the warning signs, before things get worse.



Check out these tips on managing stress [here](#).



Other challenging emotions and feelings, like anxiety, anger, worry, sadness, among others can be present in the workplace. It is important that we acknowledge them, take time to process them and get help when they become too much.

"It's time to seek help if you are feeling overwhelmed for prolonged periods of time or have persistent feelings of worry, anger or despair," says Anne Gadermann, co-lead researcher on CMHA and UBC's study on COVID mental health impacts and professor at the School of Population and Public Health, UBC.

"Or, if challenging emotions are interrupting your daily functioning, negatively impacting your relationships, your ability to work or enjoy life or causing you to rely on substances to cope. If you are having thoughts or feelings of suicide, you should seek help for your mental health."<sup>i</sup>



## What's your stress index?

Take this quick test to find out how stress is impacting your day-to-day.

*Disclaimer: This is not a scientific test. Information provided is not a substitute for professional advice. If you feel that you may need advice, please consult a qualified health care professional.*

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.med.ubc.ca/news/covid-19-survey-shows-almost-eight-out-of-10-adults-are-worried-bored-stressed-lonely-or-sad/>



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If you or someone you love is struggling, please contact your local CMHA or visit the Government of Canada's Wellness Together portal. If you are thinking of suicide, please call 1-833-456-4566 toll free in Canada (1-866-277-3553 in Quebec) or dial 911.

Check out these resources:

- [How to help someone thinking about suicide](#)
- [Planning a psychologically safe return to the workplace](#)

# THE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE

## HOW TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Sometimes the language we use to talk about mental health can be alienating, stigmatizing and discriminatory. Language related to mental health is continuously evolving. It is therefore important to be conscious of the language we use. We all have a role to play in reducing stigma associated with mental health and mental illness. Using appropriate and empowering language is one way we can all play a part in addressing stigma.



### **Quick tip: use person-first and identity-first language**

- For example: an individual who lives with schizophrenia, or a person with lived experience of mental illness (rather than labeling someone with their mental illness as an adjective, eg. they're schizophrenic)
- For example: died by suicide (rather than saying 'committed suicide'). Saying someone 'committed suicide' implies blame, wrong-doing and shame. Saying 'died by suicide' removes judgment.

Instead of...	Preferred language	Explanation
Suffering with, or victim of mental illness.	Experiencing, or being treated for, or has a diagnosis of, or a history of, mental illness.	Using the word "suffer" may be considered demeaning and disempowering.
Crazy/psycho/insane /schizo/nuts	Avoid using these words when describing a situation or a person.	These terms can be hurtful and have negative and inaccurate connotations associated with them.

Source: *Language Do's and Don'ts, Not Myself Today*, v.8.0

It is important to remember that people living with mental illnesses, mental health issues or substance use problems are more than their mental health 'status.' They deserve accurate, empowering language that recognizes their agency and dignity.

For more examples and resources on how to talk about mental health, check out these resources:

- [Mindset: reporting on mental health \(2020\)](#)
- [Mental Health Commission on Canada: Language Matters](#)

Stigmatizing	Respectful
It drives me crazy.	It bothers/annoys/frustrates me.
This is nuts.	This is interesting/strange/ peculiar/funny.
This individual suffers from depression.	They live with/are experiencing depression.
Mentally ill or insane person.	Person living with a mental health problem or illness.
Committed suicide, successful suicide	Died by suicide
Failed or unsuccessful suicide attempt	Attempted suicide
Substance abuse	Substance use or substance use disorder
Everyone who is a junkie	Everyone who uses substances
They used to be an addict	They are in recovery

*Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2020.*





# THE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE

## WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Here is a snapshot of some CMHA and other mental health programming and resources relevant to the workplace. This information is not meant to be comprehensive, nor is it a substitute for professional advice. If you feel that you may need advice, please consult a qualified health care professional.

- **The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace** often called 'the Standard,' outlines the evidence and process required for organizations to embrace and create a workplace that is psychologically safe and healthy for all employees. Psychological health and safety certification: CMHA certifies individuals across in the principles of workplace mental health so they can advise and help others.
- **Workplace mental health training:** CMHA's in-house experts provide evidence-based custom training to employers across Canada to help create a healthy and safe working environment.

- **Not Myself Today** CMHA's national workplace mental health program, helps employees and leaders, including CIHR, Veterans Affairs Canada and many other federal departments, develop the skills and knowledge needed for a psychologically healthy workplace.
- **The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety** is a great resource for fact sheets and information on how to create a high-functioning, respectful and productive work environment.
- **Guarding Minds at Work**: Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, by Canada Life, offers a comprehensive set of free resources to help assess and address the psychological health and safety of workplaces.

## Looking for more mental health resources?



**Check in on your mental health:** Free checklists to learn how you're doing, including the Mental Health Meter, What's Your Stress Index and a Work-Life Balance Quiz.



**BounceBack:** if you're feeling low, stressed or anxious, this free program offers telephone coaching based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to build skills to improve your mental health.



**Free mental health courses:** Recovery Colleges and Well-Being Learning Centres across the country offer free online and in-person courses to help you understand and improve your mental health.



**Wellness Together:** the Government of Canada offers a free, online portal with a variety of mental health supports, offering basic wellness information, one-on-one sessions with a counsellor and participation in a community of support.

## **Plus, great articles with news you can use:**

- [When positivity turns toxic and 4 ways to combat it](#)
- [Social connection is the cure](#)
- [Mental health: what is it, really?](#)

## **Need help now?**

If you or someone you love is struggling, there is hope and help:

- Please contact [your local CMHA](#).
- Visit the Government of Canada's free [Wellness Together](#) portal.
- Thinking of suicide? Please call 1-833-456-4566 toll free in Canada (1-866-277-3553 in Québec).



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years of  
community



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## THE CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IS HERE TO HELP

For 103 years, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) has been the leading community mental health organization in Canada. Our nationwide organization provides essential mental health programs, services and supports in 330 local communities. A significant part of our work is to provide care before crisis, to help take the pressure off the acute-care system. At the national level, CMHA works on behalf of its branches, regions and divisions to advocate for mental health system change, educate people about mental health and shift societal beliefs and behaviours in key spaces and places, such as workplaces like yours:

- We promote psychological safety in the workplace
- We work to reduce stigma that surrounds mental health and mental illness
- We offer a variety of workplace well-being programs, including Not Myself Today, to improve employee understanding of mental health, reduce stigma and foster safe and supportive work cultures.





# THE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE

## CHAMPIONING MENTAL HEALTH ON PARLIAMENT HILL

The pandemic has put a greater focus on mental health like never before. We need your support, as a parliamentarian, to turn this momentum into concrete policy change.

Canadians have waited for generations to improve our mental health system. Though the past 18 months have laid bare deep and long-standing gaps in the system – lack of timely access, care gaps in remote locations, lack of culturally sensitive programming, and a shortage of mental health care professionals – Canadians continue to have to wait long periods of time or pay out of pocket to meet their basic mental health needs. Countless others have fallen through the cracks, unable to access services altogether.

Rather than keep building on a system that responds to crisis, we need to rethink our mental health system so that it can promote mental wellness and prevent mental illnesses from taking hold in the first place.



# Championing mental health on Parliament Hill

We urge you to champion immediate action on a Pan-Canadian mental health plan that includes:

- Direct federal investment to sustain and improve access to chronically underfunded community mental health programs and services to ensure every Canadian who needs mental health supports can get them.
- Investment in additional supportive and affordable housing for people with mental illnesses and substance use problems to ensure that they have safe places to live as they recover.
- An increase in funding for Indigenous-led mental health services to advance reconciliation and to better support Indigenous communities.
- More funding to support people who use substances; this includes funding to enhance access to substance use treatments and supports, ensuring integration between mental health and substance use supports, increasing the number and accessibility of supervised consumption sites, and decriminalizing simple drug possession.

We're here to support you, and we look forward to working with you to declare mental health a national priority.