In any given week, at least half a million Canadian employees miss work due to a mental illness, reports the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. This includes about 355,000 disability cases due to mental and/or behavioural disorders and roughly 175,000 full-time
workers absent due to mental illness, based on research from Dewa, Chau and Dermer and StatsCan employment data.

Companies have always struggled to find ways to effectively reduce workplace stress. In fact, according to Towers Watson’s 2013/14 Staying@Work report, 78% of Canadian companies continue to identify stress as a top workforce risk issue.

Many companies have implemented initiatives to reverse this trend as more refined strategies around workplace mental health emerge. For example, there are more leadership training programs as well as programs related to creating a respectful workplace and organizations instituting peer-support programs.

In conjunction with traditional health management programs (e.g., providing exercise programs and education sessions on stress management and work/life balance), there’s a subtle trend developing as companies begin to understand the importance of the happiness factor and overall mental health of their workforces.

The Importance of Resilience

Human capital is important to the workplace, but psychological capital is even more so. And it’s resiliency (defined as the ability to manage stress and cope with new and unexpected situations), along with self-efficacy, hope and optimism, says Dr. Fred Luthans, that contributes to a person’s positive psychological capital.

Luthans’ research clearly demonstrates that boosting psychological capital in a company equates to improved productivity. In a paper titled “Positive psychological capital: Beyond human and social capital,” he states that “the value created when human capital is aligned with corporate strategy and fully engaged in making the enterprise effective has been researched extensively…and found to have a significant positive impact on performance outcomes.” As companies face tougher competition for both human capital and improved financial results, they would benefit by investing in programs that foster a resilient workforce.

As the ever-changing workplace requires people to learn new skills and adapt to changing management styles, the importance of stress management is evident. But it’s how a person responds to these situations that magnifies his or her level of resiliency.

In Workplace Wellness, Dr. Rose Gantner writes, “success for a company is more likely if its workforce is filled with purposeful, resilient, positive people.” But, she observes, employers often fall short in offering training to employees on happiness, the power of positivity or resiliency. This trend should improve as 84% of employers believe they have a responsibility to provide a work environment that promotes mental well-being, according to a Buck Consultants report.

USEFUL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Many organizations can help employers to build a resilient workforce. Here are just a few.

- Canadian Mental Health Association – cmha.ca
- ComPsych Corp. – compych.ca
- Mensante Corp. – feelingbetternow.com
- Mood Disorders Society of Canada – mooddisorderscanada.ca
- The Resilience Centre – theresiliencecentre.com.au

Have employees assess their resiliency levels at resiliencescale.com
But is it the company’s sole responsibility to help employees manage stress? No. Accountability should be shared. Employers need to create a healthy workplace; and employees need to be accountable for their overall health, which includes their ability to cope in the face of adversity (see right, “Are Your Employees Resilient?”).

**Becoming More Resilient**

The American Psychological Association cites 10 ways people can cope with stress and change:

- **Make connections.** Maintain good relationships with close family members, friends and colleagues.
- **Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.** Stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to them.
- **Accept that change is constant.** Changing circumstances can make targeted goals unattainable. Accepting a situation that can’t be changed can help you focus on what is actually possible.
- **Move toward your goals.** Develop realistic benchmarks and do something regularly that enables you to move forward.
- **Take decisive actions.** When and where possible, act on adverse situations, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses.
- **Seek opportunities for self-discovery.** People often learn something about themselves and may find they’ve grown as a result of their struggles with loss.
- **Nurture a positive view of yourself.** Developing confidence in your problem-solving abilities and trust your instincts.
- **Keep things in perspective.** Even when you face painful events, consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective.
- **Maintain a hopeful outlook.** Being optimistic will enable you to expect good things will happen.
- **Take care of yourself.** Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Do things you enjoy and find relaxing, and exercise regularly.

**How Employers Can Help**

Employers need to do their part to build a resilient workforce. However, it requires a commitment from the top and needs to be part of a company’s broader mental health strategy. Try these techniques:

- **Identify and remove sources of stress.** Do employees have the tools and training they need to do their jobs? Confusion stemming from communication is often a source of stress, so set clear expectations.

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**ARE YOUR EMPLOYEES RESILIENT?**

Resiliency is the ability to adapt, recover and grow stronger from adversity, says Dr. Gail Wagnild, founder of The Resilience Centre.

Are your employees impatient, frustrated and unable to cope? How does negative world news or a change at work affect them?

Resiliency is innate for some people; they can handle change and hard times without skipping a beat. Others have to work at it. The good news is, your employees can learn these skills, such as the ability to bounce back after a setback.
• Review HR processes and practices. Consider a change to the ways in which managers provide feedback. The traditional performance management method of providing feedback once or twice a year through a time-consuming, protracted process that focuses on the past is stressful for employees. And emerging research suggests it’s also not as effective as instant, ongoing feedback.

• Survey employees about mental health attitudes. Gauge employees’ knowledge of good mental health and identify the level of stigma in the company.

• Reduce stigma associated with mental illness. The employment environment has a significant impact on a person's ability to be resilient. One of the challenges both employers and employees face is the stigma associated with mental illness. Improving mental health literacy in the company and establishing a peer-support program will help reduce stigma over time.

• Provide training and education programs to help stress management. Educate leaders on the benefits of both personal and organizational resiliency, and follow up with training at all levels.

• Implement the Psychological Health & Safety Standard. The Standard contains a dedicated section on employee resilience (Build Employee Resilience) as an element of a psychologically healthy work environment. The Standard can and should be implemented over time, and the development of a resilience program is a good place to start.

• Continue to promote mental health in the workplace. Offer an employee and family assistance program (EFAP), for example. If used, its programs can greatly reduce stress and offer support to employees and their families. According to a 2014 report from Morneau Shepell, companies had an average $8.70 return for every dollar invested in their EFAP.

As companies face tougher competition for both human capital and improved financial results, they would benefit by investing in programs that foster a resilient workforce.

BY THE NUMBERS
1% of the Canadian population is affected by schizophrenia.
Suicide accounts for 24% of all deaths among 15- to 24-year-olds and 16% among 25- to 44-year-olds
Source: Canadian Mental Health Association

Over the past few years, there’s been a shift toward creating a partnership to promote employee health. Employees need to foster good mental health and ensure they’re productive at work. Employers need to offer programs to improve the resiliency of their workforces. It’s a shared responsibility.

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APPOINTMENT NOTICE

BENEFITS CANADA WELCOMES GLENN KAUTH AS EDITOR

Before joining our team as editor, Glenn Kauth spent more than seven years with Ontario’s top legal affairs publications. For the past six years, he worked for Thomson Reuters Canada Ltd. as editor of Law Times, where he brought an eye for finding unique, high-value stories to Ontario’s top legal publication.

He now brings his talents and editorial rigour to our coverage of Canadian pensions, institutional investments and workplace benefits.

Prior to entering the realm of business-to-business journalism, Glenn worked in daily newspapers in Alberta mainly as a police and court reporter.

He has degrees in journalism from Ryerson University and international development studies from the University of Toronto.

APPOINTMENT NOTICE

BENEFITS CANADA WELCOMES JENNIFER PATERSON AS ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Prior to joining our team as Associate Editor, Jennifer Paterson spent 10 years writing and editing at a range of Canadian and British publications.

From 2009 until 2014, she lived in London where she wrote for the U.K.'s leading benefits and pensions magazine. More recently, she’s worked as a real estate editor in Toronto.

She now brings those talents to our coverage of Canadian pensions, institutional investments and workplace benefits.

Away from the office, Jennifer enjoys dining out and cooking for friends—and chronicling it all on her food blog, FoodFlash.me.

Jennifer holds a BA in English and history from Queen’s University and a BA in journalism from Ryerson University.