



# 12.1 An Introduction to Mental Health



## Impact on the Canadian Economy and Workplaces

Mental health issues affect people personally, but they also have a significant impact on Canadian workplaces and the economy:

- The annual economic cost in Canada is at least \$50 billion.
- The annual indirect cost due to lost productivity is around \$6 billion.
- The number of workers unable to work due to poor mental health is approximately 500,000 each week.

## Prevalence of Disability

Depression is ranked by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the single largest contributor to global disability. The largest category of disability within Canadian workplaces is attributed to mental health challenges.

While employees who experience a mental health challenge may require a disability leave from work at some point during their illness, many employees are able to effectively function and contribute within the workplace.

## Defining Mental Health: Common Mental Health Challenges and Disorders

Just as we all have physical health, we also all have mental health. Sometimes we are healthy and well and sometimes we may experience health challenges, whether physical or mental.

The most common mental illnesses that Canadians face are mood (ie: depression, bipolar disorder, etc.) and anxiety disorders (ie: generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, social phobia, etc.).

### Depression

Depression symptoms can vary from mild to severe and are generally characterized as the lowering of a person's mood, such as feelings of sadness, and can include:

- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in appetite, weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide

## Bipolar Disorder

People with bipolar disorder experience different phases: mania and depression. These phases can last for extended periods of time and symptoms vary during the manic and depressive phases. Between episodes of mania and depression the person may not experience any symptoms.

The manic phase is characterized by:

- Extreme happiness, hopefulness, and excitement
- Irritability, anger, fits of rage or hostile behavior
- Restlessness, agitation, rapid speech
- Poor concentration and judgment
- Increased energy, less need for sleep
- Setting unrealistic goals
- Paranoia

## Anxiety

Anxiety disorders are characterized by excessive and persistent feelings of nervousness, anxiety, panic, fear, and uneasiness. A person who has an anxiety disorder may also experience:

- Sleep problems
- Inability to stay calm and still
- Cold, sweaty, numb, or tingling hands or feet
- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations
- Dry mouth
- Nausea

*Note: Physical medical conditions (ie: thyroid problems or a vitamin deficiency) can appear like symptoms of depression. It is important to visit a medical professional for an accurate diagnosis and to receive appropriate and effective treatment and supports.*

While some mental illnesses can be chronic and recurring, many people also recover fully from them.

# How These Illnesses Can Show Up (Symptoms) In the Workplace

An employee that is experiencing a mental health challenge may display some signs. It's important to have a trusting, healthy relationship with your employees so that you can recognize these signs, which often show up in a change in behaviour, personality or how they work.

Some things to watch for that could indicate that a person is struggling with their mental health:

- Attendance issues
- Difficulty concentrating or meeting deadlines
- The quality of their work begins to suffer
- A change in personal grooming standards
- Becoming less outgoing or withdrawn
- Irritability, agitation, or sadness
- Indifference to assignments and tasks where they once displayed engagement

Understanding your employee, recognizing changes, and displaying curiosity and empathy towards them can help you to distinguish between performance issues that might need coaching or corrective measures, and mental health issues that may require treatment from a healthcare professional and workplace accommodations.

## Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Ipsos. (2021, April). *Mental Health and the Pandemic: An Ipsos Context Trends Report for Canada*. Retrieved from [Entrepreneurialism \(ipsos.com\)](https://www.ipsos.com/entrepreneurialism)

<sup>2</sup> Howatt, B. Bradley, L. Adams, J. Mahajan, S. Kennedy, S. (2017). *Understanding mental health, mental illness, and their impacts in the workplace*. Retrieved from [Monreau White Paper Report Eng.pdf \(mentalhealthcommission.ca\)](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/monreau-white-paper-report-eng.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Holden, J. (2015, April 29). *Depression and Anxiety in the Workplace*. [PowerPoint Presentation \(mentalhealthcommission.ca\)](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/powerpoint-presentation)

<sup>4</sup> Deloitte. (2019, November 4). *The ROI in workplace mental health programs: Good for people, good for business*. A blueprint for workplace mental health programs. Retrieved from [A blueprint for workplace mental health programs | Deloitte Insights](https://www.deloitte.com/insights)

## Disclaimer:

*Hire for Talent has made every effort to use the most respectful words possible while writing these materials. We realize, however, that the most appropriate terminology may change over time. We developed these materials with the intent to respect the dignity and inherent rights of all individuals.*