

## **Mentally Unhealthy Workplaces Taking An Enormous Toll in Canada**

**Toronto (May 1, 2008)** – Responding to a new survey showing workplace stress, burnout and depression are on the rise in Canada, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is urging employers across the country to accept greater responsibility for the mental health of their employees.

“Employers must do more to promote a healthy work/life balance, otherwise they, their workers, our economy and society will suffer serious consequences,” warned Dr. Taylor Alexander, CEO of the CMHA.

According to a survey commissioned by Desjardins Financial Security (DFS) and released today in advance of Mental Health Week (May 5-11), an astonishing 83 per cent of Canadians report showing up for work while sick or exhausted an average of six times in the past year. Meanwhile, 89 per cent report that instances of stress-related mental health problems have been increasing over the years.

“Stress, burnout, and depression create huge fallout in the workplace that far exceeds taking a sick day here and there. They are part of a continuum leading to serious illness,” noted Dr. Alexander. “It is estimated that more than two million employees in Canada suffer mental illness at any given time. The economic, social and personal impact of mentally unhealthy workplaces is staggering.”

According to the Conference Board of Canada, workers who reported a high degree of stress balancing their work and family life missed 7.2 days of work each year – *double* the absentee rate of those who reported very little stress.

Employees suffering clinical depression are off the job an average of 40 days, and mental health claims (particularly depression) are the fastest growing category for days lost to disability in Canada.

Many companies fail to recognize the toll this is taking. By not addressing these problems in the workplace, they are incurring increased days lost, reduced productivity, and higher disability and benefits costs.

“In addition, businesses are facing projected shortages of skilled workers in the future and they will have to use their resources in the most effective way. Part of that is ensuring that their workforce is mentally healthy,” Dr. Alexander stated.

As well, mentally unhealthy workplaces place another burden on an already-stressed healthcare system. Research shows that depression is linked to heart disease, diabetes, and autoimmune disorders.

“For all of these reasons, we’re calling on employers to do more – to make mental health their business,” said Dr. Alexander.

CMHA helps employers with advice and counseling through various programs, including **Mental Health Works**. A similar program called the **Copernicus Project** is based in Alberta.

Some of the steps that employers can take include:

- Offer flexible hours
- Allow workers to work from home where possible and appropriate
- Permit those returning from a leave to gradually build up to a full- time schedule
- Train managers on how to support work/life balance
- Encourage staff to stay home with sick children or elderly relatives when needed
- Eliminate unnecessary meetings
- Communicate expectations clearly to staff
- Allow staff to control their own priorities as much as possible

### **About the Survey**

SOM Surveys, Opinion Polls and Marketing conducted the survey on behalf of Desjardins Financial Security between February 7<sup>th</sup> and March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008. In total, 1,594 interviews were conducted with a representative sample of Canadian adults. The data has a maximum sampling error of +2.6% at a 95 % confidence level.

### **About the Canadian Mental Health Association**

The Canadian Mental Health Association National Office is a leading national voluntary organization within the mental health sector. For more than 90 years, it has existed to promote the mental health of all people in Canada, and to serve mental health consumers, their families and friends through education, public awareness, research, advocacy and direct services. In addition to its National office, the CMHA has 12 provincial and territorial Divisions and more than 135 Branches and Regions in communities across Canada.

### **About Desjardins Financial Security**

Desjardins Financial Security, a subsidiary of Desjardins Group, the largest integrated cooperative financial group in Canada, specializes in group and individual life and health insurance, and savings products and services. Every day, over 5 million Canadians rely on Desjardins Financial Security to ensure their financial security. With a staff of over 3,700 employees, Desjardins Financial Security manages and administers close to \$20 billion in assets from offices in major cities across the country, including

Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec, Levis, Halifax and St. John's.

– 30 –

To find more information about mental health, visit [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca). To view Desjardins Financial Security's survey, visit [www.healthiscool.ca](http://www.healthiscool.ca)

**For more information or to arrange an interview, contact:**

Rachel Sa  
PR POST  
416-777-0368  
rachel@prpost.ca

Mental Health Works  
Mary Ann Baynton  
cell 905-334-7724  
or  
Renée Ouimet  
613-737-7791 x 124

Copernicus Project  
Jill Armstrong  
403-297-1410

## The Cost of Mental Health Issues to Canadian Workplaces

**Stress can be the beginning of something more serious – and most Canadian workers are feeling the pressure.**

- Desjardins Financial Security's survey reveals that 89% of Canadians find that their working environment is increasingly stressful.
- The survey also found that 83% of Canadians reported to work exhausted or sick an average of six times in the past year.
- According to Statistics Canada, employees who considered most of their days to be quite a bit or extremely stressful were over 3 times more likely to suffer a major depressive episode, compared with those who reported low levels of general stress.
- A study published in the journal *Chronic Diseases in Canada* estimated that the Canadian economy loses \$30 billion each year in direct and indirect costs related to mental health issues.
- The Conference Board of Canada found that workers who reported a high degree of stress balancing their work and family life missed 7.2 days of work each year, while those who reported very little stress only missed an average of 3.6 days.
- According to the World Health Organization, depression will be the second leading cause of disability by 2020, behind only cardiovascular disease.
- In terms of prescription drug claims, a study by Cubic Health demonstrated that mental illness represented the second most expensive therapeutic category and the second most utilized therapeutic category for employers, behind only cardiovascular drugs.
- A variety of studies have shown that for every dollar spent on a Corporate Wellness Program, the returns have been cost savings of up to \$10.10 in the areas of decreased absenteeism, fewer sick days, reduced WSIB/WCB claims, lowered health and insurance costs, and improvements to employee performance and productivity.
- The Canadian Institute of Stress found that stress control programs alone can result in an 18% reduction in absences, 32% reduction in grievances, 52% reduction in disability time, 7% improvement in productivity, and 13% improvement in service quality.