



Publishers support promotion of mental health on the job

By Kerry MacGregor
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Newspaper publishers have added their voices to a growing chorus asking for a national research agenda on mental health in the workplace.

The members of the group called Publishers for Mental Health are to release a statement tomorrow at a roundtable asking for an ambitious mental health in the workplace agenda.

The rising rates of mental illness are an "unheralded crisis" say the four publishers in a statement. Only one in five Canadians who needs mental health care is actually getting it, they say.

"This is not just a health care problem, a funding problem or a government problem. Although it is all of those," said the statement. "This is societal problem and demands a response from society as a whole -- including employers."

Citizen publisher Jim Orban, one of the four publishers, said Ottawa is well on its way toward establishing an infrastructure that will help local employers encourage and maintain wellness among their employees.

"Sometimes the workplace is the only place that symptoms can be detected," said Mr. Orban.

The publishers' group so far includes Mr. Orban, Toronto Sun Publisher and CEO Neil Fowler, Toronto Star publisher and CEO Michael Goldbloom, and National Post Publisher Les Pyette.

As both employers and local information sources, says Mr. Orban, newspapers that are associated with Publishers for Mental Health will help raise awareness.

Ottawa's involvement in the initiative goes back to a Greater Ottawa Chamber of Commerce luncheon where guest speaker Bill Wilkerson, co-founder and CEO of the roundtable, was invited to discuss workplace wellness with 150 business leaders in July 2004.

Ottawa Mayor Bob Chiarelli's Council on Healthy and Productive Workplaces was formed shortly after.

Mayor Chiarelli's task force will help area businesses identify and cope with wellness concerns such as work overload and time pressure.



Stress may have been known as a "silent killer" in the past, but with the help of Ottawa's task force, it will be something that is well discussed and monitored in the future, said Mr. Orban.

"It's not just a health care issue," says Mr. Orban. "We've got to work with our employees to address the problem."

Mr. Orban has pledged \$10,000 to the task force and offered space in the Citizen to help raise awareness.

The city hopes to raise \$120,000 to \$150,000 annually to fund a secretariat that will develop a budget and plan for the municipality's wellness initiatives.

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