



CANADIAN MENTAL  
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POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE

# MEDIA RELEASE

## Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta Division

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Edmonton, Alberta, May 7, 2007–

## WHAT IS NOT GETTING TALKED ABOUT AT THE WATERCOOLER: MENTAL HEALTH

*This National Mental Health Week focus on your employees*

To officially launch National Mental Health Week (May 7 – 13), the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and Desjardins Financial Security today released a study that shows that mental health continues to be a *taboo issue* in the workplace. The study found that only 34% of employees report having readily access to services and tools at work to help with mental health issues.

The study found that many employers, supervisors and employees are uncertain how to manage or help colleagues experiencing a mental health issue. Just over half (51%) of employees who learned that their co-worker had a mental health issue turned to no one about it for information or support. Only eight percent of employees turned to their immediate supervisor, while only seven percent turned to an EAP program.

The silence surrounding mental health in the workplace is particularly alarming considering how prevalent the issue is at work. Approximately 43% of Canadians have had a colleague who has had a mental health issue and 34% have had a co-worker leave work for a period of time because of a mental health issue. Interestingly, 26% of those respondents noted that their colleague never came back to work.

The uncertainty on how to handle mental health issues continues even after an employee returns from a leave. The study found that 57% of respondents noted that their workplace did nothing to help their colleagues return to work after being on a leave because of a mental health issue.

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Some businesses are starting to respond to mental health issues in the workplace.

“We are on the cusp of some major changes,” says Glenn Thompson, CEO of CMHA, National. “Businesses are beginning to recognize that this issue has economic implications. Particularly given the competitive labour market, it’s in an employer’s best interests to start investing now in policies, education programs and ultimately a culture that supports employees’ mental health.”

CMHA offers the following tips to employers to help create a workplace that supports mental health:

- Train managers on how to encourage work-life balance and how to manage colleagues with mental health issues
- Educate employees about workplace policies and programs available to promote mental health
- Establish flexible hours to help employees balance responsibilities at home and work
- Encourage staff to stay home with sick children or elderly relatives when necessary
- Create a method to track employees’ satisfaction with their work-life balance
- Reintroduce employees who have been on leave because of a mental health issue gradually

The Copernicus Project: Risk Management for Workplace Mental Health is a health and wellness education program developed by CMHA Calgary in response to increasing request from the business community for help with mental health issues in the workplace.

“The Copernicus Project is responding to a huge need in the business community,” says Thompson. “Employers see that mental health issues are having an impact on their bottom line, and that knowing how to support employees has a tremendous benefit.”

According to the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, mental illness is costing Canadian businesses \$14 billion each year. “Ignoring the problem certainly isn’t going to make it go away,” adds Thompson.

The CMHA’s 56th annual National Mental Health Week (May 7 - 13) is presented this year by Desjardins Financial Security. As part of its public education campaign, the CMHA will be providing information, tips and tools for Canadians about the importance of mental health and in particular, how to promote mental health in the workplace.

“We have seen with many of our clients that strong mental health policies and practices lead to happy and healthy employees,” says Alain Thauvette from Desjardins Financial Security.

“While many companies are doing an excellent job at providing wellness programs, few are integrating mental health into those programs,” said Dr. Irvin Wolkoff, a psychiatrist in private practice in Toronto, and a commentator on mental health. “For this issue to truly be addressed, it cannot all fall on the shoulders of employers. Supervisors, and employees, all need to be part of the solution and help create open and supportive environment at work that makes mental health a priority.”

To find more information about mental health or to take a Work-Life Balance Quiz visit [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca). To view Desjardins Financial Security’s Health is Cool! book, visit <http://www.dsf-dfs.com/en-CA/>

## **About the Survey**

SOM Surveys, Opinion Polls and Marketing conducted the survey on behalf of Desjardins Financial Security between February 12th and March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007. In total, 1,508 interviews were conducted with a representative sample of Canadian adults. The sampling plan provides proportional estimates with a maximum margin of error of plus or minus 2.6% at a 95% confidence level (19 times out of 20). The data was statistically weighted to accurately reflect the composition of Canadians by region, gender and age based on Statistics Canada's 2001 Census information.

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

The Canadian Mental Health Association 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 provincial, territorial and regional offices in more than 135 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 five 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.

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