

# Mental health and well-being at work



*Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity — World Health Organization, 1948*

Work is an important part of most people's lives, and there are many ways that work can impact workers. Work can promote mental health and wellness when it is well organized, designed and managed. Most importantly, it must respect human needs and limits.

Mental health and well-being affect a person's ability to realize their own potential, to effectively deal with the day-to-day stresses caused by life's challenges, to work productively and to contribute to their community.

Mental and physical health are deeply linked because the brain monitors and controls every part of our bodies. Physical illnesses or injuries have mental health symptoms (for example, pain can cause fatigue and concentration problems) and mental illnesses and injuries have physical symptoms (like diarrhea or vomiting). When one part of our body is ill or injured, it puts the whole body out of balance. When this happens, we need supports like accommodations or medical treatment.

## Intersectionality

Members of equity-deserving groups may have additional stressors to deal with, like violence or discrimination based on race, culture, origin, ability, gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation. Intergenerational trauma, like from colonization or racism, can cause mistrust of the health care or security systems we typically count on for help. Any action proposed must be respectful and inclusive.

## **Signs there could be a problem**

There are many signs and symptoms that you may notice in yourself, a coworker, a family member or a friend that can indicate there is a problem that needs more attention, possibly from a health care provider. Noticing symptoms in yourself or others is the first step.

Watch out for changes that point to a decline in well-being, such as:

- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Sudden or unexpected change in alcohol or drug use
- Changes in personal appearance
- Changes in energy, sociability, physical health or behaviour
- Loss of focus or productivity
- Frequent absences
- Errors or accidents on the job
- Talking about strange ideas

If you notice signs that there might be a problem, avoid making a diagnosis. Only a health care provider can do that. Passing judgment on or making assumptions about yourself or others can unintentionally cause harm. The best thing you can do is be supportive and non-judgmental. There is no shame in being unwell.

People who are struggling under pressure are more likely to need support and help. That is how you can be most helpful.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:**

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