Enabling Healthy and Productive Work Roundtable

Summary Report

May, 2015

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Canadian workforce is changing and these important demographic trends will continue over the next decade. Due to significant changes in birthrates since the 1940s, employers will see a rise in young workers under 25 years old and of mature workers over the age of 45, and a decline in the number of middle-age workers. Since the prevalence of chronic conditions increases with age, this increase in mature workers will correlate with a higher prevalence of chronic conditions in the Canadian workforce, resulting in a greater need for accommodation measures to enable all workers to fully participate in the labour force. A growing number of Canadians are balancing work and caregiving responsibilities, which has implications for workplace wellness and labour force participation. Facing a surge in retirements and a potential shortage in talent and skills, employers will need to look at different talent markets to fill their human resource needs. Individuals with disabilities are presently under-represented in the Canadian labour force and will become a significant pool of talent. In order to retain their critical talent, organizations will need to become more inclusive and supportive of all employees.

In order to assist employers facing these changing demographics, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) in partnership with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) is initiating a potential research funding initiative which will focus on determining successful workplace interventions and policies that enable participation in healthy work for all employees. In January 2015, a roundtable of key stakeholders (e.g., employers, union leaders, providers, and employer and employee advocate associations, among others) was held to seek input on the design of the Work and Health Initiative. During this consultation, the workplace experiences of four employee groups were specifically discussed:

- Older workers
- Workers with caregiving responsibilities
- People with disabilities
- Workers with mental health issues

Each of these employee groups were thought to experience unique challenges in the workplace, which may benefit from targeted research. This report summarizes the results of this consultation process.

OLDER WORKERS

According to the participants of the Roundtable, older workers are the knowledge repositories of an organization. With the upcoming wave of retirements expected to hit within the next decade, a major challenge for employers will be to replace this critical talent and ensure that appropriate knowledge exchange takes place between retiring employees and their replacements so that operations can continue without issues. Employers are putting in place targeted retention strategies to encourage older workers to remain in the workplace or to return to work in a different capacity once they have retired (e.g., as an external consultant).

Since older workers experience more non-occupational illnesses, injuries, and disabilities, employers will also need to focus on health promotion activities and ensure that mature workers return to work safely and in a timely manner if they require a disability leave. Unfortunately, employers are not always equipped to effectively accommodate older workers and facilitate the return to work process. Roundtable participants reported that more information and research are required in this area.

Finally, some mature workers are overwhelmed by the rapid rate of technological advancement that is seen in today's workplace. They may choose to retire rather than to try to learn new technology that is essential for their job. Although face-to-face, instructor-led training is becoming less common in organizations, this was thought to be the most appropriate way to teach older workers about new technology.

WORKERS WITH CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

The number of caregivers employed in the Canadian labour force is increasing. Employees with caregiving responsibilities often experience excessive stress when trying to balance their family responsibilities and their work obligations. Employers are becoming more aware of this situation and are implementing strategies to better support the needs of the caregivers.

Unfortunately, many traditional organizational supportive practices and programs have not been structured for employees with caregiving responsibilities. For example, leave policies often cannot be used by employees who need to care for a family member or a dependent. In order to better address the unique needs of the caregivers, flexibility in leave options and work arrangements is the key to success. By allowing employees with caregiving responsibilities to work when, where and how they wish to do so, employers empower them to manage their time and obligations.

In many organizations, though, the workplace culture must shift in order for this flexibility to be available to workers with caregiving responsibilities. First, managers must show visible support for procedures that allow for added flexibility for employees to feel able to use these organizational practices. If the manager believes that face-time is equivalent to productivity, employees will not use the supportive practices put in place to address their needs. As well, many of organizations' practices do not account for the changing definition of family. While managers are often sympathetic of parents who must care for a sick child, that is not always the case for an employee who must take care of his or her same-sex spouse or a close family friend, for example, As the definition of family expands, employers are becoming aware that their programs and practices will need to be adjusted as well to reflect these changes. Manager education may also be necessary to fully implement these changes.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Individual with disabilities are under-represented in the Canadian labour force. As employers face the surge in retirements that will come when the baby boomers leave the workplace, they require more information on how to make their human resources practices more inclusive in order to attract and retain this talent.

However, myths and stigma still surround employees with disabilities in the workplace – in particular, about their productivity, their absenteeism, their turnover rate and their skills. Education and awareness training is required at all levels of the organization in order to ensure that the workplace is inclusive and supportive of employees with disabilities.

Employers are also challenged with finding the appropriate accommodation measures that will enable employees with disabilities to be productive at work. Some employers believe that accommodations are very costly and are reticent to explore options. As well, these employers sometimes think accommodations help keep at work someone who is not fit to work. Therefore, more education is needed in this area to make employers aware of the link between health and productivity and the impact of accommodations in the workplace. A detailed accommodation process that can be customized to individual workplaces and examples of cost-effective accommodations for specific disabilities would be useful tools for employers.

Finally, in order to ensure that employees with disabilities have support when they face medical issues, they require a variety of health-related programs that cover the range of the health spectrum. This includes health promotion and injury / illness prevention initiatives, early intervention, stay at work programs, and disability management programs with return to work processes. Employers require evidence-based information and examples of best practices in all of these areas.

WORKERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Stigma related to mental health issues is prevalent in our workplaces. The impact of stigma is profound; it can prevent employees who are experiencing a mental health issue from accessing workplace resources. They are concerned that their managers and their colleagues will judge them if they disclose that they have experienced, or are experiencing, a mental health issue. They also believe that it might impact their career advancement and their success at work. However, employers are also concerned about self-stigma. This occurs when an employee who is experiencing a mental health issue believes that this is a sign of weakness or otherwise judges themselves harshly for having this medical condition. The employee cannot accept that he or she might require assistance and does not access the workplace supportive practices or resources. Anti-stigma training is required at all levels of the organization to shift the mindset on mental health.

Employers require guidance on how to build mentally healthy work environments. This includes information on how they can address workplace issues that may negatively impact the mental health of employees and prevent psychological harm. Furthermore, research is needed on how to shift a workplace's culture so that it is supportive of employees with mental health issues and welcomes open dialogue on the importance of mental health at work.

THE HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE WORK INITIATIVE

Roundtable participants believe that collaboration between researchers, employers, unions and employee or employer advocate associations will lead to new and innovative practices to implement in the Canadian workplace. This will assist all employees, not only the four employee groups discussed above, and will help Canada to remain competitive. In particular, participants wanted the initiative to:

- Provide research on industry specific or job specific strategies or programs,
- Facilitate the exchange of practical knowledge and information,
- Identify and evaluate promising Canadian and international practices, and
- Provide evidence-based data on the outcomes of the programs to determine if they are cost-effective.

INTRODUCTION

The demographics of the Canadian workforce are changing. Canadian employers now face new challenges to enable participation in healthy and productive work. In response, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) in partnership with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) are launching a major research funding initiative on work and health. The focus of the Healthy and Productive Work initiative is to determine successful workplace interventions and policies that enable participation in healthy work for all employees, and to build capacity and infrastructure for measuring and demonstrating their broader health, economic and social impacts.

To inform the Work and Health Initiative, The Conference Board of Canada, on behalf of CIHR and SSHRC, convened a roundtable of key stakeholders (e.g., employers, union leaders, providers, employer and employee advocate associations, among others) to get their feedback on successful workplace interventions and policies that enable participation in healthy and productive work for all employees. In particular, the discussion focused on accommodating the needs of older workers, employees with caregiving responsibilities, employees with disabilities, and employees with mental health issues.

This report summarizes the findings from this consultation. The following section details the results of a pre-roundtable survey given to participants in order to identify their top of mind issues related to enabling healthy and productive work. The subsequent sections summarize the discussion during the Roundtable.

THE PRE-ROUNDTABLE SURVEY

Prior to the Roundtable, participants were asked to answer a short survey to determine the gaps and opportunities to improve employers' practices and policies focused on enabling participation in healthy work. Highlights of the survey responses are summarized in the section below. (The full survey results are found in Appendix B.)

The workforce demographics are changing. In particular:

- The Canadian workforce is aging.
- While there are more employees over 50 years of age, there is also a significant number in their 20's. Yet, there are fewer employees in the middle age group (30 to 50 years of age). Employers

may need to retain their mature workers and speed up the development of their younger employees in order to meet their human resources needs in the future.

- More highly educated individuals are entering the workforce but their skills may not match the skills required by employers.
- Persons with disabilities are an underutilized talent pool.

The workplace is also more precarious today. There appears to be a higher rate of workplace injuries, illnesses and fatalities in the Canadian workplace. The workplace is more demanding and some workers are having difficulties adapting to these demands. Mental injuries are becoming more prevalent.

Employees want to feel valued. They have greater expectations about their employment and benefits (i.e., flexibility, work-life balance, benefits, vacation). Employers are adapting to this changing workforce by focusing on recruitment, retention, wellness and creating a flexible workplace.

During this consultation process, four employee groups were specifically discussed to inform the Work and Health initiative:

1. Older workers
2. Workers with caregiving responsibilities
3. People with disabilities
4. Workers with mental health issues

In order to better accommodate the needs of these four employee groups, and enable healthy and productive work, the pre-roundtable respondents identified the following gaps in knowledge and opportunities for future research in their needs assessment:

- Proactive identification of needs and accommodation approaches (i.e., employers could partner to deal with common issues);
- Tools and strategies to recruit and retain these employees;
- Collaboration with educational institutions to ensure that employees are trained in skills that are in demand in today's economy;
- A systematic implementation and review framework for the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the National Standard);
- Success at the bargaining table on issues related to accommodation; and
- Realistic government policies that can be implemented without undue hardship in the workplace.

Respondents also identified several areas where the new Work and Health Initiative could help them fill these gaps. These included to:

- Create guides or reference tools for employers on how to accommodate different needs and situations;
- Identify best or promising practices (i.e., mental health in the workplace, the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace);

- Measure the effectiveness of strategies and approaches - cost-benefit analysis (i.e., implementation of the National Standard);
- Provide evidence-based knowledge on the key challenges faced by employers;
- Provide industry specific, national and international benchmarks; and
- Measure the effectiveness of government programs.

CHANGING WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS

Survey respondents were asked to describe how the demographics of their workforce are changing. A few respondents indicated that there is a higher proportion of mature workers over the age of 50 years, resulting in a higher prevalence of chronic diseases in the employee population. While there is recognition that employers must demonstrate a willingness to accommodate employees, both to recruit and to retain them, they are challenged when trying to identify the appropriate accommodation that will allow an employee to stay at work.

People with disabilities represent a significant body of untapped labour but their labour force participation has not changed significantly over the past few years.

There is a growing gap between generations in the workplace (younger and older workers). The workforce is shifting to a younger demographic over time. Employees are more educated. However, the workplace also has a greater need for specific technical skills. There is a greater need for innovative thinkers and workers with change management capacity.

Furthermore, work is becoming more precarious, with an increase in workplace injuries and fatalities, and higher cancer rates amongst blue collar workers. An across-the-board increase in mental injuries (including violence and harassment) was also reported. In unionized environments, new workers are reluctant to step up to roles within the union or to exercise their rights such as the right to refuse unsafe work.

Some employees feel underemployed and have expectations for greater challenges at work. However, overall, the labour market is becoming more demanding. This is leading to a labour force having greater difficulties adapting to these changes and a resulting increase in employees on sick leave and on long- term disability. Employers are losing experienced employees and having greater difficulties finding people to replace them.

Workers want to feel valued at work - not only in terms of the work they do but also in terms of their value to the overall organization. Their expectations are also increasing in relation to flexibility at work, and work-life balance. Yet, employees are challenged by a lack of work-life balance, eldercare and childcare, benefits, and adequate vacation time.

Finally, technology is changing the way we work and communicate. There are fewer social exchanges between co-workers in the workplace which can affect an employee's social support network.

HOW EMPLOYERS ARE ADAPTING TO THE CHANGING WORKFORCE

In recent years, employer strategies have focused on:

- Occupational health and safety;
- Diversity and inclusion in the workplace;
- Flexible work arrangements (e.g., flexible hours of work, telework);
- Wellness programs; and
- Providing education and raising awareness around mental health in the workplace.

The retirement of baby boomers, and the resulting loss of valuable knowledge in the workplace, has also led to a focus on recruiting younger workers and retaining older employees. Employers are ensuring that their benefits programs are competitive and that they are offering a variety of flexible work arrangements in order to successfully attract the best talent. Due to a mismatch in the skill sets possessed by students entering the workforce and those required in the workplace, employers are targeting the recruitment of specific skilled workers and are looking at new talent markets. They are also speeding up the development of younger employees to fill the gap that will be created with the retirement of mature workers.

There is an increased awareness of the economic and social impact of mental and physical impairments and their associated competitive and human resources consequences for organizations. This is leading many employers to make employee wellness a priority in their organizations. However, the majority of organizations are not equipped to deal with employees experiencing mental health problems. In particular, leaders lack the training and the competencies on how to manage and support an employee with mental health issues.

Table 1 - Employer strategies to address the changing workforce demographics, identified during the pre-roundtable survey

Recruitment

- Benefit eligibility commencing the first month after hire, and increasing vacation entitlement
- Attempting to match skills to positions and engaging the workforce through various means
- Targeting specific skill sets (e.g., tech-savvy) and new markets to find specific talent

Retention and leadership development

- Increasing the value proposition for employees with critical skills
- Fostering innovation and productivity, in a healthy fashion
- Educating leaders on their impact on an employee's physical and psychological health and wellness
- Focusing on face to face and direct education
- Early succession planning strategies to resolve the loss of valuable knowledge due to retirements
- Transferring knowledge/skills and mentoring new employees before a mature worker retires

Early intervention and wellness in the workplace

- Early identification of medical / non-medical barriers to help reduce the severity of conditions and shorten the duration of absences from work
- Development of measurement framework to identify challenges and program improvements
- Making wellness a priority in the workplace

Work design and work arrangements

- Creating a flexible work environment that acknowledges exceptional performance / innovation
- Telecommuting
- Part time and contract roles
- Changes to work arrangements and space to accommodate innovation and to attract workers (both from across Canada and internationally)

Employers need to be flexible in order to accommodate the needs of employees at different stages of their lives and careers. A strategy is required that touches on the interests and needs of all generations of employees. There is still much work to be done to equip management with concrete, practical tools to assist employees while respecting the needs of the co-workers.

OLDER WORKERS

CURRENT WORKPLACE CHALLENGES IN REGARDS TO OLDER WORKERS

According to Roundtable participants, older workers are looking for stability and sustainability at work. Some older workers are challenged when there is rapid and continual change in an organization. This is particularly true as it relates to technology. Technological advancements have been accelerated at a phenomenal rate in workplaces. Older workers may find it difficult to adapt to these changes. Yet, face to face learning, which mature workers prefer, is being offered less frequently in organizations. This is creating challenges for the older workers, who may prefer to retire than to learn the new technology.

Furthermore, chronic conditions are more prevalent among older employees. They also experience more non-occupational illnesses and injuries. Employers must focus on health promotion in order to retain them in the workplace and help them return to the work in a timely manner if they take a health-related leave. Yet, employers often find the accommodation and return to work of older workers to be a challenge.

Finally, the retirement of these knowledgeable employees can be challenging for employers as they must recruit and develop new talent to replace retiring workers. In response, employers are trying to find ways to retain older workers and to bring them back from retirement when critical knowledge is lacking.

Table 2 - Workplace challenges in regards to supporting older workers, identified during the roundtable discussions

Retirement

- Loss of valuable knowledge
- Some mature workers struggle with the rapid and continual change found in certain organizations
- Some employers are moving to minimum standards which can make older workers retire earlier

Recruitment and retention

- Not just at the executive level, but at all levels of an organization
- Mature employees are looking for stability and sustainability
- Recruitment of younger workers is a priority to replace workers who are leaving the workforce
- It is important to offer a stimulating environment for older workers, not just career advancement

Health

- Older workers experience more non-occupational illnesses/injuries, resulting in higher healthcare costs
- Return to work and accommodation can be challenging to employers

Technology

- Loss of face-to-face training, which some mature workers prefer
- Online training and information can be more difficult for older workers to access
- A focus on technology literacy, resilience and learning is required to bring older workers up to speed with new technology
- Some older workers prefer to retire rather than learn new technology

CURRENT STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT OLDER WORKERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Most of the strategies that employers have implemented to support their older workers revolve around their retention. An emphasis has been placed on flexibility in the workplace to allow them to stay or to return to the organization in more casual employment relationships.

As well, in order to prepare for the upcoming wave of retirements, employers are fast-tracking the onboarding and development of younger employees and creating repositories of knowledge that can be used when these younger workers face a new issue in the workplace.

Finally, in order to keep the older workers in the workplace longer, employers are also implementing supportive programs and practices to promote their health and wellbeing.

Table 3 – Strategies to support older workers in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Retirement

- Flexible working arrangements that focus on bringing retired workers back part-time to consult.
- Pre-retirement options, if possible to meet operational requirements. People can be offered reduced work-loads as a way to phase in retirement.
- Bring retired employees back to the workplace on a contract or casual basis, based on competencies, to fill a knowledge gap
- Focus on injury/illness prevention and identifying employees at risk
- Focus on retaining older workers and transferring knowledge from the older to the younger workers
- Interviewing people about their work and responsibilities before they retire and providing the transcripts to new employees moving into those roles

Recruitment and retention

- To attract older workers, employers must focus on expertise and connections
- Manager education to reduce their reticence in accommodating the needs of older workers
- Employee education on safe practices, wellness, healthy eating in order to prevent injury/illness
- Mentorship roles
- Creating diverse teams with a balance of younger and older workers, diverse backgrounds, etc.
- Flexible work arrangements, part time hours
- Clear job requirements
- Offer stimulating but not overwhelming work environment
- Take into consideration their work experience and identify transferable skills
- Ensure appropriate refresher training, especially when retired workers return to the workplace

Health

- Closed office for those who need it (quiet spaces)
- Promotion of psychologically healthy workplaces and the adoption of the National Standard
- Supports for wellness
- Policy advocacy, caregiving and income security

Technology

- Effective change management strategies and internal communication
- Face-to-face, instructor led training instead of online, self-serve training modules

THE EMPLOYER'S WISH LIST: TOOLS AND STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT OLDER WORKERS

Employers are concerned that the retirement of mature workers will leave knowledge gaps in their organizations that will negatively impact their competitiveness. Therefore, their wish list included tools and

---

strategies revolving around the retention of this important employee group and the transfer of their information and knowledge to younger workers.

Table 4 – Tools and strategies required by employers to support older workers in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Retention

- Many group insurance plans stop at age 65, which is keeping older workers from continuing to work. Benefit plans should be restructured so they are not a disincentive to their retention.
- Having rest facilities/quiet rooms for older workers, or others, who require a rest
- Successful strategies around mature workers, including:
  - how to promote their health and wellness,
  - how to transfer knowledge,
  - how to retain older employees, and
  - how to bring them back from retirement to fill knowledge gaps.

WORKERS WITH CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

CURRENT WORKPLACE CHALLENGES IN REGARDS TO WORKERS WITH CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

In today's society, more and more employees face the challenge of balancing their work obligations and their family responsibilities. Employees are taking care of dependent spouses, children, grandchildren and parents, resulting in an increase in the number of employed caregivers. Workers who are caregivers are at an increased risk of both physical and mental illness due to the overwhelming strain of balancing work and family demands.

One major challenge for employers is accommodating the need for flexible work arrangements of workers with caregiving responsibilities while ensuring the sustainability of day to day operations. Furthermore, in many organizations, benefit plans and leave policies do not include support for employees with caregiving responsibilities. More education is required so that managers and senior leaders recognize the demands of the caregiving roles and offer appropriate support and resources to these employees.

Table 5 - Workplace challenges in regards to supporting workers with caregiving responsibilities, identified during the roundtable discussions

Workplace culture

- Employers require education on their obligations / responsibilities related to the accommodation of an employee's non-work related life challenges.
- Caregiving responsibilities can result in mental health disabilities that are not covered in an organization's short or long term disability plan.
- Caregivers are denied leave when they ask for it but they still require the time off. This can result in the employee taking sick leave in order to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities.
- Employers are more used to accommodating the needs of parents. However, they do not often offer accommodations to same sex couples needing time off to take care of their spouse.
- Employers are challenged to balance the demands of the organization with individual needs when accommodating the caregiver's need for flexible work arrangements.

Workplace programs and policies

- Determining the appropriate policies to implement to better support employees with caregiving responsibilities (e.g., personal days per year, formal compassionate leaves)
- Developing affordable workplace supports and approaches (i.e., accommodations)
- Difficulty to provide flexibility to workers in a highly structured work environment, such as the resource or manufacturing sector or an automobile plant. Employers may need to implement sector specific approaches in that regard.
- The application of policies in not always consistent across different managers and departments within the same organization.

CURRENT STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT WORKERS WITH CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

The focus of the strategies that employers have implemented to support workers with caregiving responsibilities has been on changing the workplace culture so that managers and colleagues are more aware and understanding of the special needs of this employee group. Employers are also putting in place appropriate supportive programs and policies to sustain this culture change. These include:

- Flexible benefit plans;
- Flexible leave policies; and
- Mental health resources to support caregiver employees' mental wellbeing.

Table 6 – Strategies to support workers with caregiving responsibilities in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Workplace culture

- Manager education to reduce their reticence in accommodating the needs of workers with caregiving responsibilities

Workplace programs and policies

- Flexible benefits, personal days, extra vacation time, repaid leaves, paid and unpaid leaves
- Paying the waiting period when an employee is going on compassionate leave
- Sabbatical planning (banking part of their salary or banking hours in case of need)
- Flexible work arrangements and hours, telework
- Compensation for employees who travel for work and need to pay for care while they are away
- In organizations where this occurs only from time to time, it is often dealt with on a one to one basis
- Employee Assistance Program, Mental Health First Aid, support services
- Adoption of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace
- Policy advocacy regarding caregiving and income security

THE EMPLOYER'S WISH LIST: TOOLS AND STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT WORKERS WITH CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

Workers with caregiving responsibilities can experience significant stress due to the balancing act they must perform each day to ensure that they meet both their work demands and their family obligations. Employers are becoming increasingly aware of this issue. They now realize that their organizational culture may not always support these employees effectively. Therefore, they require additional resources on how to shift a workplace culture so that is more supportive and promotes work-life balance. They also require examples of programs or practices that have been implemented successfully in other organizations to better support the needs of workers with caregiving responsibilities.

Table 7 – Tools and strategies required by employers to support workers with caregiving responsibilities in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Workplace culture

- Strategies to drive a culture change that promotes work-life balance and family life

Workplace programs and policies

- Innovative ways to design leave programs and benefits that include flexibility so that employees who are caregivers do not have to use vacation for caregiving responsibilities

- Education on self-care for employees who are caregivers

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

CURRENT WORKPLACE CHALLENGES IN REGARDS TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Despite considerable evidence to the contrary, stigma and lack of knowledge is still present in the workplace related to employees with disabilities (e.g., about their productivity, their absenteeism, their turnover rate and their skills). This can prevent individuals with disabilities from finding employment or achieving career success. Education and awareness training is required in this area.

Employers are also challenged when providing accommodations for employees with disabilities. In particular, they often find it difficult to balance the organizational and individual needs. They can find it difficult to find the appropriate accommodation for specific situations and there is often a false understanding on the cost of these accommodations. Yet, there is a growing prevalence of chronic conditions and disability as our workforce ages. These conditions often require specific accommodations resulting in an overall increase in the need for accommodation measures.

Senior leaders must be aware of the need to accommodate employees with disabilities for their organization's future success and show commitment to this initiative. Peer networks and employee resource groups have been found to be very effective to not only provide support for employees with disabilities, but also as a resource to identify potential accommodations for complex work situations. In complex situations, employers may need to look for external support or an external provider to determine the appropriate accommodation for an employee with disabilities.

Table 8 - Workplace challenges in regards to supporting employees with disabilities, identified during the roundtable discussions

Workplace programs and policies

- It can be a challenge to identify and effectively support employees who have a slow degenerative condition leading to disability (i.e., cognitive disorders, MS). This can also be the result of aging.
- Conversations can be very delicate when an individual's physical or mental health is deteriorating and he or she is trying to remain independent.
- Some accommodation measures are very expensive, especially for small businesses. Many employers do not have a systemic process in place to provide accommodations. It is often difficult to balance organizational demands and individual needs.
- Employers are challenged to find the most appropriate accommodation for specific conditions.
- It is more common to assess an injured or ill employee's physical abilities and limitations. It can be more challenging to assess cognitive demands.
- Workplace issues can result in a mental health-related leave of absence which may not be supported by an organization's short term or long term disability plan.

Government policies

- Government policies that are based solely a person's revenue are a major obstacle (mostly in Quebec). Access to some programs is contingent on being a welfare recipient, which is limiting.
- How a disability is defined in Ontario is not necessarily the same as how a disability is defined in Quebec. This is a problem across Canada.

Recruitment

- How employers recruit employees with disabilities: Where do they source them? What are the expectations of subsidized accommodated workers? How can agencies help businesses find candidates? Often, individuals with disabilities will not use an agency. They will self-advocate and will not self-declare a disability at recruitment.
- Pre-hiring and self-disclosure: What are the advantages to self-disclosure? How can employers support an employee when they do not know they might need an accommodation?
- At recruitment, it can be difficult to understand exactly what accommodations a new employee may need to enable productive work and how these needs may vary over time.

Workplace culture

- Need a cultural shift from thinking of people with disabilities as a small group to thinking that each employee may potentially need disability accommodation at some point.
- Several participants agreed that there should not be differentiation in the approach or availability of supportive programs for employees with physical and mental disabilities.
- There can be unfounded negative attitudes and beliefs around the productivity of employees with disabilities. Myths are particularly present when dealing with a mental health issue.
- Employers sometimes expect their employees to be at 100% productivity at all times. This is unrealistic. According to some long term disability plans, employees cannot return to the workplace until they are back to 70% functionality.
- In some unionized environments, it is difficult to offer accommodation to particular employees without the situation leading to grievances.
- The real challenge is not accommodating employees; it is reducing the prevalence of disabilities requiring accommodation by focusing on psychological health and safety at work.
- Contract workers or precarious workers are less likely to self-disclose. Senior leaders are also less likely to self-disclose as they do not want to appear weak.
- There needs to be an expectation on the side of senior leadership to make this a priority. Lack of structure to identify what are the needs and how to address them. Lack of structure likely stems from lack of leadership.

Education

- Employer education is required on how to recruit and accommodate people with disabilities.
- Highlighting success stories: enabling employees with disabilities to share their experience in the workplace and describe the accommodations they require.
- Education to leadership is required in terms of accommodation.

The negative impact of these challenges leads to escalating disability claims. Failure to accommodate an employee with a disability can lead to issues with retention, which in turn can lead to lost productivity and lost labour opportunities. Employers often are unaware of the real cost of an accommodation. When cost of an accommodation is their sole focus, they lessen the value of productive employees within their organization.

CURRENT STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

To overcome the challenges facing people with disabilities in the workplace, employers have implemented many strategies to educate and raise awareness among all levels of employees within their organization. Open dialogue on this issue is now encouraged in many workplaces and networking opportunities for employees with disabilities, often through the creation of an employee resource group, is promoted.

Employers are sustaining this shift in culture by putting in place programs and policies that support the needs of employees with disabilities. These include:

- Comprehensive benefits plans;
- Health programs that target all stages of the health continuum;
- Accommodation measures; and
- Disability management programs.

Recognizing that individuals with disabilities are a significant and untapped pool of talent, employers are also focusing on their recruitment practices in order to ensure that they are inclusive of all applicants, including individuals with disabilities.

Table 9 – Strategies to support employees with disabilities in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Workplace programs and policies

- Targeted programs (i.e., flexible work arrangements, graduated hours, modification in work tasks, paid and unpaid leave policies, emergency leaves, EAP, Mental Health First Aid, targeted health support services, wellness supports, comprehensive benefits package)
- Health programs for all stages of the health spectrum (i.e., illness prevention and health promotion, ergonomics, early intervention, attendance management with active case management, return to work)
- Employers are more proactive to offer accommodations to their physical built space
- External support for finding the most appropriate accommodation can be useful
- Promotion of a psychologically healthy workplace and adoption of the National Standard
- A standardized process for accommodation developed in collaboration with key stakeholders
- The consensus based disability audit: it is a pass/fail audit which helps employers determine where they can improve their programs
- Including disability management in a diversity program can increase its visibility within the

organization

Workplace culture

- Management, unions, and employee collaboration regarding accommodation
- Building a culture of accommodation when this circumstance arises
- Open dialogue on this issue in the workplace and networking opportunities for employees with disabilities and their allies (i.e. ,employee resource group, peer support group)
- Senior leadership awareness and commitment: recognition that all individuals have abilities

Education

- Training and guides on how to hold an inclusive meetings
- Awareness programs directed at employees, employers, and unions
- Employer resource groups can help raise awareness, create allies and dispel myths
- Employer training to reduce their reticence in accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities which reinforce the notion of duty-to-accommodate and explains how to put it into practice

Recruitment

- Comprehensive onboarding process for new employees with disabilities
- During the recruitment process, provide the opportunity for employees to self-disclose issues confidentially that will allow the organization to better accommodate their needs

THE EMPLOYER'S WISH LIST: TOOLS AND STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

In order to better support the needs of employees with disabilities, employers require more information on successful, cost-effective accommodations for particular health conditions or disabilities. Furthermore, they need a comprehensive framework to help individuals return to the workplace successfully after a disability leave. Employers also recognize that, in order to promote the recruitment of people with disabilities, greater collaboration will be required between recruitment agencies and employers.

Table 10 – Tools and strategies required by employers to support employees with disabilities in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Workplace programs and policies

- Framework to prepare employees to return to work from a health related leave of absence and ensure their meaningful and productive work
- Provide disability case management before health conditions escalate and the employee must take a leave of absence from work
- Accessibility guidelines (e.g., how to create accessible websites)
- Cognitive demands and analysis, inter-personal demands analysis (team based work)
- Guidance on the variety of available accommodations
- A database of effective practices and tools that are industry specific to assist employers to accommodate the diverse needs of employees with disabilities[1]

Other policies

- Common resume database for the clients of agencies to enable employees to search for candidates more easily
- The Dutch government introduced a requirement that, if employees with a disability do not return to work after a leave of absence due to their disability, the employer is required to pay them two years of salary

Workplace culture

- Methods to change an organization's culture so that abilities and capacity is recognized during the accommodation process instead of focusing on the disability
- Enhanced management accountability for effectively managing cases

Education

- Manager training to enhance their ability to respond to individual cases in accommodation situations

Recruitment

- Guidance on how to make the recruitment process accessible (e.g., website, application process)
- Third party confidential negotiation of accommodations before the hiring decision so that decisions are more objective

---

[1] This type of database exists in Germany. It can also link an organization's job demand analysis and match it to an individual's functional capacity assessment to determine appropriate assistive technology or other accommodations. This helps to problem solve more complex accommodation challenges and maximize the return to work potential of the individual

Of particular interest when looking at other external or government policies, the Dutch government introduced a requirement for employers to pay one year of salary to an employee if he or she does not return to work after a leave of absence due to a disability. They have recently increased this to two years of salary. The intent of this policy is to encourage employers to proactively accommodate employees with disabilities and enable their healthy and productive work. Participants found this type of policy to be ground-breaking. However, they were cautious that, while this policy may encourage employers to accommodate employees with disabilities, it may have the unintended outcome of hampering their recruitment. If employers believe there is a future cost to employing an individual with a disability, they may decide not to proactively recruit them.

Analysis of the impact of the policy in Holland has demonstrated, however, that it has helped to enhance accommodation efforts and reduced the stigma around people with disabilities in the workplace. When employers work through the accommodation process, myths about their cost is dispelled. Furthermore, as more employees with disabilities are retained in the workplace, this also helps to reduce the stigma around their productivity, their absenteeism, and their turnover rate. Barriers are removed to their employment and this can open the door to the hire of people with disabilities.

WORKERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

CURRENT WORKPLACE CHALLENGES IN REGARDS TO WORKERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Stigma around mental health issues is prevalent in society and in the workplace. Due to stigma, employees often refuse to seek help in the workplace or use workplace resources when they experience a mental health issues. This can prevent many of them from getting the assistance they require in order to get healthy. This is of concern as mental health issues are becoming more prevalent in the Canadian workplace.

Once again, employers are struggling with balancing work demands and the individual needs of employees. Furthermore, employers find it even more challenging to problem-solve complex issues and situations related to mental health in the workplace. While employers are more knowledgeable about accommodating physical health conditions and modifying their built environment, they are often perplexed to find the appropriate accommodations for mental health conditions. They also find it difficult to identify medical and non-medical barriers that may prevent an employee experiencing mental health issues from staying in the workplace as well as to identify and address potential workplace issues that are negatively impacting on employees' mental health.

Organizations are lacking leadership skills and competencies in the area of workplace mental health. Senior leaders and management are ill prepared to discuss and address concerns. They are often

uncomfortable having conversations with their direct reports about mental health. Therefore, certain key areas of focus were identified in order for employers to better support workers with mental health issues. First, it is essential to educate employees, managers, and senior leaders on mental health. By creating an open dialogue about this issue, employers can begin to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health conditions and the workplace. Anti-stigma training (including self-stigma) is also essential. In order to promote the mental health and wellbeing of all employees, employers need to build psychologically healthy workplaces where employees feel they will not be judged if they disclose a mental health issue and encourage individuals to be their own advocate, so they can get the support they need in and out of the workplace in order to get better.

Table 11 - Workplace challenges in regards to supporting employees with mental health issues, identified during the roundtable discussions

Stigma and self-disclosure

- Stigma is the primary challenge when addressing mental health in the workplace and prevents employees from disclosing they have a mental health issue and seeking help
- Anti-stigma education for leaders and employees is essential to remove stigma
- Self-stigma prevents employees from admitting they have a mental health issue and seeking help
- Even within organizations that are pro-actively addressing mental health, stigma still exists. Employees who do disclose that they have a mental health condition fear they will be judged and that the disclosure will hamper their career advancement and success
- Employees can also deny and refuse to acknowledge that they might be experiencing a mental health issue which can make it very difficult for managers to direct them to resources

Prevention and accommodation

- There is a growing focus on accommodation. However, prevention is also imperative to promote mental health in the workplace, especially when workplace situations are exacerbating or creating a mental health condition
- Employers are more aware of appropriate accommodations when dealing with a physical health issue but are challenged into finding innovative solutions to situations when trying to accommodate an employee with a mental health issue
- Employers find it difficult to balance organizational demands and employee needs when trying to accommodate an employee with health conditions
- Identifying both medical and non-medical barriers that can prevent an employee from staying in the workplace (i.e., burnout) and their impacts on the individual and the organization
- Identifying and dealing with potential workplace issues that can result in, or exacerbate, mental health conditions (i.e., harassment, bullying)
- The success of policies and programs can depend on an individual's supervisor or manager. If the manager is not supportive, employees will not use the workplace resources

Education

- There is a lack of leadership skills and competencies to discuss and address concerns.
- There is a lack of understanding of mental health issues in the general population and this is transferred to the workplace. Colleagues can sometimes be unsympathetic of peers with mental health conditions. Education is required in this area; anyone can develop a mental health condition.
- Many different conditions are bucketed under the term mental health. Mental health is very broad - just like putting in place programs to better manage physical health would be very broad

CURRENT STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT WORKERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN THE WORKPLACE

Stigma, including self-stigma, can prevent employees with mental health issues from getting the help they need to get better – especially in the workplace. Therefore, employers are implementing strategies to reduce stigma at work, including education and awareness training. This education, however, also includes manager and employee training on the signs and symptoms of a mental health issue and on resources that are available if an employee experiences a mental health issue.

Employers are particularly challenged when trying to find the appropriate accommodation for an employee with a mental health issue. Employers are now collaborating with key stakeholders (e.g., employees, unions, benefit providers, EAP) to not only find appropriate accommodation measures but also to put in place supportive practices to help prevent the occurrence of mental health issues at work.

Table 12 – Strategies to support employees with mental health issues in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Stigma and self-disclosure

- Anti-stigma training, specific to managers, and communications that address issues around stigma (including self-stigma) are very useful
- Thinking about mental injury instead of mental health has helped reduce stigma. Language used around mental health in the workplace can be a good strategy to help address it
- Employers can encourage individuals with mental health challenges to be their own advocate, with the support of leadership and co-workers, by providing them with tools and resources
- Open dialogue about mental health in the workplace can help reduce the stigma

Prevention and accommodation

- Implementation of the National Standard and creation of a psychologically healthy workplace
- Collaboration between employers and unions to implement initiatives to accommodate employees with mental health issues
- Targeted programs and policies (i.e., flexible work arrangements, generous paid and unpaid leave policies, emergency leaves, EAP, health support services, wellness supports, comprehensive benefits package)
- Access to professional supports to problem solve complex issues during accommodation process
- Health services department: pays for treatment (i.e., cognitive behavioural therapy), conducts independent medical examinations with psychiatrists, and provides early access to recommended mental health treatment

Education

- Manager education can help reduce their reticence to accommodate the needs of workers with mental health issues.
- Mental Health First Aid Training
- Employers are making efforts to modify behaviours and culture through education and information sessions for leaders, front line managers, as well as employees
- Leader education on how to manage mental health issues in the workplace

THE EMPLOYER'S WISH LIST: TOOLS AND STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT WORKERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Mental health issues can result from workplace or job fit issues or can be exacerbated by the workplace. Therefore, employers identified the need for guidance to recognize workplace stressors that could have a negative impact on an employee's mental health. They require a better roadmap to help them create a mentally healthy workplace. This could include specialized training modules (e.g., anti-stigma training, impact of mental health issues on job performance and cognitive abilities) and resources for people managers on how to address complex accommodation issues. This would allow for employers to resolve challenging situations and, potentially, help employees experiencing mental health issues to recover more quickly.

Table 13 – Tools and strategies required by employers to support employees with mental health issues in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Stigma and self-disclosure

- More education is required on mental health issues to reduce stigma

Prevention and accommodation

- Disability case management before the issue escalates
- Ensure there is no gap is support between short term disability and long term disability coverage
- A mental health issue may result from workplace or job fitness issues (e.g., fundamental skill sets may be missing or may have a skill gap which creates excessive stress). Employers need to focus on prevention and identify key stressors in the organization
- Understanding an employee's cognitive abilities as well as his or her physical abilities can help with disability management. It can help understand the impact the mental health issue can have on job performance and cohesion, especially in team based work. How does this impact the individual, the team, and inter-personal relationships on a short term and long term basis? More tools and best practices would be useful in this area.
- There needs to be a better road map to develop and foster mentally healthy workplaces

Education

- Comprehensive mental health training
- Leader education and a resource they can go to find solutions to complex accommodation issues would be useful. Then, challenging situations could be solved early and strategies could also be implemented early to help the employee with a mental health issue get better

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF ALL WORKERS

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF ALL WORKERS

Some of the issues, challenges and successful strategies that were identified for the four groups of employees under focus during this Roundtable are common to all employees within a workforce. These successful practices could then be applied to address the needs of all workers. Nevertheless, context does make a difference. Employees in precarious employment arrangement (e.g., contract work, casual work, seasonal work) often do not have access to the same benefits and programs as permanent full time employees. As well, some work environments are more precarious. For example, workers in the oil sands during an economic downturn work in a stressful, rapidly changing environment that the typical office worker may not experience. When applying promising practices to different employee groups, different industries, or different work environments, it is important to remember to tailor the programs so that they suit the culture and reality within that environment.

Table 14 - Workplace challenges in addressing the needs of all employees, identified during the roundtable discussions

Workplace culture

- Getting the buy-in and visible commitment from management and senior leadership
- Changing the organizational culture so that healthy and productive work for all employees is valued
- Despite great research, there is a lack of understanding organizationally about the link between health and productivity and the importance of accommodation measures
- The hetero-normative structures in workplaces and healthcares can lead to a bias in who can receive accommodation measures
- Many organizations have programs in place that promote flexibility however the organizational culture or the management team do not support the practices. These programs are then not used.
- Integration of employer services with community services (urban versus rural)
- Sectoral and contextual differences within each workplace in how to accommodate - including precarious workers, shift workers, among others
- Gender biases can impact an employee's treatment, accommodation and recovery success

Financial and organizational costs

- Cost of interventions and solutions
- For many employers, accommodating an employee is a delicate balancing act between offering support to the employee and ensuring that organizational demands are met
- Perception that accommodations are very costly and that an employee who requires accommodations is less productive. This is in conflict with most organization's need to reduce costs, increase productivity and remain competitive.
- Supportive programs and practices can help employers attract new employees, retain critical talent, control health care costs in the long term

Prevention and accommodation

- Programs to fit the diverse needs of employees (e.g., new Canadian, ethnicity, First Nations, Métis, generational and gender differences, sexual orientation, linguistic diversity, among others)
- Difficulty to provide flexibility to workers in highly structured work environments
- Compassionate care issue: how can we better support caregivers
- Integration of employer services and community services
- Lack of skills and knowledge in problem solving
- Lack of structured process to identify needs and address them
- Understanding the triggers that cause the issues in the workplace and determining which solution is the most appropriate can be difficult for managers
- Flexible work arrangements apply well to an optimum and stable work environment but not in an economic environment under duress. (e.g., automotive, forestry, and oil and gas sectors)
- Employers would benefit from industry specific interventions for a specific need or disability (i.e., the needs of a railroad engineer with a disability may be different from an office worker with the same disability)

In general, several factors may make it more difficult for some employers to effectively offer accommodations to their employees in order to enable their healthy and productive work. These include their work context, their organizational culture, the financial costs associated with accommodations, and the absence of related policies.

Context

Workplace challenges can have a profound negative impact on all employees within a work team, a business unit, or an organization. However, the challenges can impact certain work groups and teams differently. This can make accommodation more complex. A solution that will be effective in one work environment may not have the same success in another. For instance, employees working in a precarious work environment (i.e., workers in the oil sands during economic down turn) will experience different challenges than those in thriving business sectors and the types of accommodations offered in these environments will also differ. Isolated or remote employees can also have very different needs than those working on teams with lots of face-to-face contact and may require different accommodation measures. An employee's and an employer's specific work context must therefore be taken into consideration when determining an appropriate accommodation measure.

Culture

The negative impacts of a challenging workplace culture can lead to employees participating in the "Get away with it" culture. An ineffective or hostile culture is pervasive; it can prevent employers from reaching their strategic objectives. This explains the importance ensuring that all workplace parties are held accountable for creating a supportive team or organizational culture and that there are consequences for different behaviours detrimental to the workplace culture. In some instances, the policies, processes and culture do not fit the needs of the organization. Employees working in a hostile or unsupportive work culture will be less likely to ask for an accommodation.

Financial cost

One of the main challenges in addressing the needs of all workers in the workplace is the perceived financial burden this puts on the business. Providing flexibility can incur a financial and human resources cost. For many organizations, in particular small businesses, this cost may seem overwhelming and prevent them from offering accommodations. Employers sometimes find it difficult to balance the needs of individual employees with operational demands.

Policies

While some workplaces do have policies in place to help address the needs of workers, sometimes the implementation of these policies can be challenging. There is often incongruence between stated values and observable behaviours and action. Managers are expected to have the skills needed to deal with all workplace issues but often this is not the case. Many managers have never received training to effectively manage employees who require accommodation. Even if good management training is offered, not all managers are willing to participate in these sessions.

In addition, when determining an appropriate accommodation to support the needs of an employee, organizations must also examine the effect this accommodation may have on the individual's work

team. Some employers shy away from examining the impact of an accommodation on the work team because they are concerned they will breach the accommodated employee's right to privacy. Managers can be provided with comprehensive and detailed procedures in order to prevent any lapse in confidentiality while still supporting the entire team.

Some policies can be precarious in nature and exacerbate issues in the workplace. For example, in the United Kingdom, there is no workers' compensation system and employers rarely offer short-term disability or long-term disability coverage. Roughly only 10 per cent of the workforce receives this coverage and these employees are mostly found in the public sector. In this type of legislative environment, there are no consequences for the employer who does not provide accommodations.

Failing to address these challenges in the workplace can have detrimental consequences to the organization, such as decreasing engagement and lost productivity. Failing to respond proactively can result in employees leaving the organization or reducing their resiliency and commitment to the organization. This can put a strain on the workplace bond as well. Failing to address issues can also damage and organization's reputation which can hurt an organization's ability to recruit the best talent.

CURRENT STRATEGIES IN ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF ALL EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE

Any employee may, at some point in his or her life, require accommodation measures in the workplace because of an injury, an illness or a disability. Unfortunately, the accommodation process is a challenge for many employers. Many organizations are now educating their managers and senior leaders on the importance of accommodation and the link between health and performance.

Flexible work arrangements that may have been put in place in an organization to address the specific needs of an individual (e.g., an employee with caregiving responsibilities) are also useful to all employees. They allow employees to manage their time in order to effectively balance work and personal obligations, without using sick leave to cover personal days.

Finally, comprehensive benefit plans and supportive programs and policies like EAP, wellness supports, access to health services, among others, have been identified as essential resources for older workers, employees with caregiving responsibilities, persons with disabilities, and workers with mental health issues. However, they are as essential to all employees. They offer a supportive safety net in cases of medical need and they also help employees to maintain their physical and mental health.

Table 15 – Strategies to address the needs of all employees in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Workplace culture

- Creating a workplace culture of openness and flexibility through education, awareness raising, and policies

Financial and organizational costs

- Educating managers and senior leaders on the link between health and performance
- In one organization, employees are encouraged to come forward and build the business case that they qualify for a flexible work arrangement. Individual managers may not be as open to this concept, however, preventing some employees from receiving support

Prevention and accommodation

- Comprehensive benefits and supportive programs and practices to cover a wide range of individual needs including a generous leave policy, EAP, flexible work arrangements, flexible leave policies, wellness supports, access to health services, eldercare and childcare, among others
- Tracking absences and proactively managing attendance issues to offer support in case the employee is struggling with a medical condition or a personal or family issue
- Manager training to ensure that they are trained to adequately respond to their direct reports' needs
- Ensuring managers are accountable by adding return to work key performance indicators to their performance management

THE EMPLOYER'S WISH LIST: TOOLS AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF ALL EMPLOYEES

The Roundtable participants reported that, in order to better address the needs of all employees, employers required information on how to create a more supportive organizational culture that values performance over face time and which provides flexibility in how and when employees can do their work. Since stigma can be attached to using certain workplace resources (i.e., employees can be seen as being weaker because they need an additional support), information on how to reduce stigma would also be useful to employers.

It is important for employers to accommodate employees with special needs – and more information is required in this area – however it is also important to focus on illness, injury and disability prevention. Information on this topic would be useful to employers.

Finally, in order to make the most informed decisions, employers also require evidence-based guidelines on the return to work process, the accommodation process, disability management, and effective interventions in the workplace. It would be useful for this information to be industry or sector specific.

Table 16 – Tools and strategies required by employers to address the needs of all employees in the workplace, identified during the roundtable discussions

Workplace culture

- Education and communication is key
- Guidance on how to create a culture of flexibility
- Insights on how to promote a culture where employees self-disclose
- Examples on how to create a culture where there is no stigma around using the benefits or programs offered by the organization. Some people, for example, use vacation for caregiver reasons. How can employers ensure that people use their vacation to rest and recuperate?

Prevention and accommodation

- Focus on prevention over accommodation
- Identifying industry specific challenges and effective solutions
- Federal or centralized resources for guidance on strategic interventions and risk process and technology
- Better evidence-based guidelines on return-to-work that better prepares the employee to ensure that he or she has meaningful and productive work
- Benefits plan design that goes beyond group insurance
- Identification of best interventions, not necessarily research-based, but evaluated with a criteria sensitive to the type of organization
- Concrete education for managers on how to react in certain situations

THE HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE WORK INITIATIVE

HOW COULD THESE TOOLS AND STRATEGIES BETTER SERVE EMPLOYER NEEDS?

A major concern reported by participants of the Roundtable was the difficulty in finding the appropriate accommodation for each specific individual's needs that would allow the organization to meets its operational objectives and not cause undue hardship to the individual's work team. Therefore, strategies to enable employers to more proactively identify the needs of an employee and systemic accommodation approaches or processes would be extremely useful. It would be beneficial to analyze similarities and differences between employee groups, particularly in regards to strategies and successes to determine if strategies developed for one employee group could be adapted for other employees. Education and support for employers to help them navigate and problem-solve the various workplace challenges they encounter would be appreciated. Some participants reported that some government policies related to the accommodation of employees create difficulties for employers and that more realistic government policies that do not create undue hardship in organizations were also necessary. Managers and senior leaders must manage many different portfolios and time is always an issue. It would better serve their needs to ensure that the programs are less of an administrative chore.

Apart from accommodation, employers find it difficult to recruit and retain employees with disabilities. It would be beneficial if tools and strategies could be created to help providers and agencies assist employers to recruit and retain employees with disabilities, without necessarily relying on government subsidies. Positive steps could be taken to ensure that educational institutions and other stakeholders equip people with disabilities more effectively with the skills and competencies that are presently needed in the Canadian workplace so they can obtain meaningful and well paid employment.

Several employers are presently in the process of implementing the National Standard in order to help build a psychologically safe workplace and better support the mental health needs of their employees. The implementation of the Standard requires a continual review of the effectiveness of the strategy. It would be beneficial to these employers if a framework to implement, review and evaluate the adoption of the National Standards could be created.

In 2008, the British Columbia government instituted the Disability Management Excellence Initiative to encourage BC public and private sector employers to adopt an international best practice benchmark standard in disability management and return to work. This initiative produced a return on investment of 5:1 in the healthcare sector alone. Many Canadian employers require more information and strategies to implement an effective disability management program in their workplaces. Could the Disability Management Excellence Initiative, or something similar, be scaled up to assist all Canadian employers implement these programs?

Responding to the diverse needs of employees can be overwhelming for employers. It might be beneficial to create an opportunity for employers to partner together on this issue so they can resolve common problems and situations together.

WHAT DID THE PARTICIPANTS TAKE AWAY FROM THE ROUNDTABLE?

The Roundtable reminded participants and gave them an appreciation for the strategies already in place in Canada to enable healthy and productive work for all employees. There are many good practices already being implemented. They agreed, however, that it would be very beneficial to connect directly with researchers so that they can get the latest evidence-based, practical research on which to base their practices. Employers need concrete tangible outcomes that can have an impact on the workplace. Employers know which practices they want to implement in their workplaces to better support their employees but they need the skills to tailor the programs and initiatives to make them effective. They also need the ability to measure the financial impact of these programs on their organizations.

Union leaders believe that an integrative approach with researchers would be beneficial to the Canadian workplace. Some unions represent millions of workers. When research is done, worker organizations should be contacted to help determine the direction and scope of the research and see if there is an opportunity to partner with the unions. Unions work alongside employers and, if there is union support initially, employers will find it easier to implement new programs and initiatives.

Whatever initiatives or strategies are researched or created, the researchers will have to pay particular attention to the dissemination of the findings. Employers can find it very difficult and time consuming to find appropriate or related academic articles. It is important for employers to gain knowledge from the findings so that it does not simply end up on a shelf.

In particular, it would be useful if the research could help resolve some the societal or workplace challenges faced by some employee groups. For example, in the United Kingdom, individuals with a disability who are also unemployed are 40 per cent more likely to commit suicide than the rest of the population. As well, unemployment of people with disabilities is over 50 per cent. What can be done to resolve these issues?

RELEVANCE OF WORK AND HEALTH INITATIVE TO EMPLOYERS

Participants of the Roundtable agreed that collaboration between academic researchers, employers, unions and employee or employer advocate associations was essential to ensure that new findings and innovative thinking were implemented in the workplace. This was found to be important for Canada to remain competitive. In particular, the Work and Health Initiative could:

- Provide research on industry specific or job specific strategies or programs,
- Encourage dissemination of the findings and the exchange of practical knowledge,
- Evaluate and identify best and promising practices, both nationally and internationally, and
- Provide evidence-based data on the outcomes of the programs to help employers build the business case for being more proactive in their approach to employee health.

Table 17 – How could the Work and Health Initiative be relevant to employers?

Culture and context

- Canadian based research with solutions that are workable in Canadian culture
- Industry-specific research that describes best work environment to implementing policies, programs, and strategies to address: work culture, business model, labour management, fiscal reality, external policies and priorities, regulatory regime, incentives and disincentives
- Research that is focused on problem solving one of the challenges that were identified during the Roundtable with an outcome based approach that results in a win/win situation for all
- Research to understand the challenges faced by employers
- Guidelines or framework to standardize the implementation of return to work programs that take into account different types of work environments
- Research on a cross-section of organizations covering different industries to determine their primary driver (economic, personal, regulatory) to implement the practices in question
- Research on how changes in government, and therefore ideological changes, can bring about changes to benefit plans/coverage and the impact they have on individuals in vulnerable positions (e.g., sporadic spikes in suicide rates)

Knowledge exchange

- Setting up networks for data exchange on best practices specific to workplaces
- The research must be translated into practical training, coaching and mentoring
- There is a need for effective knowledge translation and exchange on how to accommodate workers with disabilities or with mental health issues.
- Development of a practical tool-kit to support management systems so that the research does not exist in isolation but that its relevance extends to the real workplace

Best practices

- Best practices versus emerging practices
- Pilot project to test interventions: what type of interventions will have the most impact on workplaces?
- Standards of measurement: issues, descriptions, progress evaluation
- Identification of effective workplace programs and tools that will have positive results and influence government policies
- Effective international models that can be benchmarked and could be applied to the Canadian workplace
- Research on how the health system and employment benefits can better ensure healthy workplace

Business case

- The research should demonstrate the value or the ROI of being proactive in accommodations and enabling healthy work
- The research could determine which steps really make a difference in the workplace. Employers are investing more money in their employees. Is this resulting in better business outcomes?

Particular relevance for employees with disabilities

- Research to improve the business case for the recruitment and greater employment of people with disabilities
- Information about successful efforts to increase the meaningful employment of people with disabilities, and the gaps (e.g., cultural views about the employability of people with disabilities) that inhibit it
- Comparative assessment of organizations that have successful return-to-work and disability management programs
- Standardized, voluntary return to work standard for different types work and work environments (e.g., a CSA Group/BNQ standard, disseminated through CCOHS)
- The creation of a practical toolkit, guide, or reference tool on how to accommodate the various needs and situations of workers with disabilities
- Measurement of the effectiveness of government programs, including work subsidies, and identifying any improvements to programs that will help people with disabilities find meaningful employment

Particular relevance for workers with mental health issues

- Mental health intervention effectiveness for at risk populations in and out of the workplace including: post-secondary students/faculty, first responders, police, fire, paramedic, health care providers, LGBTQ
- Integrate knowledge translation/knowledge transfer on mental health
- Types and costs of accommodation measures for employees with mental health issues(from minor to severe conditions)
- Guide on how to assist an employee who does not recognize his or her own mental health issue
- Identification and evaluation of practices to create a mentally healthy workplace
- Research in the area of mental health initiatives in the workplace, and how to address workplace issues becoming disability-related matters
- A research project on the impacts of leader education to support mental health needs in the workplace
- Strategies and techniques to implement the National Standard, including cost-benefit analysis
- Improved cognitive abilities assessment

WILLINGNESS TO BECOME INVOLVED IN THE WORK AND HEALTH INITIATIVE

Roundtable participants showed interest in being involved in outcome-based research that is meant to solve actual challenges experienced in the workplace. They want to have the opportunity to participate in the research from the start, and look forward to the invitation to do so.

Organizations would be more willing to be involved in research where they can see tangible results of the initiatives. For research related to workers with disabilities in particular, agencies would like more input on, and results from, research initiatives. Front line agencies can provide valuable input into the challenges that people with disabilities have to participate in the labour force.

Roundtable participants are interested in participating in research that focuses on accommodation, but also on prevention of health issues. Organizations often have internal information that can be shared with researchers and are often not asked for that information because the research team does not know the data is available.

CONCLUSION

There are many issues facing workplaces today and the Work and Health Initiative is a proactive approach from CIHR and SSHRC to begin to address some of these challenges. The discussion during the roundtable focused on the diverse workplace needs of older workers, workers with caregiving responsibilities, people with disabilities and workers with mental health issues.

Older workers are nearing retirement. Employers are attempting to put in place programs to retain them as long as possible in the workplace but also to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from these

experienced employees to their replacements. In some organizations, strategies have been implemented to create pools of retired employees with critical organizational knowledge who can be contracted to return to the workplace if a gap in knowledge is observed. Mature workers, however, often experience more chronic health issues and have more difficulty adapting to the changing, technologically advanced workplaces of today. This can be a challenge to employers who attempt to accommodate their needs.

Workers with caregiver responsibilities often experience excessive stress and strain trying to balance their work demands and their personal or family obligations. In order to better support their needs, employers are implementing more flexibility in their workplaces: both in how and where the work can be done. Comprehensive leave programs can assist these employees to better balance their obligations, and can prevent them from using sick leave in order to do so.

Although they represent a highly educated pool of talent, people with disabilities still experience barriers when trying to find employment in today's workplace. Unconscious bias and preconceived notions about their abilities, their productivity, their turnover rates, and their absenteeism can prevent them from finding meaningful employment and advancing in their careers. Education and awareness training in the workplace can help reduce this stigma. Appropriate accommodations do not have to be costly but can assist workers with disabilities in maximizing their productivity at work.

Finally, workers with mental health issues also experience stigma in the workplace. Self-stigma can also prevent them from being successful at work. Education and awareness training can, once again, help alleviate this stigma. As well, since it often takes a significant amount of time for an individual with a mental health issue to get the proper diagnosis and treatment, some organizations are having great success in providing and paying for access to diagnosis and treatment for workers with mental health issues. Employers must be aware of the impact of their workplaces on an employee's mental health. When the organizational culture is unsupportive or hostile, employees can develop mental health issues or exacerbate existing conditions. On the other hand, the creation of a psychologically healthy and safe work environment can help protect an employee's mental health status. Therefore, workplace culture is also a focus when employers try to better support employees with mental health issues.

These employee challenges can also have a negative impact on an organization and four themes emerged during the Roundtable discussions. First, challenges negatively impact workplaces in a variety of ways and **context** is very important to keep in mind. Situations facing precarious workers are much different than office workers, and different industries face different challenges. The **culture** of the workplace plays a big role in these challenges. As well, it can also affect the way a manager will try to assist, or not, an employee in need. The perceived **financial cost** of accommodations is a major issue for some employers and more research is required in this area to identify cost-effective yet successful accommodation measures targeted to specific conditions or workplace situations. **Policies** are only effective if the organization's culture supports them. For example, an employer can implement flexible work arrangements to better support the needs of employees but if the employee's manager does not believe in these initiatives, employees will not participate in them.

While there are many challenges facing workplaces today to provide healthier outcomes for employees, roundtable participants wanted to collaborate with the academic researchers in order to find practical solutions. They reported that they required practical, outcome-based research focused on the entire health spectrum: from health promotion and injury/illness prevention, early identification and accommodation, through to disability management and return to work of employee with health conditions or with family/personal obligations.

APPENDIX A. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A full participant list is available as a separate document.

APPENDIX B. PRE-ROUNDTABLE SURVEY RESULTS

(n=16)

1. **How is your workforce (or the workforce you provide service to/advocate on behalf of) changing?**

   The workforce demographics are changing:
   - Higher proportion of employees over 50 / mature workers (n=4)
     - Resulting increase in incidence of chronic diseases
     - While there is recognition that the employer must show compassion and willingness to accommodate employees, both at the hiring and to retain employees, employers are challenged with supporting a "stay at work" focus and accommodations to support employees in the workplace
     - People with disabilities represent a significant body of untapped labour but their level of employment success has not changed significantly over the past few years.
   - Bigger gaps between generations in the workplace (younger and older workers) (n=2)
   - Workforce shifting to a younger demographic over time (n=1)
   - More educated (n=2)
     - However, the workplace also has a greater need for specific technical skill. A greater need for innovative thinkers and change management capacity.

   Furthermore, work is becoming more precarious.
   - Higher workplace injuries and fatalities
   - Higher cancer rates amongst blue collar workers
   - An across-the-board increase in mental injuries (including violence and harassment)

   In unionized environments, new workers are reluctant to step up to roles within the union or to exercise their rights such as the right to refuse unsafe work.

   Some employees feel underemployed and have expectations for greater challenges at work. However, overall, the labor market is becoming more and more demanding. This is leading to:
   - A labor force having greater difficulties adapting to these changes (n=2)
   - An important increase in employees on sick leave and on long- term disability (n=2)
     - The result is employers are losing experienced employees all the while having greater difficulties finding people to replace them

   Workers want to feel valued at work - not only in terms of the work they do but also in terms of their value to the overall organization. Their expectations are also increasing in relation to:
   - Flexibility at work, work/life balance (n=3)
     - Employees are challenged by a lack of worklife balance, eldercare and childcare
   - Benefits, vacation (n=1)

In recent years, the focus of employers has also been on:
- A commitment to safety (n=1)
- A commitment to diversity in the workplace (n=1)
- Flexibility around hours of work, working from home, flex Fridays (n=1)
- A focus on wellness programs (n=1)
- A focus on providing awareness around mental health (n=1)

The retirement of baby boomers and the resulting loss of valuable knowledge in the workplace have also lead to a focus on recruiting younger workers and retaining older employees. There is also an increased awareness of the economic and social impact of mental and physical impairments and their associated competitive and human resources consequences for organizations.

However, the majority of employers are not equipped to deal with employees experiencing mental health problems. In particular, leaders are lacking training/competencies on how to navigate mental health concerns of their direct reports.

Finally, technology is changing the way we work and communicate. There are less social exchanges between co-workers in the workplace which can affect an employee's social support network. Some employers are also investing more into digitization resulting in a workforce that is more competent with technology.

2. How are you adapting to / accommodating this changing workforce?

The changing workforce has led to a focus on:
- Recruitment (n=5)
    - Benefit eligibility commencing the first month after hire, and increasing vacation entitlement
    - Attempting to match skills to positions and engaging the workforce through various means
    - Targeting specific skill sets (e.g. tech-savvy)
    - Targeting new markets to find specific talent
- Retention and leadership development (n=4)
    - To increase the value proposition for employees with critical skills and to foster innovation and productivity, in a healthy fashion
    - Education and training of leaders to help them better support employees
    - Education on the impacts of leadership: how the role of the leader impacts wellness at work and links to a psychologically healthy work environment
    - They are focusing on face to face and direct education.
    - Early succession planning strategies has helped resolve the loss of valuable knowledge in the workplace with the retirement of baby boomers.
    - It is important to transfer knowledge and skills - and mentor new employees – before a mature worker retires.

- Early intervention and wellness in the workplace (n=4)
  - Identify medical and non-medical barriers and issues early so that interventions can help shorten the severity of conditions and the duration of absences from work
  - The development of educational and return to work / disability management program measurement resources to identify organizational challenges but also provide insights on how to improve programs and policy
  - Make wellness a priority in the workplace.
- Office design, virtual office and flexible work arrangements (n=4)
  - Policies, benefits, and other programs have been introduced to facilitate a more flexible work environment that acknowledges exceptional performance and innovation.
  - Telecommuting
  - Part time and contract roles
  - Changes to work arrangements and space to accommodate innovation and to attract workers (both across Canada and internationally)

Employers need to be flexible in order to accommodate the needs of employees at different stages of life and career. A strategy is required that touches the interests and needs of all generations of employees. There is still much work to be done to equip management with concrete, practical tools to assist employees while respecting the needs of the co-workers.

3. **What are your organization's key challenges (current and future) with respect to accommodating the hiring and retention of:**
    a. **Older workers:**
        - Older workers are looking for stability and sustainability and can struggle with the rapid and continual change in organizations today. (n=2)
        - Employers are moving to minimum standard on numerous fronts in collective agreements which can make older workers leave the workplace sooner (n=1)
        - Older workers are struggling more with non-occupational illnesses/injuries and return to work and accommodation is challenging. (n=1)
        - Higher health care costs (n=1)
        - Recruitment of talent to replace retiring workers and concerns about the career advancement of younger workers. (n=1)
        - Offer a stimulating environment, not only based on career opportunities (n=1)
        - Average retirement age is increasing. Employers are adapting policies and programs to keep employees longer and to bring back retirees. (n=1)

    b. **Workers with caregiving responsibilities:**

    This is a current area of focus for several employers. Some challenges were identified to accommodating the needs of workers with caregiving responsibilities. In particular:
        - Balancing the demands of the organization with individual needs. (n=4)
          - Need to travel
          - Need to work outside regular hours
          - Scheduling and coverage for employees
            - Who need to take time off
            - Who need flexible work arrangements

- Increased prevalence (n=1)
  - Spouses, as well as parents, children, grandchildren – given aging workforce and underemployment of adult children
- Developing affordable workplace supports and approaches (n=1)

However, some factors have been found to be helpful in accommodating workers with caregiving responsibilities:
- Collective agreements do offer family-related leaves (n=2)
- Since this situation occurs only from time to time, it is dealt with on a one to one basis. (n=1)

c. **Persons with disabilities:**

Several participants agreed that there should not be differentiation in the approach or availability of supportive programs for employees with physical and mental disabilities.

Some workplace challenges were identified to accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities:
- The stigmatization faced by, and myths about, persons with disabilities in the labour force (n=3)
  - Related productivity, absenteeism, turnover, skill, accommodation costs
  - Particularly for employees with mental health issues
- Finding appropriate accommodations, problem solving complex challenges (n=3)
- Balancing their accommodation needs with the work to be done (n=2)
  - Understanding the appropriate accommodation that is needed and the potential impacts on productivity
- Increased incidence of chronic conditions requiring accommodations (n=1)

However, some factors have been found to be helpful
- Employers and Unions have accelerated accommodations (n=1)
- There is a culture of accommodation in certain organizations when this circumstance arises. (n=1)

d. **Workers with mental health challenges:**

Mental health in the workplace is a critical area of focus for many participants. The respondents identified the following key challenges with respect to accommodating the hiring and retention of workers with mental health challenges:
- Stigma (n=4)
  - Employees do not seek help for fear that they may lose their jobs
- Ensuring that the accommodation is appropriate and problem solving complex challenges (n=2)
  - Ensuring that they are provided the necessary support so they are successful in performing their day-to-day work activities
- Lack of leadership skills and competencies to discuss and address concerns (n=2)

- Incidence is rising in workplaces (n=1)
- Balancing their accommodation needs with the work to be done (n=1)
- Identifying both medical and non-medical barriers and their impacts (n=1)
- Identifying and dealing with potential workplace issues (n=1)

However, the following positive developments have been observed recently:
- There are strong initiatives underway between employers and Unions to accommodate employees with mental health issues (n=1)
- Employers are making efforts to modify behaviours and culture through education and information sessions for leaders, front line managers, as well as employees (n=1)

4. **What tools and strategies is your organization using to enable the participation of:**

a. **Older workers:**
   - Education (n=2)
     - To reduce their reticence in accommodating the needs of older workers
     - Around safe practices, wellness, health eating
   - Mentorship roles (n=2)
   - Effective change management strategies and internal communication (n=1)
   - Creating diverse teams with a balance of younger and older workers, diverse backgrounds, etc. (n=1)
   - Promotion of psychologically healthy workplaces (n=2)
     - Adoption of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace
   - Flexible work arrangements, part time hours (n=2)
   - Clear job requirements (n=1)
   - Supports for wellness (n=1)
   - Offer stimulating but not overwhelming work environment (n=1)
   - Take into consideration their work experience and identify transferable skills (n=1)
   - Policy advocacy (n=1)
     - Caregiving
     - Income security

b. **Workers with caregiving responsibilities:**
   - Policies and benefits specifically geared to assist individuals who are caregivers (n=6)
     - Flexible work arrangements
     - Generous leave policies
       - Both paid and unpaid
     - Employee Assistance Program
     - Mental health first aid
     - Possibility to work from home
     - Support services
   - Education (n=1)
     - To reduce their reticence in accommodating the needs of workers with caregiving responsibilities

- Encourage dialogue (n=1)
- Adoption of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (n=1)
- Policy advocacy (n=1)
    - Caregiving
    - Income security

c. **Persons with disabilities:**
- Policies and benefits specifically geared to assist persons with disabilities (n=7)
    - Flexible work arrangements
    - Early and Safe Return to Work program
        - Graduated hours, Modification in work tasks
    - Generous leave policies
        - Both paid and unpaid
        - Emergency leaves
    - Employee Assistance Program
    - Mental health first aid
    - Health support services available even without a disability claim
    - Wellness supports
    - Comprehensive benefits package
    - Entire office space equipped to accommodation standards
    - Offer accommodation measures at meetings
- Education (n=3)
    - To reduce their reticence in accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities
    - Awareness programs directed at employees, employers, and Unions
- Encourage dialogue and networking (n=2)
- Promotion of a psychologically healthy workplace (n=2)
    - Adoption of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace
- Senior leadership awareness and commitment (n=1)
    - Senior leaders recognize the all individuals have capabilities and that it is important to put strategies in place to assist persons with disabilities
- Increased presence in the workplace (n=1)
- Support offered to employers (n=1)
- Influencing government policies (n=1)
- Policy advocacy (n=1)
    - Caregiving
    - Income security

d. **Workers with mental health challenges:**
- Policies and benefits specifically geared to assist persons with disabilities (n=7)
    - Flexible work arrangements
    - Generous leave policies
        - Both paid and unpaid
        - Emergency leaves
    - Employee Assistance Program

- o Mental health first aid
- o Health support services available even without a disability claim
- o Wellness supports
- o Comprehensive benefits package
- o Access to professional supports to problem solve complex issues
- o Offer accommodations
- o Health services department
  - Pays for treatment (i.e., cognitive behavioural therapy)
  - Conducts independent medical examinations with psychiatrists
  - Provide early access to recommended mental health treatment
- Education (n=5)
  - o To reduce their reticence in accommodating the needs of workers with mental health challenges
  - o Anti-stigma training
    - Specific manager training and workplace communications that address issues of stigma (including self-stigma)
  - o Leader education on how to manage mental health issues in the workplace
  - o Awareness training for all employees
- Promotion of a psychologically healthy workplace (n=2)
  - o Adoption of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace
- Encourage individuals with mental health challenges to be own advocate, with the support of leadership and co-workers (n=1)
- Encourage dialogue (n=1)
- Ask all persons at the time of hire to self disclose, if there is a need for accommodation (n=1)

5. **How could these tools and strategies better serve your needs?**
   - Adoption of the National Standard requires continual, ongoing review and implementation
   - Success at the bargaining table on these issues
   - Realistic policies
     - o If programs are administrative obstacles for employers, they will not be successful
   - More proactive identification of needs and accommodation approaches
   - Education and supports to navigate the various workplace challenges
   - Tools and strategies to help providers assist employers recruit and retain employees with disabilities, without reliance on government subsidies
   - Positive steps to help educational institutions and other stakeholders more effectively equip people with disabilities to obtain meaningful and well paid employment
   - Tools and "out of the box" examples of how to retain these employees
   - The British Columbia government's 2008 Disability Management Excellence initiative produced a return on investment of 5:1 in the healthcare sector alone
   - Responding to the diverse needs of employees can be overwhelming for employers. Employers could partner together to deal with common issues.
   - Connect more efficiently with educational institutions so that employees are better prepared to deal with issues around wellness, mental health, among others, before entering the workforce.

6. **What would make a research initiative on work and health relevant to your goals, needs and challenges?**
   - To understand the challenges faced by employers that make some of them implement minimum standards
   - Studies related to the effectiveness of strategies and techniques to fully implement the National Standard and establish best practices, including cost-benefit analysis
   - Effective programs will have positive results. Research initiatives can serve to identify these programs and influence government policies
   - A research project on the impacts of leader education to support mental health needs in the workplace
   - Research in the area of mental health initiatives in the workplace, and how to address workplace issues becoming disability-related matters
   - Research how the health system and employment benefits can better work together to ensure healthy workplace
   - Clarifying and identifying practices on creating a healthy workplace and a workplace that accommodates its employees with mental illness
   - Tools in situations where an employee is unable or unwilling to recognize their own mental illness
   - Types and costs of accommodations for employees with mental illness (from minor to severe conditions)
   - Information about what is working in the efforts to increase the meaningful employment of people with disabilities, and the gaps (e.g. cultural views about the employability of people with disabilities) that inhibit it
   - Measuring the effectiveness of government programs, including work subsidies, and identifying any recommendations for improvements to programs that will help people with disabilities find meaningful employment
   - Guide / reference tool for employers on how to accommodate different needs and situations
   - "Mining" of data associated with the return to work / disability management assessment protocols would not only offer an evidence-based understanding of the key challenges facing Canadian employers but, due to the broad international adoption of the assessment protocol, offer opportunities for both industry specific, national and international benchmark comparisons.
   - The research needs to be focused. Employers are investing more and more money into their employees. Is this resulting in better business outcomes? It would be useful to determine which steps really make a difference.

Insights. Understanding. Impact.

The Conference Board
of Canada