

# The voices of mental health in the workplace. Listen carefully.

Managers and employees across Canada have been asked to reflect on their personal and workplace experience with depression. This month, they took part in a survey commissioned as a public service by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.

Ipsos-Reid conducted the study, and the findings are surprising and groundbreaking:

- **16% of managers and 18% of non-managers say they've been diagnosed by a doctor for depression. (Previous studies set this at under 10%).**
- **Of those Canadian workers who cope with bouts of depression and may require time off work, most of these employees are off for over a week – 20% are off for one month or more.**
- **Managers say that the employees with depression who report directly to them cost their company, on average, \$14,500 a year in reduced productivity on the job and \$20,000 being**

**off work altogether. The per employee cost for reduced productivity is \$7100 and for absenteeism, it is almost \$10,000. (Previous studies estimated the per-employee cost of depression was less than \$2,000).**

- **More and more employees are willing to tell their boss about their depression, and nearly 7 out of 10 managers are willing to accommodate time off.**
- **While 'workplace stress' is cited as a major factor in causing anxiety, employees feel that depression is brought on more by a single life event, such as a divorce or a death in the family.**

At the heart of these findings are two facts: the workplace is unfolding in a manner more friendly to mental health. This is progress. But in responding to employees suffering mental illness, managers are working with virtually no training and no policies to guide them.

The findings also say this: a very small percentage of employees turn to the HR department when in distress.

In this survey, employers will hear the voices of Canadians who live and work with depression, and who struggle to meet their job and family obligations.

More than numbers, the survey sheds new light on an old and, until now, intractable problem. Depression thrives on the darkness of stigma, ignorance and shame. Now, that darkness seems to be fading.

The goal of the Mental Health Commission of Canada is to improve the quality of life for Canadians living and working with mental illness. The results of this survey support that mission.

We urge employers to do the same and listen to the voices of mental health in the workplace.

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