

What do mental health statistics mean for your work team?

In any given year, one in five Canadians will experience a mental illness or an addiction problem. These include, but are not limited to, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The numbers surrounding mental health can be difficult to grasp.

Though millions of people are affected, mental health statistics become more relevant when you scale them down to better fit your own environment. For example, if you have 20 people in your office, how might those stats translate? In the next year, it's possible that four of your co-workers could experience a mental illness, and one of them may be living with an anxiety disorder right now. When you think of mental health statistics in this context, the numbers hit closer to home.

Mental health issues are likely to affect your workplace at some point – if they haven't already – making it important to develop both an awareness and sensitivity around mental illness. Use the tips below to prepare yourself for supporting your work team, should mental health issues arise.

- **Learn about the various forms of mental illness likely to impact your workplace.** Some of the more common diagnoses include: anxiety, depression, panic attacks, ADHD, eating disorders, and substance abuse or addiction.
- **Recognize the common warning signs of a mental health condition.** Examples include severe mood swings, extreme difficulty in concentrating, and excessive sadness or withdrawal for more than two weeks.
- **Determine what your role should be.** Your role will likely vary. You will want to help your employees take advantage of the various counselling and EFAP resources available to them through your organization. You may also take on an educational role, as you help build mental health awareness amongst your team. Your role may even be disciplinary, if gossip, resentment, teasing, insensitivity, or other issues surface. Above all, your role should involve being a caring and supportive leader. Check in regularly, ask how you can help, and share your concerns without being dismissive or judgmental.
- **Consider formal training.** With training focused specifically on mental health issues, not only will you become more knowledgeable about how to handle mental illness in the workplace, but you will also become better equipped to support your work team.

Developing an awareness and sensitivity around mental illness will help you effectively manage the situation, should a team member begin showing signs of a mental health issue. By taking the time now to understand the statistics and equip yourself with the training and knowledge necessary to be a supportive manager, you will be better prepared to help your employee – and your entire work team – successfully navigate through a challenging period. With one-fifth of your team likely to experience a mental health issue in the next year, putting the right support in place now is an important investment.