

# **Employee Health & Wellness for Human Resources Professionals**

# **EMPLOYEE HEALTH & WELLNESS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS**

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Fanshawe College Pressbooks  
London, ON, CA



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# ABOUT THIS BOOK

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Employee wellness is about more than offering fitness programs or occasional wellness activities. It involves creating workplaces where employees can thrive physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. As organizations face changing workforce expectations, growing mental health concerns, and increasing demands for inclusive workplaces, HR Professionals are uniquely positioned to champion employee well-being while supporting organizational goals.



This textbook was developed to help students and emerging HR professionals understand the many dimensions of workplace wellness and the role HR plays in creating healthy organizations. Throughout the chapters, readers will explore key topics such as occupational health and safety, mental and physical health, work-life balance, program design, implementation, and evaluation. Using Canadian examples, this resource encourages readers to think critically about how wellness initiatives can support diverse employee needs and contribute to healthier, more productive workplaces.

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## A Note About AI Use

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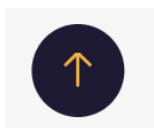
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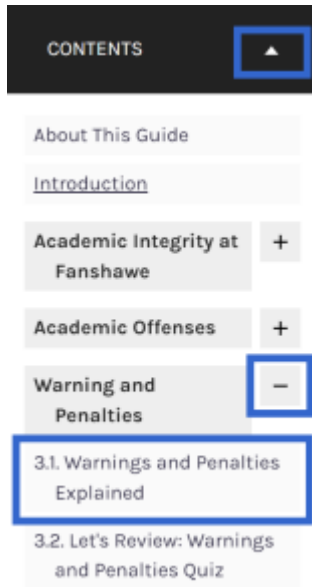
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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO WORKPLACE WELLNESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH

## Chapter Overview

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Defining Workplace Wellness, Health, and Safety
- 1.2 Scope of Workplace Wellness
- 1.3 Canadian Workplace Wellness Trends
- 1.4 Case Studies
- 1.5 Reflective Questions
- 1.6 Summary



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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Define workplace wellness, occupational health, and occupational health and safety.
- Explain the range of wellness and health responsibilities at the individual, organizational, and system levels.
- Describe the business case for workplace wellness, including impacts on productivity, engagement, and innovation.
- Identify key trends shaping workplace wellness in the Canadian context.

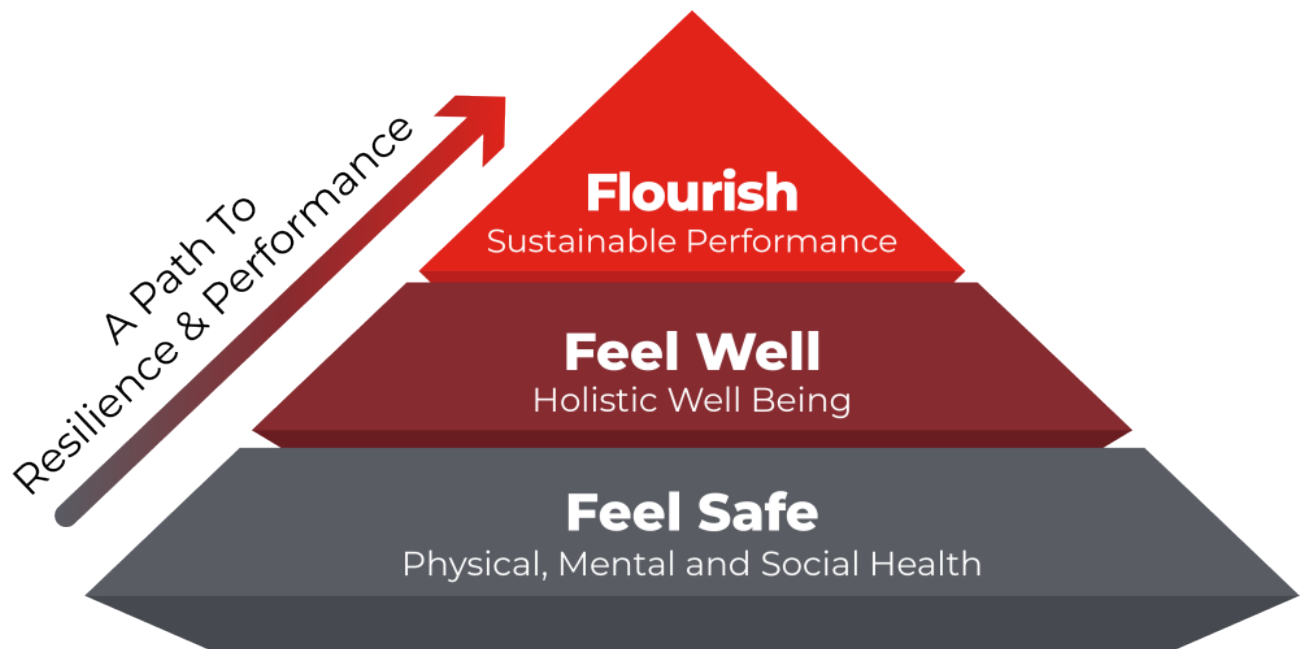
## Overview

Employee health and wellness have become central concerns for organizations as work environments continue to evolve. Factors such as increased psychosocial risk, labour shortages, hybrid work models, and rising mental health concerns have shifted attention from traditional safety compliance toward broader, more integrated approaches to employee well-being.

**Workplace wellness** refers to efforts that promote and protect employees' physical, psychological, and social well-being, while organizational health reflects how leadership, culture, systems, and work design collectively influence both employee outcomes and organizational effectiveness.

The WHO (World Health Organization) Definition of a Healthy Workplace:

1. Employee health is now generally assumed to incorporate the WHO definition of health (physical, mental and social) and to be far more than merely the absence of physical disease;
2. A healthy workplace in the broadest sense is also a healthy organization from the point of view of how it functions and achieves its goals. Employee health and corporate health are inextricably intertwined.
3. A healthy workplace must include health protection and health promotion (Burton, 2010).



“Employee Health and Wellness Pyramid” by Koen Liddiard, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 (JLL Regenerative Workplace, 2021, as cited in Puybaraud, 2022).

#### Image Description

Three-level pyramid showing employee health and wellness as a progression from “Feel Safe: Physical, Mental and Social Health” at the base, to “Feel Well: Holistic Well Being” in the middle, and “Flourish: Sustainable Performance” at the top. An upward arrow beside the pyramid indicates growth toward sustainable performance.

In the Canadian context, workplace wellness is increasingly viewed as both a legal responsibility and a strategic investment, with growing recognition that employee well-being is directly connected to productivity, engagement, innovation, and long-term sustainability.

# 1.1 DEFINING WORKPLACE WELLNESS, HEALTH AND SAFETY

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## Definition of Health

The World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health: “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Csiernik, 2005).

WHO further defines a healthy workplace as:

one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace by considering the following, based on identified needs:

- health and safety concerns in the physical work environment;
- health, safety and well-being concerns in the psychosocial work environment including organization of work and workplace culture;
- personal health resources in the workplace; and
- ways of participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families and other members of the community (Burton, 2010, p. 12).

## Workplace Wellness

Workplace wellness goes beyond preventing illness. It supports employees' physical, mental, and emotional health, encourages positive social connections, and creates a healthy, supportive work environment. According to the World Health Organization (2010), “a healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers col-

laborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of all workers” (p. 6).

Workplace wellness initiatives may include health promotion programs, mental health supports, flexible work arrangements, respectful workplace policies, ergonomic and safe work design, and opportunities for learning and growth. Importantly, wellness is shaped not only by individual behaviours but also by organizational factors such as workload, job control, leadership practices, psychological and social support, and workplace culture (Healthy Ireland @ Work, n.d.; Mental Health Commission of Canada, n.d.).

## Employee Wellness Programs

Employee wellness programs are any activity that centers on creating proactive, positive impacts on the physical and mental health of employees (and sometimes their family members). A healthier workforce should, in turn, help the company increase productivity, performance and overall financial health of the firm. Employee wellness programs focus on the health, safety, and lifestyle of the employee, both in and outside of the organization and could include the following:



Image by Andrea Piacquadro, Pexels License.

- Physical exercise (which could include activities in or outside the workplace, like gym memberships, group fitness classes, walking clubs, meditation, etc.)
- Nutrition
- Decreasing stress
- Substance use (i.e. alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs) decreases or elimination
- Decreasing obesity
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Lunch and learns/training and development on various health/wellness topics

A study from Weiner, Lewis, and Linnan found that some of the most effective activities involved in wellness programs include support groups, exercise classes, healthy eating habits counselling, and annual physical checkups (Isson & Harriott, 2016).

## Occupational Health

Occupational health focuses on preventing work-related illness and injury and promoting safe and healthy working conditions. Occupational health is interdisciplinary, drawing on medicine, psychology, ergonomics,

and public health to ensure work is adapted to workers' physical and mental capabilities rather than the reverse (World Health Organization, n.d.).

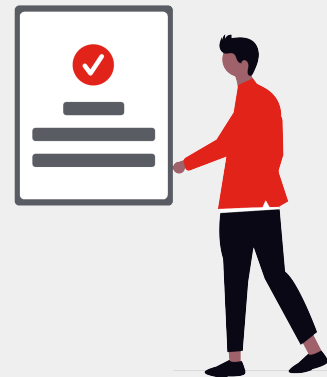
## Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

Occupational health and safety refers to the legislative and regulatory systems designed to prevent workplace injury and disease. In Ontario, this framework is governed by the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), which outlines the duties of employers, supervisors, and workers (CCOHS, n.d.).

Health and safety systems are typically compliance-driven and focus on hazard identification, risk assessment, training, incident reporting, and enforcement. Workplace wellness initiatives operate alongside—but do not replace—OHS requirements, extending beyond minimum compliance to proactively support employee well-being.

In Ontario, the Occupational Health and Safety Act outlines minimum legislative requirements as well as best practices and action items for both management and employees.

The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) (in addition to other responsibilities) and other health agencies help to work together to support occupational health and safety in Ontario.



## 1.2 SCOPE OF WORKPLACE WELLNESS

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### Workplace Wellness Operates Across Multiple Levels:

Individual level: physical health, mental health, coping skills, resilience

Job level: workload, role clarity, autonomy, ergonomic design

Team level: social support, psychological safety, inclusion

Organizational level: leadership, culture, policies, and management systems

### The Business Case for Workplace Wellness

#### Productivity and Performance

According to the Government of Canada (2018):

- 30% of disability claims are related to mental health problems and mental illness
- 1 in 5 Canadians experiences a mental health problem or mental illness each year
- \$50 billion per year is the total cost of mental health problems and mental illnesses in Canada

Organizations that prioritize employee health and wellness tend to perform better than organizations that do not.

According to the Workplace Safety and Prevention Services, here are some specific business benefits:

- Positive employee morale and a reduction in turnover
- Fewer sick days
- Consistent customer service
- Stable production
- Positive impact on your business's reputation and brand capital
- A competitive advantage when recruiting new talent
- Lower Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) costs.

(Workplace Safety & Prevention Services, n.d.)



“Business Case for Workplace Wellness” by Koen Liddiard, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Content Reference: Burton, 2010.

### Image Description

An unhealthy or unsafe workplace leads to: workplace-related stress:

- Poor health decisions (e.g., smoking, drinking, overeating, lack of exercise)
- Chronic conditions (e.g., coronary artery disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer)

The business then faces an impact on:

- Cost and resources (accidents and injury, illness, job dissatisfaction, burnout, workplace violence, absenteeism, presenteeism, short and long-term disability, health insurance)
- Work force and relations (workers' compensation claims, union grievances, turnover)

The bottom line consequences:

- Operational strain (increased cost, decrease in productivity, decrease in quality of service, fines, imprisonment)
- Business failure!

## Check Out the Research Findings:

According to Gunther et. al., developing a culture of health and well-being is important for many reasons:

- Employers with higher corporate health assessment scores, a common way to quantify “cultures of health,” tend to have a lower health care cost trend, without the need to reduce benefit services or shift more costs to their employees. Given that health care costs represent a significant expenditure for most employers, reducing health care costs is a competitive advantage.
- A healthier workforce is also more productive. It is estimated that for every dollar saved in direct health care costs, employers receive an extra \$2.30 in improved performance or productivity. When an employee is unhealthy, first, they do not perform optimally at work (presenteeism); then, the work is not completed in a timely manner (delayed production). Unwell workers may then not show up for work (absence), and ultimately, perhaps are even lost from the workforce (disability).
- Other studies have shown superior stock performance by organizations that achieve a culture of health, as measured by receipt of various health and safety awards.



## Why Should You Care About Workplace Wellness?

Watch the video on page 1.2 Scope of Workplace Wellness, in the online version of this text.

## Engagement and Retention

Organizations that prioritize wellness tend to experience higher levels of employee engagement, morale, and organizational commitment. Workers are more likely to remain with employers who demonstrate care for their well-being, particularly in competitive labour markets.

Psychologically healthy workplaces support creativity, learning, collaboration, and problem-solving. Psychological safety—defined as an environment where employees feel safe to speak up, make mistakes, and share ideas—is strongly associated with innovation and continuous improvement (Caburao, 2026).

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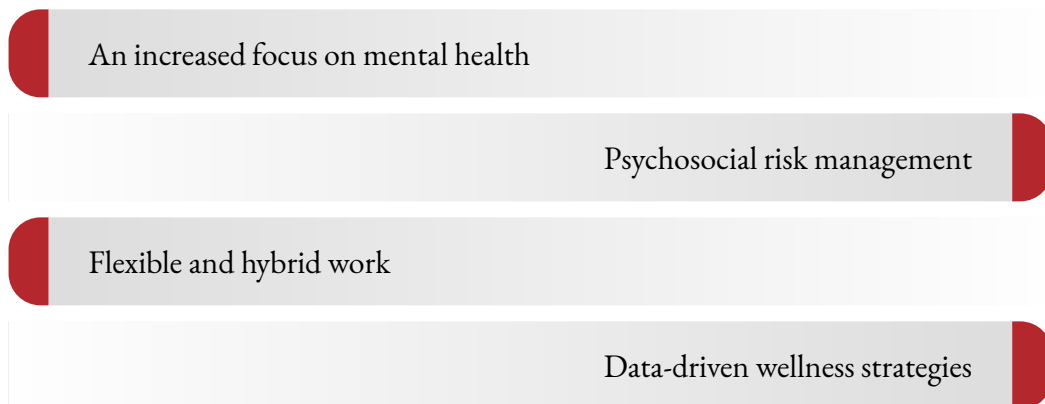
Research findings: “Building a Culture of Health and Well-Being at Merck” by Cathryn E. Gunther, Virginia Peddicord, Joseph Kozlowski, Yi Li, Danielle Menture, Raymond Fabius, Sharon Glave Frazee, and Peter J. Nigro is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. Modifications: Used section Benefits of a Culture of Health, edited.

## 1.3 CANADIAN WORKPLACE WELLNESS TRENDS

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### Key Trends in Canadian Workplaces Related to Wellness

There are several key trends shaping workplace wellness in Canada today. These include:



### Mental Health Focus

Canadian and International businesses have taken an increased focus on mental health in the past 5-10 years. This focus has become a key influence on Human Resources practices and policies, signaling a transformative shift in how companies perceive and prioritize employee well-being. The importance of mental health in the workplace has gained widespread recognition. Stress, burnout, and other mental health concerns can have detrimental impacts on employee productivity, engagement, and overall job satisfaction. Understanding this, HR departments are increasingly integrating mental health initiatives into their overall employee wellness programs.

HR professionals are now tasked with developing and implementing strategies to create a mentally healthy workplace. This involves fostering an organizational culture that encourages open conversations about mental health, reduces stigma, and provides support for employees dealing with mental health issues.

One of the most successful strategies is Bell Let's Talk Day, which started in 2011. Check more about the Bell Let's Talk Day initiative and view valuable workplace resources.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), which often include counselling services, are becoming more common as part of broader health benefits packages. EAPs have been around for a number of decades and serve to support employees in the workplace, along with the other health and dental benefits often provided. EAP services often include:

- Mental health and counselling services (i.e. short-term counselling with a therapist)
- Workplace and career support (i.e. coaching/support for career transitions)
- Family and relationship support (i.e. marital/relationship counselling with a social worker)
- Financial and legal assistance (i.e. referral to a legal professional)
- Health and wellness support (i.e. nutrition coaching, substance use support programs/in-patient care)
- Life management services (i.e. help finding childcare, eldercare, or housing)

Most EAPs offer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, conditional telephone or online chat support.



“Bell Let's Talk 2017” by York Region, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

## Psychosocial Risk Management

Psychosocial hazards influence both the mental and physical health of employees, including their capacity to engage and function effectively in a workplace with others. These hazards can lead to psychological and emotional outcomes such as burnout, anxiety, and depression, as well as physical health issues like cardiovascular conditions or musculoskeletal injuries. They are often associated with how work is structured and managed, as well as factors like workplace violence. Globally, psychosocial risks are widely recognized as significant concerns for occupational health and safety, as well as for overall employee productivity.

## Flexible and Hybrid Work

The shift to remote work, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has also brought mental health into sharper focus. HR departments have had to grapple with the unique challenges posed by remote work, such as feelings of isolation, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and the lack of physical separation from work. These challenges have further underscored the need for robust mental health support in the modern workplace.

## Data-Driven Wellness Strategies

HR professionals have been doing a better job in the past 5-10 years of tracking various analytics related to people statistics in their workplaces. One of these analytic focuses is on wellness in the workplace. In addition to tracking sick days, absenteeism, leaves of absence, etc., some workplaces are going deeper and tracking the wellness and mental health of their employees. For example, I work part-time for GoodLife Fitness. We have an annual associate survey that asks about a number of areas that the company is doing well within and also areas of opportunity. Many mental health/wellness areas have been identified in both of these areas. GoodLife Fitness publishes a summary of the results of the survey and includes next steps (action items) the company plans to take (directed by senior management). One action item the organization has taken is to run a series of optional, virtual Mental Fitness & Well-Being Panel sessions throughout the year. These sessions are open to all associates and often include a follow-up email with the recording and resources for those who missed the synchronous event. GoodLife Fitness also employs a senior leader in the role of “Director of Associate Relations, Mental Fitness & Well-Being”.



### The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is a set of guidelines to promote mental health at work. It is the first of its kind in the world and also includes tools and resources to help prevent psychological harm at work. It was commissioned by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and launched in January 2013. The voluntary guidelines help an organization, no matter its size or sector, to promote mental health and have been widely adopted in Canada and across the world. The Workplace Standard was updated in 2022 to reflect the evolving best practices in the field and new research findings. A second edition is expected in 2026.

Consider this recent article from HR Reporter: From Stress to Success – Tracking Happiness in the Workplace



Canadian workplaces are increasingly shifting from viewing wellness as a standalone program to embedding well-being into organizational culture and management systems.

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## 1.4 CASE STUDIES

### Innovative Wellness Programs in High-Tech Companies

#### Case 1: Google

Google's wellness program is one that tries to build a happy and healthy work environment. Employees are treated to free snacks and coconut water. To encourage employees to eat healthy snacks, dried fruits and health bars are placed in transparent plastic or glass boxes, while candies and cookies are hidden in opaque jars. Another clever design is that the various foods in the cafeteria are coloured with nutrition information. Food with a red label means that it is unhealthy, while healthy food, such as lettuce salad, has a green label. In addition, aside from the scooters and ping-pong tables we can see in many companies, Google lets its employees design their own standing desks (see Exhibit 1). According to Paul (2014), sitting too much can increase disability by 50 percent among people who are aged 60 and older, even if they go to the gym regularly. Standing desks make Google's employees feel more comfortable when they work: they find it much easier to brainstorm with their co-workers, and they sit less in the office.



Exhibit 1: Working at a standing desk. Image by TheStandingDesk, Unsplash License.

Google also organized a competition challenging its employees to cook healthy lunches. Moreover, employees have access to a free gym and can take free dance classes. Google also takes care of its employees' family members. If an employee dies, that employee's spouse can receive half the employee's salary for ten years. Anyone who joins Google is immediately eligible for this benefit. On top of the half-salary, the spouse will also receive company stock. If they have children, their children will be given \$1,000 per month until they are 19 years old. Gay couples can receive the same benefits.

## Case 2: Apple

Part-time employees at Apple enjoy the same health benefits as full-time employees (Eadicicco, 2015). Managers developed a Design Plus Health kit for their employees. The kit contains weighted coffee mugs (see Exhibit 2), which work as dumbbells when the employees drink coffee or water. The kit also contains coasters (see Exhibit 3) with images of teeth so that employees can see the stains they might leave on their own teeth if they drink too much coffee or tea. There are healthy sticky notes in the kit to remind employees to eat healthily or exercise more (See Exhibit 4). Since most people live a busy and fast lifestyle now, they have little time to go to the gym. Apple gave Design + Health guidebooks to its program designers to teach them how to do some exercise in the office (see Exhibit 5).



Exhibit 2. Coffee mugs



Exhibit 3. Coffee coasters

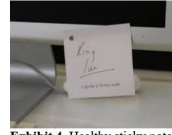


Exhibit 4. Healthy sticky notes



Exhibit 5. Design + Health guiding books

Exhibits 2 (Coffee mugs), 3 (Coffee coasters), 4 (Healthy sticky notes), & 5 (Design + Health guiding books). Image from Zhang, CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Case 3: Intel



Image by Sweet Life, Unsplash License.

Intel started the *Encore Fellowship Program* for its aging employees in 2011 (Intel, 2015). To bridge the gap between the high-pressure working lifestyle and the more relaxing retirement lifestyle, Intel cooperated with non-profit organizations to provide its retired employees with opportunities to solve technical issues. The retirees can earn a \$25,000 stipend and health insurance coverage every year. This program is very useful for senior employees who have difficulty working regular hours but still want to live a

meaningful life. Another of Intel's wellness initiatives is called *Health for Life* (Intel, 2015). Through *Health for Life*, the company provides excellent medical and dental coverage and preventive care, as well as access to mental health and fitness resources. Employees can take part in personal development seminars to find effective means to balance life and work. The company also offers online homework assistance for the children of employees who are too busy to help with homework directly. Some Intel

offices assist in finding quality child care and priority access to child care centers near the workplace. Programs also include access to summer camps and tax deferral options for child care services. For employees who are worried about taking care of their aging parents, the program offers on-site care-giver training.

#### Case 4: Evernote

Evernote is considered one of the coolest places to work (Garun, 2012). Evernote sends professional housekeeping staff to its employees' homes twice per month. This benefit allows busy and hardworking employees freedom from worrying about their home cleaning issues; they can be happier and concentrate on product development. In addition, employees have unlimited vacation allowance if they complete their work. Phil Libin, the CEO of Evernote, encourages his team to take a break from high-pressure work by providing them with a \$1,000 travel fund annually (Garun, 2012). The company hopes that employees can work in a good mental state. All workers can see everybody (see Exhibit 6) around the office, which can be useful for having casual conversations with co-workers. Inter-office emails are discouraged because people cannot read the expression on each other's faces when they communicate through email.



Exhibit 6: AnyBot. Image by Leo Chen, CC BY 2.0.

#### Case 5: Facebook

Employees can take a free dinner home. If they work too late, their family can come to eat with them at work. No one feels strange seeing children in the cafeteria. The company also provides each employee with \$3,000 for child care expenses and up to \$5,000 for adoption fees. Employees who have just had new babies can receive \$4,000. Facebook has also promised to pay for egg freezing fees for its female employees since 2014 (Rooney, 2014). After freezing their eggs, female employees can choose when to

put an egg back into their womb. So, when they cannot get pregnant naturally, they can still have children. This service is extremely expensive: each egg freezing treatment costs \$10,000, with egg storage fees of \$500 per year. The maximum Facebook will reimburse is \$20,000 (Rooney, 2014). This benefit will help redefine the conventional gender-biased roles in the workplace – women can now focus on their careers as men traditionally have, instead of having to choose between a career and a family.

Besides the aforementioned cases about employee wellness programs, there are some other innovations in this respect. For example, employees at Airbnb are allowed to take their pets to work every day. They can have lunch with their pets and bring them to yoga classes, or even enjoy massages together. According to Messieh's (2012) observation, unlike Casual Friday in most companies, Airbnb organizes Formal Friday to encourage its employees to dress up on Fridays. Dropbox offers daily breakfast, lunch, and dinner to its employees. The company tries to provide healthy food to its employees and save them from having to cook as well. Similar to Airbnb, Dropbox employees can have happy hours called Whisky Fridays. The workers can turn busy work into a party on these days. Unlike many other companies offering unlimited food, Yammer makes sure its employees maintain a healthy lifestyle with fitness classes on site and free bikes to use during the day. On Valentine's Day, workers can take free cupcakes. Zynga, as a provider of social video game services, provides the game designers with on-site gaming rooms. Gaming systems such as Nintendo, Xbox 360, and PS3, as well as traditional arcade games, can be found in relaxing lounges (Messieh, 2012). Staff who have just broken up with their partners can take paid time off in Tokyo-based Hime & Company. Managers understand that no one can be productive after a relationship has ended; two or three days off can help refresh employees in this situation. The company also gives staff paid time off to go shopping during the on-sales season. Thanks to this benefit, employees do not have to take half-days off to go to sales or feel guilty about taking their shopping bags into the office (Reuters, 2008).

## Successful Employee Wellness Programs in Some Hospitality Units

According to the Great Place to Work For survey, the following hospitality companies are good at creating employee benefits: Wegmans, Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, Marriott, Whole Foods Market, and Hyatt.

### Case 1: Wegmans

Here is an example of a Wegmans employee wellness program from one Wegmans employee (Berman, 2013). Mark Novelli got a warning from a Wegmans nutritionist after finding out his blood pressure was at 180/120. Thanks to the free monthly screenings offered by his company, Mark realized the importance of changing his unhealthy lifestyle and lost 35 pounds in a month. Several years ago, Wegmans started to launch wellness programs to help its workers stay healthy and fit, which included blood pressure and nutrition coaching as well as on-site yoga and Zumba classes. Though these perks are common for tech giants like Google to attract engineering talent, Wegmans stands out for providing such wellness programs to a more diverse workforce. All employees, from executives to checkout cashiers, have access to health advice and fitness programs. According to the CEO of Wegmans (Berman, 2013), the company's efforts on employee wellness are aimed at the bottom line in addition to corporate social responsibility. Poor health among employees can have negative effects on businesses and cost companies more than half a trillion dollars. From 2008 to 2013, the percentage of Wegmans workers with high blood pressure dropped from 24 percent to 14 percent. Employee health screenings and fitness classes can be considered an extension of the same healthy-living value the company expresses to the public. Pacino, an IT worker at Wegmans, joined a 5K training group offered through the company and dropped 50 pounds in two years. Also, she uses Wegmans' at-work yoga classes (see Exhibit 7) to get an hour of just me time every week to lessen the pressure. She said that she felt more energetic and that the wellness programs helped her perform her job better.



Exhibit 7. Wegman's staff is doing a yoga class. Image from Zhang, CC BY-NC 4.0.

### Case 2: Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants

Kimpton has approximately 8,100 employees in the United States. According to Kimpton (Fortune, 2015), almost 95 percent of its employees feel trusted by the company and are willing to deliver caring, personal service to guests because of the great perks. The company also provides \$1,500 of college tuition reimbursement for all its staff. Besides classes related to work, classes such as stress management, positive employee relations, personal financial management, and English as a second language

are all options for the workers. Kimpton has surprised housekeeping staff who work on hot days with boxes of personalized snacks or ice cream treats. Kimpton also rewards loyal staff with gifts or gift cards. Moreover, the staff can invite their family members or friends to have dinner at Kimpton's restaurants. Kimpton grants employees three days of paid sick leave. If staff have a family member with a serious health condition, they can take 12 to 16 weeks of unpaid time during which their job and benefits are protected. Employees have access to insurance not only for themselves but also for their pets. Knowing that it is depressing to lose a pet, the company offers paid leave for staff to give them time to recover (Great Places to Work, 2015). Kimpton partners with the Trevor Project, the leading national organization that provides services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning young people. The company encourages its employees to participate in social media and marketing campaigns as volunteers with the Trevor Project (Great Places to Work, 2015). Kimpton offers tax-preparation services to employees in Miami. Learning from high-tech companies, Kimpton schedules exercise elements such as yoga or organized walks into the agenda of every employee meeting (Great Places to Work, 2015). All hotels and restaurants have healthy snacks on hand for employees, which is similar to the high-tech companies as well. Also, employees can get a membership at a local gym with a company discount and can apply to be reimbursed for wellness activities such as smoking-cessation hypnosis. Another creative employee wellness program is called *Kimpton Moments Chips* (Toporek, 2015). If an employee offers superior care or service to customers and is witnessed by a co-worker, supervisor, or patron, they will receive a token. These tokens can be redeemed for prizes such as trips, TVs, iPods, and more.

### Case 3: Whole Foods Market

Whole Foods combats high healthcare costs through innovative healthcare and wellness plans as well. One of them is called the *Healthy Discount Incentive Program* (Mackey, 2013). Based on the degree of wellness, the company offers employees up to 20 percent in additional store discounts. The extra discount depends on the levels of cholesterol, height-to-waist ratio, and blood pressure, along with being nicotine-free. On the other hand, Whole Foods offers a medically supervised program to its unhealthiest team members who are overweight or have heart disease or diabetes. In the program, they receive intensive training to eat and live healthily. According to the company, team members often see so much progress within the first seven days that they realize they can control their health for the rest of their lives. Through these employee wellness programs, Whole Foods not only lowers its costs but transforms lives.

## Case 4: Marriott

The National Business Group on Health announced Marriott as the winner of the 2015 Best Employers for Healthy Lifestyles awards (Marriott, 2015a). Marriott was the only winner from the hospitality industry. In 2010, Marriott launched a program called *TakeCare Well-being* to create a healthy working environment for its employees. The company offers stress management, exercise and fitness, nutrition and weight management, smoking cessation, and financial well-being services to their staff. According to David Rodriguez, the Global Chief Human Resource Officer at Marriott, “Taking care of our associates has been a vital part of the culture at Marriott since its founding in 1927” (Marriott, 2015b, para. 3). Last year, Marriott established a Healthy Hotel Certification program (see Exhibit 8) to publicly recognize hotels for creating a healthy work environment for their associates.



Exhibit 8. Over 100 Marriott hotels in the U.S., U.S.V.I., and Canada achieved the TakeCare Healthy Hotel Certification for 2014. Image from Zhang, CC BY-NC 4.0.

## Case 5: Hyatt

According to Rakesh Sarna, the group president for Hyatt (Martin, 2014), the company is now focusing on connecting guests with employees at a deeper, emotional level. The company tries to elevate the personal potential of hotel employees and their passion for offering service to the customers. Based on a model from the Institute of Design at Stanford, Hyatt developed training to teach its employees how to listen deeply to understand the emotion and the real need behind what guests say. To encourage employees to be creative when they serve customers and to make a positive impact on the customers' hotel experience, Hyatt honours the most creative teams with the Hyatt CEO's *Award for Innovation*. Also, as a member of the Hyatt family, they can have complimentary and discounted stays at Hyatt hotels around the world. During work hours, they can have free meals in associate dining rooms. Fitness activities like Zumba classes and kickboxing are included in the wellness programs to help employees and their families stay healthy. Like Kimpton hotels, the staff have flexible work schedules in addition to paid holidays and vacation.

### Case 6: Westin

Westin realizes the importance of the overall well-being of their staff. The company offers pre- and post-shift stretching wellness programs. Housekeepers often suffer from muscular soreness, so Westin provides specially designed New Balance shoes with arch support and shock absorption to its housekeeping staff (Westin, 2011). Also, employee cafeterias feature healthy menu items featuring Superfoods (food items that contain high amounts of antioxidants, polyphenols, vitamins, and minerals) (Health, 2015). Many scientists believe that eating superfoods can reduce the risk of chronic disease and prolong life. Air quality is also an important factor that can affect the body's and mind's wellness. To improve the air quality in its working environment, Westin launched the Breathe program. Each Westin property introduces new ways, such as smoke-free policies, to provide healthier environments for guests and hotel staff (Westin, 2015).

### Case 7: Qdoba

The working environment at most restaurant chains is very different from the typical corporate environment as well. Restaurants can meet obstacles when they apply wellness programs. For example, there may be a budget limit for on-site programs because restaurants may not have many employees. Qdoba Mexican Grill is one of the restaurant leaders that puts emphasis on employees' well-being. According to Restaurant Business Staff (2012), the company provides financial incentives to encourage employees to live a healthy lifestyle. Staff take part in biometric screening procedures that measure their tobacco habits and report cholesterol levels, which can earn them up to \$520 per year. Moreover, if an employee's spouse or domestic partner completes the biometric screening, the entire team can earn \$1,040. Additionally, employees can participate in a program that tracks physical activity and earn rewards up to \$400 per year. Qdoba's owners believe that the positive well-being of team members will help prevent potential healthcare issues, reduce absenteeism, and help control rising healthcare costs. To support the wellness program, the company has created an online portal to guide staff through enrollment and send email reminders.

### Case 8: Noodles & Company

Noodles & Company incentivizes biometric screening among employees, like Qdoba. Also, all employees of Noodles & Company around the world have the freedom to choose how to pursue greater wellness. As Restaurant Business Staff reports (2012), each employee gets *balance bucks* every six months to spend on anything, such as a gym membership or new running shoes. Though in the short-term, wellness programs raise the company's cost, they can make a significant difference to the bottom line over time. However, according to Noodles & Company, employers should not focus on the immediate benefits. Having a healthy work-life balance creates a better, more supportive culture, which also leads to improved productivity in the end.

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## 1.5 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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## Reflection Questions

1. How does your organization currently define workplace wellness, and how closely does this align with the WHO's holistic definition of health (physical, mental, and social well-being)?
2. In what ways does your organization balance compliance with occupational health and safety (OHS) requirements and broader wellness initiatives that promote long-term employee well-being?
3. Which level (individual, job, team, or organizational) do you believe has the greatest impact on employee wellness in your workplace, and why?
4. What is the strongest business case for investing in workplace wellness in your organization (e.g., productivity, engagement, retention, innovation), and how is this measured or demonstrated?
5. How effectively does your organization address psychosocial risks such as workload, stress, and workplace culture, and what gaps or opportunities exist?
6. How have recent trends—such as hybrid work and increased focus on mental health—changed your approach to employee wellness?
7. To what extent is wellness embedded into your organizational culture and leadership practices versus treated as a standalone program or initiative?

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Microsoft. (2026, May 15). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited*

Prompt

Come up with 5-8 questions for the following chapter's content.

## 1.6 SUMMARY

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## Chapter Summary: Employee Health and Workplace Wellness

This chapter explains that workplace wellness is a holistic approach to employee well-being, encompassing physical, mental, and social health, rather than just the absence of illness. It distinguishes between:

- **Occupational health and safety (OHS):** legal compliance and injury prevention
- **Occupational health:** prevention and adaptation of work to workers
- **Workplace wellness:** broader strategies that promote overall well-being

Wellness operates at multiple levels (individual, job, team, organizational), highlighting that employee health is shaped by both personal behaviours and workplace conditions.

The chapter emphasizes a strong business case: organizations that invest in wellness see improved productivity, engagement, retention, and reduced costs. In Canada, mental health is a major concern, impacting both employees and organizational performance.

Common wellness initiatives include EAPs, mental health support, fitness programs, flexible work, and training, with increasing focus on creating psychologically safe workplaces that support innovation and collaboration.

### Key Canadian trends include:

- Greater emphasis on mental health
- Managing psychosocial risks
- Growth of hybrid work
- Use of data-driven wellness strategies

Overall, workplace wellness is positioned as both a legal responsibility and a strategic priority, essential for organizational effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

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Microsoft. (2026, May 15). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Provide a summary for the above chapter from a university-level course on employee health and wellness.

# CHAPTER 2: LEGAL AND ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS

## Chapter Outline

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Canadian Workplace Legislation
- 2.2 Purpose of Legislation for Employee Wellness
- 2.3 Duty to Accommodate
- 2.4 Privacy in Workplace Wellness
- 2.5 Ethical Principles in Wellness Programs
- 2.6 Reflective Questions
- 2.7 Summary



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## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Identify key Canadian workplace legislation, including the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), Human Rights Code, and Employment Standards.
- Describe the basic purpose of these laws and how they relate to employee rights and workplace wellness.
- Recognize the concept of the duty to accommodate in workplace settings.
- Explain the importance of maintaining employee privacy in wellness programs.
- Describe key ethical principles that guide workplace wellness initiatives.
- Illustrate how legal and ethical considerations influence workplace wellness practices.

## Overview

Workplace wellness programs are designed to support employee health, well-being, and productivity. However, these programs do not exist in isolation. They must operate within a framework of laws, policies, and ethical guidelines that protect both employees and organizations.

In Canada, employers are required to follow several key pieces of legislation that influence how workplace wellness programs are developed and delivered. In addition, organizations must consider employee privacy, accommodation needs, and ethical decision-making.

This chapter introduces the foundational legal and ethical considerations that shape workplace wellness programs.

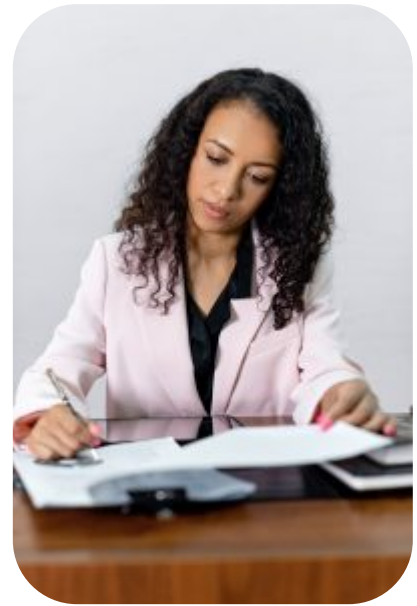


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## 2.1 CANADIAN WORKPLACE LEGISLATION

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### Key Canadian Workplace Legislation Related to Employee Health and Wellness

Employers in Canada must follow laws that ensure safe, fair, and respectful workplaces. Three important pieces of legislation are:

#### 1. Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)

The OHSA focuses on keeping employees safe at work.

- Requires employers to provide a safe working environment
- Gives workers the right to know about hazards
- Allows workers to refuse unsafe work

In a wellness context, this means programs must not put employees at risk and should support both physical and psychological safety.

The OHSA outlines (among other items) the duties of the employers (for example, ensuring that personal protective equipment, materials and clothing are provided and used as prescribed), violence and harassment (employers must have policies in place, have a program to implement the policy, and assess risks of violence), and ensure that toxic substances in the workplace are handled safely.

#### 2. Human Rights Code

The Human Rights Code protects individuals from discrimination and harassment.

- Covers protected grounds such as disability, gender, race, age, and religion
- Requires equal treatment in employment

## Canadian Human Rights Code

### The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The Constitution Act of 1982 is the highest law of Canada and is a landmark document in Canadian history. It achieved full independence for Canada by allowing the country to change its Constitution without approval from Britain. It also enshrined the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in Canada's Constitution, which guarantees fundamental rights to every human, including: rights of freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion.

### The Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA)

All people who live in Canada are protected by **human rights legislation**. This law protects against intentional and unintentional discrimination in the workplace. People have access to the federal government if they have experienced harassment or discrimination when it is based on grounds of discrimination such as race, age and sexual orientation.

### Protected Grounds

According to the Canadian Human Rights Act (R.S.C. 1985, c. H-6), **protected grounds** means

race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been ordered. Idem: where the ground of discrimination is pregnancy or child-birth, the discrimination shall be deemed to be on the ground of sex. Idem: Where the ground of discrimination is refusal/request to take a genetic tests, disclose or authorize disclosure of results, the discrimination shall be deemed to be on the group of genetic characteristics. (s. 3).

An example of protected grounds is a student who is studying to complete a diploma program and needs accommodation to complete the coursework.

The CHRA became effective in March 1978. It proclaims that

all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives

that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered (Canadian Human Rights Act, R.S.C., 1985, cH-6, s.2).

Let's examine this statement in order to fully understand its significance for HRM.

1. "All individuals should have opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have": this means that, considering their desires and abilities, the opportunity to earn a living, which implies the 'opportunity to work', should be equal for all.
2. These opportunities should not be hindered by discriminatory practices based on "race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered": the CHRA is very specific as to the categories that are deemed discriminatory. These categories have changed over time, following changes in our society. Currently, the issues raised by genetic testing are at the forefront of these societal changes. Is it legal to deny insurance for people known to have a gene mutation that causes or increases the risk of an inherited disorder? These issues are currently being debated (see Canadian Supreme Court decision), and as genetic testing becomes more common, we as a society will have to decide the extent to which it is OK to use this information to make decisions about people.

## Harassment

**Harassment** is behaviour that annoys or troubles another employee. This may include verbal abuse, bullying, jokes, making faces or comments about another employee, either verbally or through social media. The types of harassment are physical harassment, verbal, sexual and emotional harassment. An example is an English-speaking employee mocking an employee's accent from another country.

Harassment falls under Human Rights, though it is also covered under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). The OHSA defines workplace harassment as engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.

The OHSA requires employers to:

- Develop a workplace harassment policy.
- Create a program for reporting and investigating complaints.
- Conduct investigations into incidents and complaints of harassment.
- Provide workers with information and instruction regarding workplace harassment.

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## Ontario Human Rights Code

The Ontario Human Rights Code outlines that there are a number of areas where people cannot be discriminated against. These include:

- Age
- Creed
- Disability
- Family and marital status
- Gender identity and gender expression
- Race and related grounds
- Receipt of public assistance
- Record of offences
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

## 3. Employment Standards

Employment Standards legislation sets out minimum requirements for working conditions. This includes rules about hours of work, breaks, and leaves (e.g., sick leave). The legislation is meant to ensure fair treatment of all employees.

Wellness programs should align with the above legislation and standards and support employees in maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Canadian Human Rights Code: “3.3 Federal Human Rights Laws” from Human Resources Management – 3rd Edition by Debra Patterson is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share-Alike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. Modifications: Used section Federal Human Rights Laws.

## 2.2 PURPOSE OF LEGISLATION FOR EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

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When employers design employee health and wellness programs, they need to keep in mind the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Human Rights Code (both federally and provincially) and Employment Standards. There are other laws that may also apply, so a basic and ongoing knowledge of Employment Law is necessary for all HR Professionals working with employee health and wellness.



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### Physical Safety

Specifically, employees should be assured that their work environments are as physically safe as possible – free from hazards, equipped with proper tools and equipment, safe work practices, emergency preparedness, and ergonomic workspaces.

### Psychological/Mental Safety

Employees should also be assured that the workplace is psychologically/mentally safe. This includes the right to a respectful workplace, where it is safe to speak up, they have support for mental health, and the work environment is both inclusive and diverse.

### Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

One area that has not yet been talked about in this textbook is EDI – equity, diversity and inclusion. In some workplaces, the acronym used is DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion), or IDEA (Inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility).

#### Equity

Equity is a process that ensures everyone has access to the same opportunities. Equity appreciates that privileges and barriers exist and that, as a result, we don't all start from the same place. Instead, each of

us comes from a different background. Equity is an approach that begins with acknowledging this unequal starting place and making efforts to address and change this imbalance (Bolger, 2020).

## Diversity

Diversity is the presence, in an organization or a community, of a wide range of people with different backgrounds, abilities and attributes, including ethnicity, race, colour, religion, age, gender and sexual orientation. This term is widely used in North America to describe programs which aim to reduce discrimination; however, anti-racism and race relations practitioners express concern that diversity programs actually limit efforts to combat racism (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2012).

## Inclusion

Inclusion refers to taking into account differences among individuals and groups when designing something (e.g., policy, program, curriculum, building, shared space) to avoid creating barriers. Inclusion is about people with different identities feeling or being valued and welcomed within a given setting.

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Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: “Definitions” from Enhancing Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) in Open Educational Resources (OER) by Nikki Andersen is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. Modifications: Added additional content.

## 2.3 DUTY TO ACCOMMODATE

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The duty to accommodate means employers must make reasonable adjustments to support employees' needs.

“The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2026) defines Duty to Accommodate as: “sometimes it is necessary to treat someone differently in order to prevent or reduce discrimination. It refers to the legal obligation that employers and service providers have to make changes to either physical spaces or policies to ensure that everyone can be included. For example, asking all job applicants to pass a written test may not be fair to a person with a visual disability. In such cases, the duty to accommodate may require that alternate arrangements be made to ensure that a person or group can fully participate.”

### **Video: The Duty to Accommodate – ASL**

Watch the video on page 2.3 Duty to Accommodate, in the online version of this text.

## **Types of Accommodations**

There are a number of options available for an employer to accommodate an employee with a disability, depending on the unique circumstances of each situation. The following chart provides examples of some specific disabilities and possible accommodations that may be utilized:

| Disability                       | Possible Accommodations                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Visual Impairment                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Text-to-speech software</li> <li>– Alternate formats of print materials</li> <li>– Magnifiers or CCTVs</li> </ul>                                                   |
| Chronic Back Pain                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ergonomic chair</li> <li>– Sit-to-stand desk</li> <li>– Back roll for chairs</li> </ul>                                                                             |
| Wheelchair Use                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Modify the physical workspace to make it more accessible</li> <li>– Provide wheelchair ramps</li> <li>– Provide accessible washrooms</li> </ul>                     |
| Autism Spectrum Disorder         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Providing questions for an interview in advance</li> <li>– Allowing individuals to have an attendant to help with communication and emotional regulation</li> </ul> |
| Hearing Impairment               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– FM System</li> <li>– Closed captioning</li> <li>– Providing notes or note-taking support</li> </ul>                                                                 |
| Anxiety Disorder                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Flexible work schedules</li> <li>– Frequent breaks</li> <li>– Pre-recorded presentations</li> </ul>                                                                 |
| Walks Unsteadily/With Difficulty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ensure accessible access to the building and work space</li> <li>– Grab bars in hallways, workspaces, bathrooms, etc.</li> </ul>                                    |

In wellness programming, this means not all employees will participate in the same way—and that flexibility is important.

---

Types of Accommodations: “Types of Accommodations” from Transition to Employment: A Guide for Supporting Post-Secondary Students with Disabilities by UPEI Career Services & UPEI Accessibility Services is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. Modifications: Added conclusion.

## 2.4 PRIVACY IN WORKPLACE WELLNESS

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Workplace wellness programs often involve personal or health-related information. Because of this, protecting employee privacy is essential.

People choose to disclose personal health information in the workplace for many different reasons. Some may need accommodations or support at work, while others disclose to build trust, promote understanding, or challenge stereotypes. In some situations, employees may share information to access legal protections or because coworkers or supervisors have already noticed signs of a problem.

At the same time, many individuals decide not to disclose personal health information. Concerns about discrimination, stigma, gossip, or negative reactions from others often influence this decision. Some employees feel that their health condition is private and unrelated to their job performance, while others may avoid disclosure because of previous negative experiences, feelings of shame, or a desire to be treated the same as everyone else.

Research on workplace disclosure highlights several important factors that shape these decisions. Employees often consider how disclosure may affect others' perceptions of them, how much control they have over their personal information, and the quality of their relationships with supervisors and coworkers. Expectations about possible outcomes also influence whether someone chooses to share information. Disclosure can occur in different ways, ranging from partial disclosure to full disclosure, and in some cases, information may be revealed unintentionally.

The timing of disclosure is another important consideration. Employees may choose to disclose before being hired, after beginning employment, or later in their careers. Disclosure may also occur during crisis situations and is often viewed as an ongoing process that can change over time. Outcomes of disclosure can include stigma, prejudice, discrimination, emotional distress, unwanted advice, or unfavourable comparisons with others. However, disclosure can also lead to positive outcomes, such as increased understanding, emotional support, and practical workplace assistance.



Image by Cottonbro Studio, Pexels License.

## Key Privacy Considerations

### Participation Should Be Voluntary

Ideally, employees should not have to disclose any accommodations they may need unless they want to disclose them. That said, it is to everyone's benefit (employee, employer, other stakeholders) that accommodation needs are disclosed to ensure the employee is properly supported and no potential health and safety issues arise. The next chapter will talk in more detail about how the culture of the workplace can help or hinder such voluntary disclosure.

### Personal Information Must Be Kept Confidential

Accommodation needs often include very personal details about an employee's physical and mental health. Ensuring this information is kept confidential is extremely important and often part of the legal framework.

One of the ways to ensure that personal information is kept confidential is by having appropriate software/Information Technology supports to keep the data safe and secure where it needs to be within the organization.

Another way to ensure that confidential information is stored and shared only as appropriate is to follow the laws in Canada.

## Canada's Privacy Act

The Privacy Act is federal legislation that protects the personal information of Canadians in the hands of the federal government. It is a crucial piece of Canada's framework for protecting your privacy interests (Government of Canada, 2021).

For private sector organizations, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) sets out the ground rules for how organizations involved in a commercial activity can collect, use or share personal information. The purpose of PIPEDA is to establish, in an era in which technology increasingly facilitates the circulation and exchange of information, rules to govern the collection, use and disclosure of personal information in a manner that recognizes the right of privacy of individuals concerning their personal information and the need of organizations to collect, use or disclose personal information for purposes that a reasonable person would consider appropriate in the circumstances (Government of Canada, 2019).

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC) oversees compliance with PIPEDA, which includes investigating privacy complaints and helping businesses improve their personal information handling practices. Personal information is defined broadly under PIPEDA as any information about an identifiable individual, such as their name, address, email, phone number, date of birth, social insurance number, driver's license, or blood type. PIPEDA also covers sensitive data, such as an individual's ethnic origin, social status, and personal health information (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2022).

An HR professional has extraordinary access to a precious asset: employees' personal information. HR professionals must treat such information with care. Here are a few recommendations from the OPC to be aware of during recruitment and selection.



Adapted: "Internet Security Graphic" by Vectorportal, CC BY 4.0. Mods: cropped.

## What do you think?

HR should develop clear policies for employees regarding computer and internet use. Do you expect privacy if you use a workplace computer for personal business?



## The OPC Knows What Can Go Wrong

The OPC has seen all too often what can happen when personal information doesn't get the respect it needs. These tips, all based on real-life events, will help you treat all employees' information with integrity and professionalism.

Avoid emailing sensitive information to groups.

What can go wrong?

Information was sent to a large group of job applicants whose addresses were accidentally put in the cc field rather than the bcc field, which violated their privacy.

When interviewing prospective staff, have applicants sign separate sheets to enter the building. Better yet, hold interviews in different buildings.

What can go wrong?

When applicants signed in for an interview, they saw the names of all other applicants because everyone had signed the same form.

Do not include an employee's address on a form to be signed by the employee's supervisor.

What can go wrong?

Someone in power accessed an employee's home address, which could compromise the employee's safety and security.

Avoid sending sensitive information electronically. If you don't have a choice, make sure the message is checked carefully before it is sent.

What can go wrong?

A manager's skills assessment was mistakenly sent electronically to 321 people in their organization.

Set up restrictions or logging mechanisms for people to access data banks.

What can go wrong?

Hundreds of employees had access to others' sensitive personal information.



## Data Should Only Be Collected When Necessary

Think about all the information that may be collected from employees in an organization – when

they apply their resume and cover letter; when they sign up for benefits, their address, family members, health history, etc. Is all this information necessary? If so, how and where is it stored? Who has access? Is it safe from a cybersecurity perspective internally as well as externally? Employers must ensure employees feel safe and respected, not pressured to share personal information.

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“3.5 Pay Equity Act & Privacy Act” from Recruitment and Selection by Melanie Hapke is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. Modifications: Used section Canada’s Privacy Act; Added introduction and key privacy concerns.

## 2.5 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN WELLNESS PROGRAMS

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In addition to laws, wellness programs are guided by ethical principles. Ethics help organizations make decisions that are fair and respectful.

### Common Ethical Principles

**Respect for autonomy:** Employees should have a choice about participating

**Equity and fairness:** Programs should be inclusive and accessible

**Confidentiality:** Personal information must be protected

**Well-being (beneficence):** Programs should aim to do good and avoid harm



### Legal and Ethical Considerations in Practice

Legal and ethical factors often work together in shaping wellness programs.

**Example: A company offers a fitness tracking challenge:**

- Legal consideration: Participation must be voluntary
- Privacy consideration: Health data must be protected
- Ethical consideration: Employees should not feel pressured or excluded

This example shows how laws and ethics guide decision-making to create programs that are safe, inclusive, and respectful.

## More Examples of How Legal and Ethical Considerations Influence Workplace Wellness Practices

### Protecting Employee Privacy

Employers must protect confidential employee health information collected through wellness programs. For example, if employees complete mental health surveys or health assessments, the information must be stored securely and not shared without consent. Ethical practice also requires employers to avoid pressuring employees to disclose personal medical information.

### Providing Accommodation

Canadian human rights legislation requires employers to accommodate employees with disabilities, mental health conditions, or chronic illnesses to the point of undue hardship. For example, a workplace wellness initiative may provide modified fitness activities, flexible schedules, or ergonomic workstations for employees with physical limitations.

### Ensuring Workplace Safety

Occupational health and safety laws require employers to provide a safe work environment. This obligation influences wellness practices such as stress management programs, violence prevention policies, and ergonomic assessments designed to reduce physical and psychological hazards in the workplace.

### Supporting Mental Health

Employers have both ethical and legal responsibilities to address psychological health and safety. For example, organizations may implement anti-bullying policies, employee assistance programs (EAPs), and mental health training to help reduce stigma and support employee well-being.

### Preventing Discrimination

Wellness programs must not unfairly disadvantage certain groups of employees. For example, offering rewards only to employees who meet strict fitness or weight-loss targets could discriminate against individuals with disabilities or medical conditions. Ethical wellness programs focus on inclusive participation rather than outcomes alone.

## Maintaining Voluntary Participation

Ethically, wellness initiatives should be voluntary. Employees should not feel forced to participate in fitness tracking, counselling services, or health screenings. Employers should clearly explain the purpose of programs and obtain informed consent before collecting personal information.

## Addressing Substance Use Fairly

Workplace substance use policies must balance safety requirements with human rights protections. For example, employees with substance dependence may require accommodation and access to treatment supports rather than automatic disciplinary action.

## Promoting Work–Life Balance

Employers increasingly recognize the ethical importance of supporting work–life balance, especially in remote or hybrid workplaces. Examples include flexible work arrangements, mental health days, and “right to disconnect” policies that help employees manage stress and avoid burnout.

## Encouraging Inclusion and Cultural Sensitivity

Wellness initiatives should reflect the diversity of the workforce. For example, organizations may provide culturally inclusive wellness resources, recognize different religious or cultural practices, and ensure programs are accessible to employees from diverse backgrounds.

## Building Trust Through Ethical Leadership

Employees are more likely to participate in wellness programs when organizations demonstrate genuine concern for employee well-being. For example, employers that involve employees in wellness planning and communicate transparently about wellness goals often create more trusted and effective programs.

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OpenAI. (2026, May 15). ChatGPT. [Generative AI chat]. <https://chatgpt.com>

*Content has been reviewed.*

Prompt

Give examples of how legal and ethical considerations influence workplace wellness practices.

## 2.6 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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## Reflection Questions

1. Why is it important for workplace wellness programs to follow Canadian laws such as the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), Human Rights Code, and Employment Standards legislation?
2. How do physical safety and psychological safety work together to create a healthy workplace environment?
3. Think about a workplace, school, or volunteer experience you have had. Did you observe examples of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)? What impact did these practices have on the environment?
4. Why might some employees feel uncomfortable disclosing personal health information at work? What can employers do to create a safer and more supportive environment for disclosure?
5. In your opinion, what does “duty to accommodate” mean in practice? Provide one example of an accommodation that could support employee wellness.
6. Why should participation in workplace wellness programs remain voluntary? What problems could occur if employees feel pressured to participate?
7. How can employers balance collecting employee wellness information with protecting employee privacy and confidentiality?
8. Which ethical principle discussed in this chapter (autonomy, equity and fairness, confidentiality, or beneficence) do you think is most important in workplace wellness programs? Explain your reasoning.
9. Consider the example of a workplace fitness challenge. How could the program unintentionally exclude or disadvantage some employees? What changes could make it more inclusive?
10. How can ethical leadership help build employee trust and improve participation in workplace wellness initiatives?

*Content has been edited*

Prompt

Come up with 10 questions for the following chapter's content.

## 2.7 SUMMARY

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### Legal & Ethical Foundations

Workplace wellness programs must balance employee well-being with legal and ethical responsibilities. Understanding these foundations helps organizations:

- Follow Canadian laws
- Support diverse employee needs
- Protect privacy and confidentiality
- Create fair and inclusive wellness initiatives

By applying these principles, organizations can build programs that are not only effective but also respectful and responsible.

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Microsoft. (2026, May 15). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Provide a summary for the above chapter from a university-level course on employee health and wellness.

# CHAPTER 3: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND THE ROLE OF HR IN ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

## Chapter Outline

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Understanding Employee Health and Wellness Culture
- 3.2 Organizational Culture and Employee Wellness
- 3.3 Key Components of a Healthy Workplace Culture
- 3.4 The Role of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)
- 3.5. The Role of Human Resources (HR), Leadership, and Interdepartmental Collaboration
- 3.6 Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI), and Organizational Culture
- 3.7 Workplace Wellness Programs and Employee Well-Being
- 3.8 Case Studies of Organizational Culture and Workplace Wellness
- 3.9 Best Practices for a Culture of Employee Health and Wellness
- 3.10 Further Reading and Open Educational Resources
- 3.11 Reflective Questions
- 3.12 Summary



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## 3.0 INTRODUCTION

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### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Define the key components of a culture of health and safety in the workplace
- Describe the roles of Human Resources, Occupational Health and Safety and leadership in interdepartmental collaboration
- Explain the benefits of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and wellness in organizations
- Recall examples of successful workplace wellness cultures within case studies

### Overview

Organizational culture refers to a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs that show employees what appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is (Chatman & Cha, 2003; Kerr & Slocum, 2005).

Organizational culture has a powerful influence on employee health and wellness. Employees are affected not only by workplace policies and procedures but also by organizational values, leadership styles, communication practices, workplace relationships, and expectations surrounding work.

A positive organizational culture can improve employee morale, increase engagement, strengthen psychological safety, and support employee well-being. In contrast, unhealthy work-



Image by RDNE Stock Project, Pexels License.

place cultures may contribute to stress, burnout, workplace conflict, absenteeism, and reduced productivity (Government of Canada, 2018).

Human Resources (HR) and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) professionals both contribute to creating healthy organizational cultures. HR departments often focus on employee relations, engagement, inclusion, training, accommodation, and wellness initiatives, while OHS professionals focus on workplace hazard prevention, safety education, and physical and psychological health and safety.

Modern organizations increasingly recognize that employee wellness requires collaboration across departments. HR, OHS, leadership teams, supervisors, and employees all contribute to building workplace cultures that prioritize safety, inclusion, respect, and wellness.

This chapter examines how organizational culture influences employee health and wellness and explores the important roles HR and OHS professionals play in supporting healthy workplaces.

## 3.1 UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLNESS CULTURE

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### What Is a Culture of Employee Health and Wellness?

A culture of employee health and wellness exists when employee well-being is consistently prioritized in organizational decisions, leadership practices, policies, and everyday interactions. Employee wellness is holistic and recognizes that employees are affected by both workplace and personal factors. Workplace wellness involves creating environments that support physical, mental, emotional, social, and occupational well-being (CCOHS, 2022).

Organizations with strong safety cultures:



Encourage open communication about hazards and concerns

Promote employee participation in safety practices

Provide ongoing education and training

Support physical and psychological safety

Hold leadership accountable for employee well-being

Continuously improve health and safety practices

A strong workplace culture extends beyond legal compliance. Organizations that prioritize wellness create environments where employees feel valued, respected, and supported. According to the Government of

Canada workplace health and safety includes injury prevention, mental health, workplace hazard management, violence prevention, and wellness promotion (CCOHS, 2022).

## 3.2 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

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### What Is Organizational Culture?



Organizational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and practices that shape how people interact within a workplace.

It is influenced by facets of workplace culture such as:

Communication styles

Leadership approaches

Employee morale

Workplace relationships

Decision-making

Psychological safety

Employee engagement

Responses to stress and conflict

(Huff, 2014)

Employees experience organizational culture daily through leadership behaviour, workplace expectations,

policies, teamwork, communication, and organizational priorities. Healthy organizational cultures promote employee wellness, inclusion, trust, and collaboration.

## Dimensions of Employee Wellness

Employee wellness is often described as multidimensional. Organizations that support wellness recognize that employee well-being involves multiple interconnected areas.

### Physical Wellness

Physical wellness involves maintaining physical health and preventing illness or injury.

Examples include:

- Ergonomic workstations
- Fitness initiatives
- Healthy workplace policies
- Injury prevention
- Access to healthcare benefits

## Psychological and Emotional Wellness

Psychological wellness includes emotional resilience, stress management, psychological safety, and mental health support.

Examples include:

- Mental health resources
- Stress management education
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Burnout prevention initiatives
- Supportive leadership

## Social Wellness

Social wellness focuses on positive workplace relationships and a sense of belonging.

Examples include:

- Team collaboration
- Respectful communication
- Inclusion initiatives
- Mentorship programs
- Peer support networks

## Financial Wellness

Financial stress can significantly affect employee well-being.

Organizations may support financial wellness through:

- Retirement planning education
- Benefits education
- Financial literacy workshops
- Fair compensation practices



## Occupational Wellness

Occupational wellness involves finding meaning, satisfaction, and balance in work.

Employees are more likely to experience occupational wellness when they:

- Feel valued
- Have opportunities for growth
- Experience manageable workloads
- Maintain work-life balance
- Feel psychologically safe





## 3.3 KEY COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY WORKPLACE CULTURE

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### Leadership Commitment

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping workplace culture. Employees often model the behaviours demonstrated by managers and supervisors.

Effective leaders:

- Demonstrate commitment to employee well-being
- Communicate openly about safety and wellness
- Allocate resources toward wellness initiatives
- Respond appropriately to workplace concerns
- Promote respectful workplace behaviours

When leadership visibly supports health and safety initiatives, employees are more likely to participate in wellness programs and report hazards.

### Employee Participation

Healthy workplace cultures encourage employees to actively contribute to safety and wellness initiatives.

Employee participation may include:

- Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSCs)
- Wellness committees
- Employee surveys
- Peer support initiatives

- Mental health advocacy programs

Ontario workplaces with 20 or more regularly employed workers are generally required to have a Joint Health and Safety Committee under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) (Government of Ontario, 2017).

## Physical Safety

Physical safety involves identifying and reducing workplace hazards that may cause injury or illness.

Common workplace hazards include:

- Slips, trips, and falls
- Repetitive strain injuries
- Hazardous materials
- Noise exposure
- Poor ergonomics
- Violence and harassment

(University of Ottawa. n.d)

Employers are legally required to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers.

## Psychological Safety and Mental Health

Psychological safety refers to an environment where employees feel comfortable expressing concerns, asking questions, contributing ideas, and discussing challenges without fear of humiliation, discrimination, or retaliation. Psychological health is a major component of employee wellness. Workplace stress, burnout, toxic workplace cultures, harassment, and excessive workloads can negatively affect employee mental health.

Psychological safety also includes:

- Mental health support
- Respectful communication
- Anti-harassment policies
- Work-life balance initiatives
- Stress management support

Common workplace mental health concerns include:

- Burnout
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Compassion fatigue
- Workplace stress
- Emotional exhaustion

Organizations that prioritize psychological health often experience improved morale, engagement, retention, and productivity. Groups such as CAMH can provide business resources to assist organizations in learning about the effects of psychological health and how to better support it in the workplace.

## Continuous Improvement

Healthy organizations regularly evaluate their workplace practices.

Continuous improvement may involve:

- Incident investigations
- Employee feedback
- Policy reviews
- Wellness program evaluations
- Ongoing education and training

Organizations that continuously improve their wellness practices are better prepared to respond to changing workforce needs.

## 3.4 THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY (OHS)

### OHS and Employee Wellness

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) focuses on protecting employees from workplace injuries, illnesses, and hazards.

Although earlier workplace wellness approaches focused primarily on physical safety, modern OHS practices increasingly recognize the importance of psychological health and employee well-being.

Occupational health and safety legislation in Canada is regulated federally, provincially, and territorially.

In Ontario, the primary legislation is the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), as previously mentioned in Chapter 2. The OHSA establishes the rights and responsibilities of employers, supervisors, and workers.



“Occupational Safety and Health” by ILO-Asia-Pacific, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.



### Worker Rights Under the OHSA

Ontario workers have three fundamental rights:

- The right to know about workplace hazards
- The right to participate in health and safety activities
- The right to refuse unsafe work

These rights are foundational to Canadian workplace safety culture.



## Internal Responsibility System (IRS)

The Internal Responsibility System (IRS) is a key principle in Canadian workplace safety.

The IRS emphasizes that:

- Everyone in the workplace shares responsibility for safety
- Employers, supervisors, and workers each play a role
- Collaboration improves hazard prevention
- Safety is integrated into daily operations

The IRS supports proactive prevention rather than reactive responses.

## 3.5. THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES (HR), LEADERSHIP, AND INTERDEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION

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Healthy workplace cultures require collaboration across departments.

### Role of Human Resources

Human Resources departments contribute significantly to employee wellness.

HR responsibilities may include:

- Recruitment and onboarding
- Workplace accommodation
- Employee relations
- Wellness programming
- Mental health support initiatives
- Training and development
- Diversity and inclusion initiatives
- Policy development

HR professionals also help ensure compliance with employment standards, human rights legislation, and workplace harassment policies.

## HR and Psychological Wellness

HR departments increasingly support:

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Flexible work arrangements
- Burnout prevention strategies
- Conflict resolution
- Mental health education

HR professionals often act as connectors between employees, leadership, and external support resources.

## Role of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

OHS professionals focus on preventing workplace injuries and illnesses.

Responsibilities may include:

- Hazard identification
- Workplace inspections
- Incident investigations
- Safety training
- Ergonomic assessments
- Compliance monitoring
- Emergency preparedness

OHS teams may also collaborate with HR regarding disability management and return-to-work planning.

## Role of Leadership

Leadership influences organizational culture through communication, decision-making, and resource allocation.

Leaders support healthy workplace cultures when they:

- Model respectful behaviour
- Prioritize employee well-being
- Encourage collaboration
- Promote transparency
- Support inclusive decision-making
- Respond appropriately to employee concerns

Leaders who actively participate in wellness initiatives often increase employee trust and engagement.



## HR and OHS Collaboration

Employee wellness initiatives are often most effective when HR and OHS departments work collaboratively.

Examples of collaborative wellness initiatives include:

- Workplace mental health programs
- Violence and harassment prevention
- Accommodation and return-to-work planning
- Employee wellness education
- Burnout prevention initiatives
- Psychological safety strategies
- Wellness policy development



HR professionals may focus more heavily on employee experience and organizational culture, while OHS professionals may focus on workplace hazards, prevention strategies, and safety compliance. Together, both departments contribute to healthier and more supportive workplaces.



## Benefits of Collaboration

Interdepartmental collaboration improves:

- Communication
- Employee trust
- Program effectiveness
- Compliance with legislation
- Workplace morale
- Organizational resilience

For example, HR and OHS departments may collaborate on:

- Mental health initiatives
- Workplace accommodation plans
- Violence prevention programs
- Return-to-work strategies
- Wellness education campaigns



Collaborative workplaces are often better equipped to address complex employee wellness needs.

## 3.6 EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION (EDI), AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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### Understanding EDI

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are essential components of modern workplace wellness. These three terms were defined in Chapter 2.2.

#### Equity

Equity involves recognizing that individuals may require different levels of support and access to opportunities.

Equity differs from equality. Equality treats everyone the same, while equity acknowledges systemic barriers and seeks fair outcomes.

#### Diversity

Diversity refers to the presence of differences within a group.

Workplace diversity may include:

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Age
- Religion
- Indigenous identity
- Socioeconomic background
- Language and culture

## Inclusion

Inclusion means creating environments where all individuals feel respected, valued, and able to participate fully.

An inclusive workplace:

- Encourages belonging
- Respects differences
- Removes barriers
- Values diverse perspectives
- Promotes accessibility



## Why EDI Matters in Workplace Wellness

EDI and wellness are closely connected.

Employees who experience discrimination, exclusion, or inequitable treatment may face:

- Increased stress
- Reduced psychological safety
- Lower job satisfaction
- Higher absenteeism
- Burnout
- Mental health challenges

Inclusive workplaces often experience:

- Improved innovation
- Better collaboration
- Higher employee engagement
- Improved retention
- Enhanced organizational reputation

Research consistently shows that diverse teams contribute broader perspectives and more creative problem-solving.

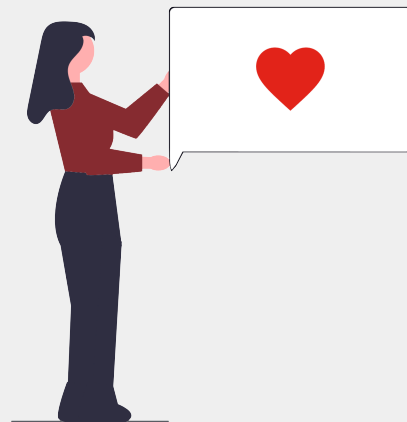


## Psychological Safety and Inclusion

Employees are more likely to feel psychologically safe when organizations:

- Address discrimination and harassment
- Encourage respectful communication
- Support diverse leadership representation
- Provide anti-bias education
- Respond seriously to complaints

Inclusive workplaces help employees feel valued and supported.





## 3.7 WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

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Modern wellness programs focus not only on individual behaviours but also on organizational culture and workplace conditions. Effective wellness programs address both individual and organizational factors.

### Examples of Workplace Wellness Initiatives

#### Physical Wellness

- Ergonomic assessments
- Fitness memberships
- Healthy workplace policies
- Vaccination clinics
- Nutrition education

## Mental Health Wellness

- Mental health training
- Employee Assistance Programs
- Stress management workshops
- Peer support programs
- Flexible scheduling

## Social Wellness

- Team-building activities
- Mentorship programs
- Employee recognition initiatives
- Community involvement opportunities

## Financial Wellness

- Retirement planning education
- Financial literacy workshops
- Benefits education



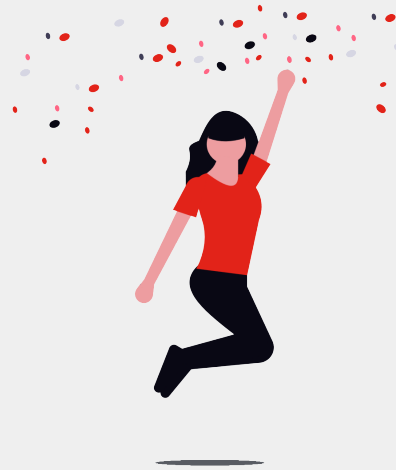
## Benefits of Employee Wellness Programs

Organizations that invest in employee wellness programs may experience:

- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased productivity
- Improved employee engagement
- Better retention
- Lower workplace injury rates
- Enhanced morale

Employees may personally benefit through wellness initiatives by experiencing:

- Improved mental health
- Better work-life balance
- Increased job satisfaction
- Reduced stress
- Stronger workplace relationships



## 3.8 CASE STUDIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND WORKPLACE WELLNESS

### Case Study 1: Bell Let's Talk and Mental Health Awareness

Canadian telecommunications company Bell Canada launched the Bell Let's Talk initiative to promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma (Bell, n.d.).

Key features include:

- Public awareness campaigns
- Workplace mental health initiatives
- Employee education
- Community investment in mental health services



"Lets Talk Day" by York Region, CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The initiative helped normalize conversations about mental health in Canadian workplaces.

### Discussion Questions

1. How can mental health campaigns improve workplace culture?
2. What role does leadership play in reducing mental health stigma?

### Case Study 2: Microsoft Canada and Flexible Work

Microsoft Canada has promoted flexible and hybrid work arrangements to support employee wellness and work-life balance (Microsoft, n.d.).

Key wellness practices include:

- Flexible scheduling
- Remote work options
- Inclusive workplace initiatives
- Employee mental health supports



Image by Devon Pankiw, Pexels License.

Flexible work arrangements can improve employee autonomy and reduce commuting-related stress.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid work models?
2. How can organizations maintain inclusion in remote workplaces?

### Case Study 3: Healthcare Sector Burnout Prevention

Healthcare organizations across Canada have increasingly implemented wellness initiatives in response to employee burnout.

Examples include:

- Peer support programs
- Psychological wellness training
- Trauma-informed leadership
- Resilience education

- Access to counselling services

(CIHI, 2025).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of psychological health and workplace support systems.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why are healthcare workers particularly vulnerable to burnout?
2. What strategies can organizations use to support employee resilience?

## 3.9 BEST PRACTICES FOR A CULTURE OF EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLNESS

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Possible techniques you can implement to have a safe and healthy work environment include the following:

### Know Safety Laws

Provide training to employees on safety laws.

Have a written policy for how violations will be handled.

Commit the resources (time and money) necessary to ensure a healthy work environment.

Involve employees in safety and health discussions, as they may have good ideas as to how the organization can improve.

Make safety part of an employee's job description; in other words, hold employees accountable for always practicing safety at work.

Understand how the health (or lack of health) of your employees contributes to or takes away from the bottom line and implement policies and programs to assist in this effort.

### Health, Safety, and Wellness Policies and Procedures Competencies

Identify health, safety, and wellness compliance standards for the organization.

Establish health, safety, and wellness policies, procedures, roles, and responsi-

bilities for leaders and employees that meet organizational compliance standards.

Provide training programs for leaders and employees on their roles and responsibilities in maintaining a safe workplace.

Educate the workforce on established health, safety, and wellness policies and procedures.

Monitor adherence to organizational health, safety, and wellness policies and procedures. Implement measures to mitigate risks to the health and safety of employees.

Develop a disability management program to support employees requiring workplace accommodations and modifications.

Implement a disability management program that respects and acknowledges the value of all employees in the organization.

Address the environmental concerns of employees.

---

“9.13 Promoting a Culture of Safety, Health, and Wellness” from Human Resources Management by Debra Patterson is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Sharealike 4.0 Unported License. Modifications: Used the first section, removed paragraphs 1&2.

## 3.10 FURTHER READING AND OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

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Health and Wellness for Public Servants

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

Healthy Workplaces [PDF]

Canadian Workplace Health and Safety. Government of Canada – Workplace Health and Safety.

Canadian Health and Safety Workplace Fundamentals (eCampusOntario OER).

Health and Safety in Canadian Workplaces (Open Textbook Library).

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. University of Waterloo – Inclusive Instructional Practices OER Collection.

Northern Lights College – Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resource Library.

Mental Health and Wellness. Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – Workplace Mental Health Toolkit.

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – Business Case for Workplace Wellness.



## 3.11 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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### Reflective Questions

1. What characteristics define a healthy workplace culture?
2. How can HR and OHS departments collaborate effectively?
3. Why is psychological safety important in organizations?
4. How does EDI contribute to workplace wellness?
5. What wellness initiatives would you recommend for a modern workplace?

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Microsoft. (2026). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited*

Prompt

Come up with 5-8 questions for the following chapter's content.

## 3.12 SUMMARY

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## Organizational Culture and the Role of HR in Organizational Health and Safety

Organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping employee health and wellness. Healthy organizational cultures promote safety, inclusion, collaboration, respect, psychological safety, and employee engagement.

Human Resources (HR) and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) professionals both contribute to workplace wellness in different but interconnected ways. HR departments often focus on employee relations, wellness initiatives, inclusion, accommodation, and organizational culture, while OHS professionals focus on hazard prevention, safety education, and workplace health and safety practices.

Collaboration between HR, OHS, leadership teams, and employees is essential for creating supportive workplace environments. Organizations that integrate wellness, safety, and inclusion into their culture are often better equipped to support employee well-being and organizational success.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion are also important aspects of organizational culture because inclusive workplaces help employees feel respected, valued, and psychologically safe.

As workplace expectations continue to evolve, organizations are increasingly prioritizing employee wellness, mental health, flexibility, and psychological safety as key components of a healthy workplace culture.

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Microsoft. (2026, May 25). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Provide a summary for the above chapter from a university-level course on organizational culture.

# CHAPTER 4: PHYSICAL WELLNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

## Chapter Outline

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Understanding Physical Wellness
- 4.2 Fitness, Ergonomics, and Chronic Disease Prevention
- 4.3 Workplace Design and Healthy Environments
- 4.4 Workplace Fitness Programs
- 4.5 Nutrition Education and Healthy Eating
- 4.6 Chronic Disease Management in the Workplace
- 4.7 Women's Wellness in the Workplace
- 4.8 The Employer's Role in Physical Wellness
- 4.9 Example Case Study: Physical Wellness in the Workplace
- 4.10 Reflective Questions
- 4.11 Summary



Image by TheStandingDesk, Unsplash License.

## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Define physical wellness and explain its importance in the workplace.
- Identify the relationship between fitness, ergonomics, and chronic disease prevention.
- Describe how workplace design and healthy work environments can support employee physical wellness.
- Identify common workplace fitness programs, such as on-site gyms, virtual fitness classes, and step challenges.
- Describe the purpose of workplace nutrition education programs, including healthy eating workshops and meal planning initiatives.
- Identify common chronic diseases that may affect employees, including diabetes and hypertension.
- Describe workplace strategies that support chronic disease management and employee well-being.
- Identify workplace wellness initiatives that support women's health, including maternal health and menopause support.
- Recognize the role employers play in promoting healthy lifestyles and physical wellness among employees.
- Describe how physical wellness initiatives can contribute to employee health, productivity, and workplace engagement.

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Microsoft. (2026, May 21). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

The chapter title is Physical Wellness in the Workplace and turn the following into LO using Blooms

taxonomy (level 1): • Fitness, ergonomics, and chronic disease prevention • Workplace design and healthy environments • Fitness programs (on-site gyms, virtual classes, step challenges) • Nutrition education (healthy eating workshops, meal planning) • Chronic disease management (support for diabetes, hypertension, etc.) • Women's wellness (maternal health, menopause support)

## Introduction

Physical wellness is an important part of overall employee health and well-being. In Canadian workplaces, organizations are increasingly recognizing that employee wellness extends beyond preventing injuries and includes promoting healthy lifestyles, physical activity, nutrition, disease prevention, and supportive work environments.

Healthy employees are often better able to manage workplace demands, maintain energy levels, and participate fully in their work responsibilities. Research has also shown that employee wellness initiatives may contribute to reduced absenteeism, improved morale, and increased workplace engagement (Stewart Black & Bright, 2019).

This chapter explores physical wellness in the workplace, including ergonomics, fitness programs, workplace design, nutrition education, chronic disease management, and women's wellness initiatives. The chapter also examines how employers, HR professionals, and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) professionals contribute to healthier workplace environments.



Image by Mikhail Nilov, Pexels License.

## 4.1 UNDERSTANDING PHYSICAL WELLNESS

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Physical wellness refers to maintaining a healthy body through regular physical activity, healthy nutrition, disease prevention, sleep, and safe lifestyle practices. In workplace settings, physical wellness also includes ensuring that work environments support employee health and reduce the risk of illness or injury.

In addition, absenteeism due to sickness and injury are on the rise. As a study by Llyod, et al. (2025) found, in the UK sickness absence rates (for both illness and injury) was 2.6% in 2022, the highest level it has been since 2004.

Physical wellness is closely connected to other dimensions of wellness. For example:



Physical health can affect mental and emotional wellness.



Chronic illness may influence financial and social well-being.



Workplace stress may contribute to physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, or high blood pressure.

As discussed in earlier chapters, organizational culture influences employee wellness. Organizations that value employee well-being are more likely to promote healthy habits, encourage participation in wellness initiatives, and create supportive workplace environments.

## 4.2 FITNESS, ERGONOMICS, AND CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION

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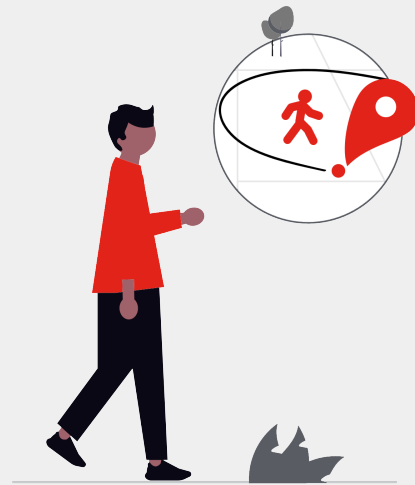
## Workplace Fitness and Physical Activity

Regular physical activity is associated with many health benefits, including improved cardiovascular health, increased energy, reduced stress, and a lower risk of chronic disease. However, many modern jobs involve long periods of sitting, repetitive tasks, or limited movement.

To support employee wellness, organizations may implement workplace fitness initiatives such as:

- On-site fitness centres
- Gym membership discounts
- Walking clubs
- Stretch breaks
- Virtual fitness classes
- Wellness competitions
- Step-count challenges

These programs encourage employees to incorporate movement into their daily routines. Even moderate physical activity can positively affect employee health and wellness.



## **Example: Workplace Walking Challenges**

Some organizations organize workplace walking or step challenges where employees track their movement using mobile apps or fitness devices. These initiatives may promote teamwork, motivation, and healthy competition while encouraging physical activity.



## Ergonomics in the Workplace

Ergonomics refers to designing workspaces, tools, and tasks to fit the physical needs of employees. Poor ergonomic practices can contribute to discomfort, fatigue, repetitive strain injuries, and musculoskeletal disorders.

Common ergonomic hazards include:

- Poor posture
- Repetitive movements
- Heavy lifting
- Awkward positioning
- Prolonged sitting or standing

Employers can reduce ergonomic risks by providing:

- Adjustable workstations
- Ergonomic chairs
- Proper lighting
- Safe lifting equipment
- Ergonomic keyboards and accessories
- Employee education and training

Ergonomics is important in both office and non-office environments. For example, healthcare workers may require lifting supports, while office workers may need properly adjusted desks and computer monitors. According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), ergonomic workplace design can help reduce injuries and improve employee comfort and productivity (CCOHS, 2024).



## Chronic Disease Prevention

Chronic diseases are long-term health conditions that often develop gradually over time. Common chronic illnesses affecting Canadian workers include:

- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Arthritis
- Asthma

Lifestyle factors such as physical inactivity, poor nutrition, stress, smoking, and inadequate sleep may increase the risk of chronic disease.

Organizations can support chronic disease prevention by:

- Promoting physical activity
- Providing wellness education
- Offering healthy food options
- Supporting smoking cessation initiatives
- Encouraging preventive healthcare

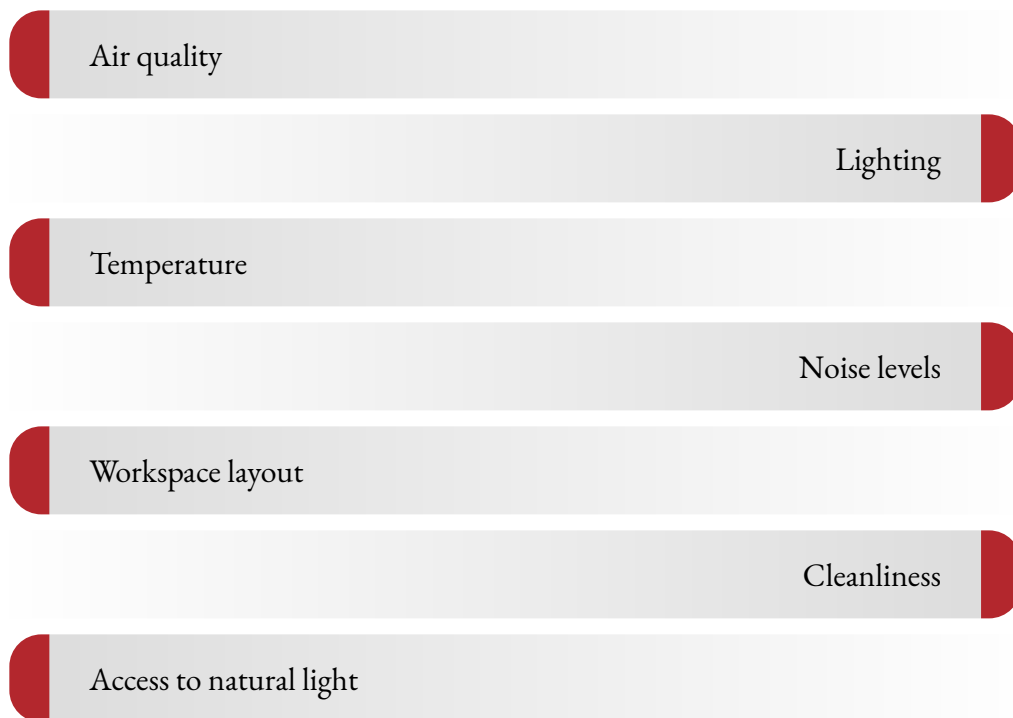
Prevention-focused wellness initiatives may improve employee well-being while reducing long-term healthcare costs and absenteeism.

## 4.3 WORKPLACE DESIGN AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

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### Healthy Workplace Design

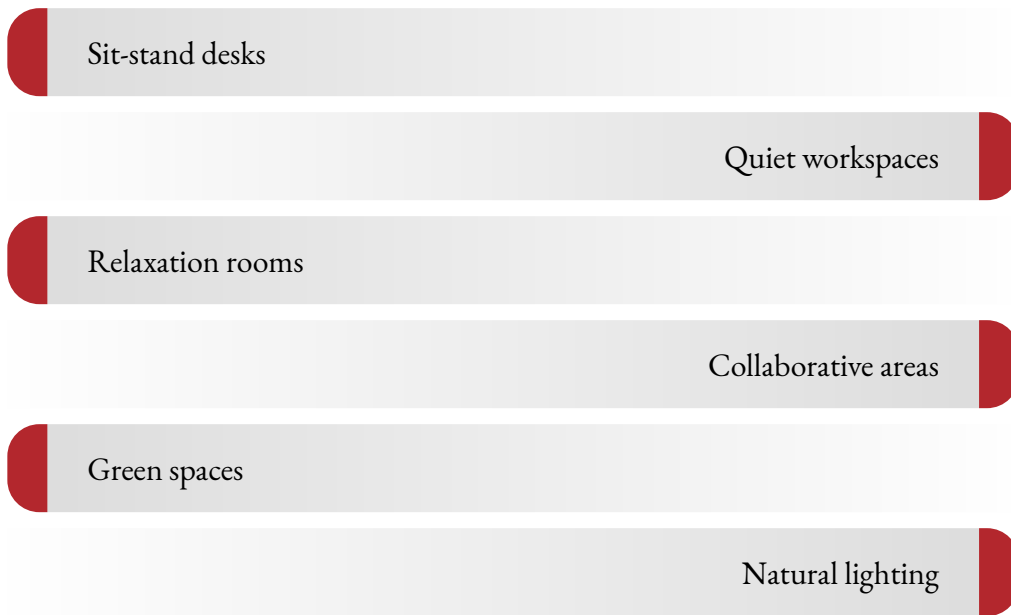
The physical work environment has a major influence on employee wellness. Workplace design includes factors such as:



Poor workplace environments may contribute to stress, fatigue, illness, and reduced concentration.

Healthy workplace environments, however, can support employee comfort, productivity, and well-being.

Modern workplaces increasingly incorporate wellness-focused design features such as:

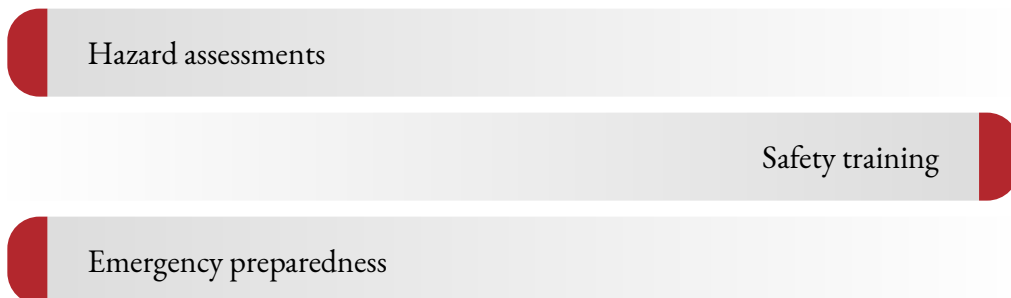


Remote and hybrid work environments have also increased the importance of home office ergonomics and flexible workspace design.

## Safety and Physical Wellness

Workplace safety and physical wellness are closely connected. Organizations have legal responsibilities to provide safe work environments and reduce hazards that may harm employees.

Examples of workplace safety initiatives include:





As discussed in earlier chapters, HR and OHS professionals often work together to support both safety and employee wellness

## 4.4 WORKPLACE FITNESS PROGRAMS

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Organizations use different types of wellness initiatives to encourage healthy lifestyles and employee participation.

### On-Site Fitness Facilities

Some organizations provide on-site gyms or exercise facilities to make physical activity more accessible for employees. Access to fitness facilities may encourage exercise before work, during lunch breaks, or after shifts. However, smaller organizations may choose alternative wellness initiatives due to budget or space limitations.

One example of an on-site fitness facility is at Canada Life in London, Ontario. Employees have a gym outfitted with cardio and weight training equipment, a group fitness studio where an on-site instructor teaches various types of fitness classes, and a shower/locker room facility. The centre was available at a very economical rate prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and since then, the gym has been free to all employees.

Personally, as a fitness instructor in my Part-time employment, I have taught yoga at three different workplaces in London, Ontario, to employees who wanted to have exercise during or after work hours. The cost of my instructor rate was paid for by the organizations. When I worked in industry as an HR Professional, I used my own experience as a fitness instructor to teach yoga and meditation classes as lunch and learns to employees at businesses I worked for.

## Virtual Wellness Programs

Virtual wellness programs became increasingly common during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to be used in many workplaces today.

Examples include:

- Virtual yoga classes (this was something I offered to other employees on Zoom at Fanshawe College during the COVID-19 pandemic years)
- Online fitness sessions
- Wellness webinars
- Stretch breaks
- Guided meditation

Virtual wellness initiatives can improve accessibility for remote and hybrid employees.

## Wellness Challenges

Organizations may also organize wellness challenges to increase engagement. Examples include:

- Step challenges
- Hydration goals
- Healthy eating challenges
- Team fitness competitions (Fanshawe College has offered this event in the past as part of a fundraiser for United Way)

Although wellness challenges can motivate employees, organizations should ensure programs remain inclusive and avoid creating pressure or unhealthy competition.

## 4.5 NUTRITION EDUCATION AND HEALTHY EATING

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Nutrition is an important component of physical wellness. Healthy eating supports energy levels, concentration, immune function, and overall health.

Organizations may support nutrition education by offering:



Healthy cafeteria options

Nutrition workshops

Meal-planning education

Wellness newsletters

Access to nutrition professionals

Healthy snack programs

Nutrition education programs generally focus on helping employees make informed choices rather than promoting restrictive diets.



## Meal Planning and Workplace Wellness

Meal planning can help employees develop healthier eating habits while reducing stress and saving time. Workplace wellness programs may teach employees how to:

- Prepare balanced meals
- Read nutrition labels
- Plan healthy lunches
- Budget for healthy eating
- Maintain healthy eating habits during busy schedules

Organizations should also recognize that employees may experience barriers to healthy eating, including financial challenges, cultural food preferences, food insecurity, or limited access to healthy food options.

Inclusive wellness programs should respect diversity and avoid stigmatizing employees based on food choices or health status.



Image by Sarah Chai, Pexels License.

## Example of a Workplace Wellness/Nutrition Program

Watch the video on page 4.5 Nutrition Education and Healthy Eating, in the online version of this text.

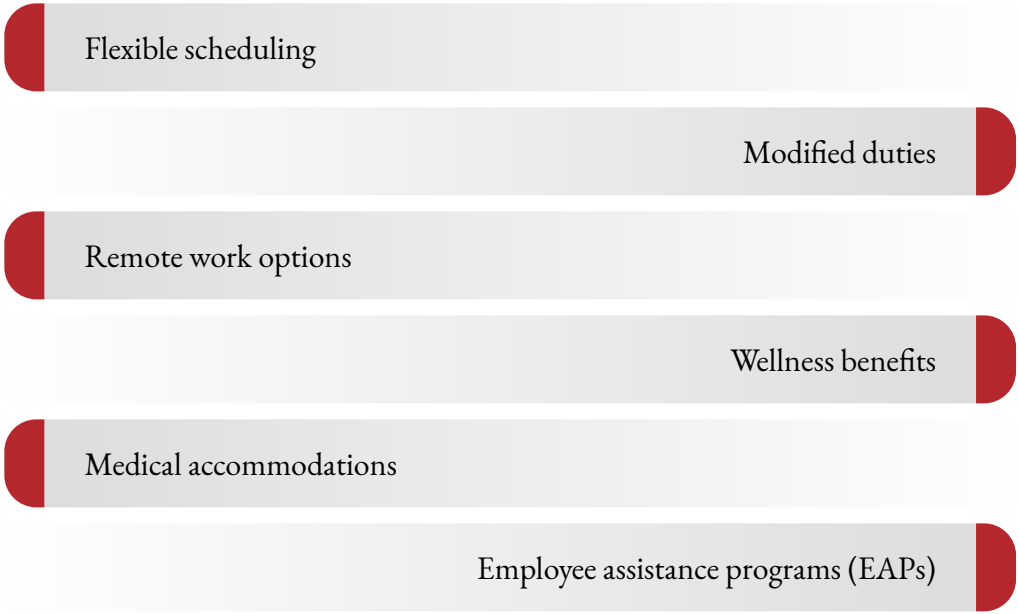
## 4.6 CHRONIC DISEASE MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

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Many employees manage chronic illnesses while remaining active members of the workforce. Supportive workplaces can help employees continue working safely and effectively.

### Workplace Accommodations and Support

Organizations may support employees with chronic illnesses through:



Flexible scheduling

Modified duties

Remote work options

Wellness benefits

Medical accommodations

Employee assistance programs (EAPs)

Under Canadian human rights legislation, employers have a duty to accommodate employees with disabilities to the point of undue hardship (more details can be found in Chapter 2).

Supportive workplace practices can improve employee well-being, inclusion, and retention.

## Reducing Stigma

Employees living with chronic illnesses may worry about discrimination or stigma in the workplace. Organizations can help reduce stigma by:



Promoting respectful communication

Protecting confidentiality

Educating employees about inclusion

Encouraging supportive leadership

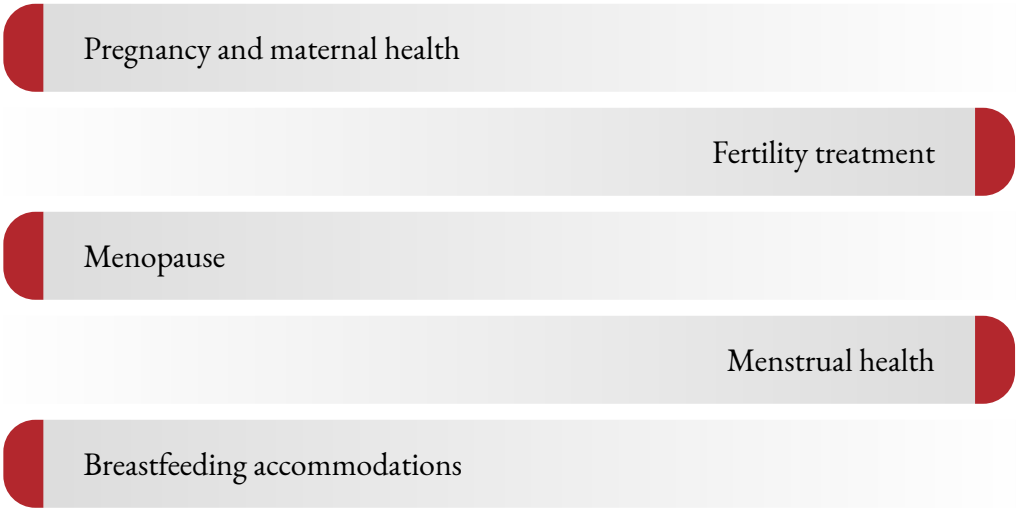
Psychologically safe workplaces allow employees to seek support without fear of judgment or discrimination.

## 4.7 WOMEN'S WELLNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

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Women's wellness is receiving increased attention within workplace health and wellness programs. Historically, some workplace wellness initiatives overlooked issues specifically related to women's health.

Today, many organizations are developing supports related to:



Pregnancy and maternal health

Fertility treatment

Menopause

Menstrual health

Breastfeeding accommodations

## Maternal Health and Pregnancy Support

Pregnant employees may require accommodations to support their health and safety. Examples include:

- Modified duties
- Flexible scheduling
- Additional rest breaks
- Remote work arrangements
- Safe working conditions

Supportive maternity and parental leave policies can also improve employee retention and workplace satisfaction.

## Menopause Support

Menopause can affect employees in different ways and may influence physical comfort, concentration, sleep, and stress levels. Some organizations are beginning to implement menopause-related supports and education programs.

Examples of workplace menopause supports include:

- Flexible work arrangements
- Temperature control options
- Wellness education
- Access to healthcare benefits

Reducing stigma around menopause contributes to more inclusive and supportive workplace cultures.

## 4.8 THE EMPLOYER'S ROLE IN PHYSICAL WELLNESS

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Employers play a significant role in shaping workplace wellness culture. Organizations that prioritize wellness often integrate employee health into workplace policies, leadership practices, and organizational values.



Image by Alexander Suhorucov, Pexels License.

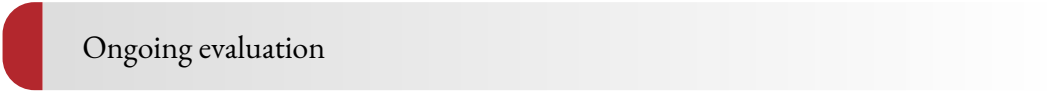
Effective wellness programs commonly include:

Leadership support – for example, leaders should participate in some of the physical health programs that are launched in an organization to actively role model their support

Employee participation – it is a good idea to survey and/or talk to employees prior to initiating various programs to gauge interest levels and hence strive for more on-going participation

Inclusive program design – as was mentioned, talk to or survey employees to find out what wants and needs they have for physical wellness. For example, if the majority of employees do not want to do exercise during working hours though instead would enjoy before or after work activities, creating a program that adheres to favoured hours would likely be more embraced and utilized.

Accessibility – the physical needs of employees should be considered. For example, if you have employees in wheelchairs, having activities they can also enjoy would be beneficial.



Ongoing evaluation



Collaboration between HR and OHS

Employees are generally more likely to participate in wellness initiatives when organizations create supportive and respectful environments.

## 4.9 EXAMPLE CASE STUDY: PHYSICAL WELLNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

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## Case Study: The Distribution Centre Dilemma

Educational Resources Ltd. (ERL) operates a large distribution centre that employs 85 warehouse associates. Over the past year, HR has noticed an increase in absenteeism, musculoskeletal injuries, and workers reporting fatigue. Several employees have indicated that long periods of standing, repetitive lifting, and limited opportunities for movement breaks contribute to physical discomfort.

A review of workplace health data revealed:

- A 22% increase in back and shoulder strain injuries.
- Higher absenteeism among employees working extended shifts.
- Low participation in the organization's voluntary fitness reimbursement program.
- Employee survey results showing many workers feel physically exhausted by the end of the workday.

The HR Manager has been asked to develop a physical wellness strategy that improves employee health while reducing injury rates and absenteeism.

### Discussion Questions

1. What physical wellness challenges are evident in this workplace?
2. What factors may be contributing to the increase in injuries and fatigue?
3. Why might employees not be using the fitness reimbursement program?
4. What workplace design or ergonomic improvements could be implemented?
5. How can HR encourage participation in physical wellness initiatives?
6. What metrics should HR track to evaluate the success of the program?

### HR Analysis

Physical wellness extends beyond fitness programs and includes workplace design, ergonomics, injury prevention, nutrition, sleep, and opportunities for movement throughout the workday. Effective interventions might include:

- Ergonomic assessments.
- Stretch-and-flex programs before shifts.
- Enhanced lifting training.
- Scheduled movement breaks.
- Wellness challenges focused on activity and recovery.
- Education on sleep and fatigue management.

HR should evaluate outcomes using injury rates, absenteeism data, employee surveys, and participation rates in wellness activities.

## Reflection

If you were the HR Manager, which initiative would you implement first and why?

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OpenAI. (2026, June 11). ChatGPT. [Generative AI chat]. <https://chatgpt.com>

*Content has been reviewed.*

Prompt

Using the OER: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/employeehealthwellness/>, please create a case study for chapter 4 similar to the case studies in the other chapters

## 4.10 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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### Reflective Questions

1. Why is physical wellness important in Canadian workplaces?
2. How can ergonomics improve employee health and safety?
3. What are the benefits and limitations of workplace fitness programs?
4. How can organizations support employees living with chronic illnesses?
5. Why is women's wellness becoming a more important workplace issue?
6. How does workplace design influence employee health and productivity?

## 4.11 SUMMARY

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### Physical Wellness in the Workplace

Physical wellness is an essential component of healthy workplaces and employee well-being. Canadian organizations increasingly recognize the importance of supporting physical health through ergonomics, fitness initiatives, healthy workplace design, nutrition education, chronic disease management, and inclusive wellness practices.

Employers, HR professionals, OHS practitioners, and employees all contribute to creating workplace environments that support health and wellness. Organizations that invest in employee wellness may experience improved morale, engagement, productivity, and organizational effectiveness.

The next chapter will examine mental and emotional wellness in the workplace, including stress management, burnout prevention, psychological safety, and workplace mental health supports.

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Microsoft. (2026). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Given the chapter learning outcomes, write content for the chapter of my college level course in Ontario that includes as much open resource content as possible and ensure it is cited with links I can access.

# CHAPTER 5: MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

## Chapter Outline

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Understanding Mental and Emotional Wellness
- 5.2 Workplace Stress
- 5.3 The Impact of Workplace Stress
- 5.4 Burnout
- 5.5 Stress Management and Burnout Prevention
- 5.6 Resilience
- 5.7 Psychological Health and Safety
- 5.8 CSA Z1003: Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace
- 5.9 Reducing Stigma Around Mental Health
- 5.10 The Role of HR Professionals
- 5.11 Example Case Study: Mental and Emotional Wellness
- 5.12 Reflective Questions
- 5.13 Summary



Image by Anna Shvets, Pexels License.

## 5.0 INTRODUCTION

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## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Define mental and emotional wellness within the context of workplace health and wellness.
- Explain the relationship between workplace stress, burnout, and employee well-being.
- Identify common workplace stressors and their impact on employee performance, engagement, and organizational outcomes.
- Describe the signs, symptoms, and stages of burnout.
- Examine evidence-based approaches to stress management and burnout prevention.
- Explain the concept of resilience and strategies for building resilience in the workplace.
- Analyze the role of psychological safety and psychologically healthy workplaces.
- Describe the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Psychological Health and Safety Standard (CSA Z1003).
- Evaluate the responsibilities of HR professionals in supporting mental health and emotional wellness.
- Discuss the legal, ethical, and organizational implications of workplace mental health initiatives.

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Microsoft. (2026, May 27). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Turn the following into learning outcomes for the chapters (likely need more LO): Stress management, burnout prevention, and resilience, Psychological Health and Safety Standard (CSA Z1003), Mental health support (EAPs, mindfulness, stress management, mental health first aid), Work-life balance (flexible work arrangements, time-off policies)

## Overview

Mental and emotional wellness has become a central issue in modern workplaces. Organizations increasingly recognize that employee well-being is directly connected to productivity, engagement, retention, innovation, and organizational culture. Mental health concerns affect employees across industries and occupations, influencing absenteeism, presenteeism, turnover, workplace relationships, and organizational performance.

Since 2014 the number of publications about employee well-being in the HRM research area has been on a sharp increase (from just over 20 in 2014 to just under 160 in 2023). That number jumped drastically from 2020 to 2023 (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024).

Human resources professionals play a critical role in creating supportive environments that promote psychological well-being. HR departments are often responsible for developing wellness initiatives, implementing mental health supports, training leaders, and ensuring compliance with workplace health and safety obligations.



Image by Yan Krukau, Pexels License.

In Canada, workplace mental health has received growing attention due to rising rates of stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (2022), approximately one in five Canadians experiences a mental health problem or illness in any given year. Workplace factors can either contribute to psychological harm or support positive mental health outcomes.

Mental wellness extends beyond the absence of illness. It includes the ability to manage stress, maintain healthy relationships, adapt to change, and function effectively in personal and professional settings. Emotional wellness similarly involves emotional awareness, regulation, coping abilities, and resilience.

This chapter explores workplace stress, burnout, resilience, and psychological health and safety. It also examines the role of HR professionals in promoting mentally healthy workplaces.

## 5.1 UNDERSTANDING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

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### Mental Health Stats:

21.4% of the working population experienced mental health problems and illnesses that affected their productivity.

In 2019, depression became the leading global cause of disability leaves.

Post-COVID – high-risk mental health issues have risen from 14% (2017-2019) to 35% (Sept 2025).

Mental health problems and mental illnesses account for approximately 30% of short- and long-term disability claims. And they are rated one of the top causes of disability claims by over 80% of Canadian employers.

Mental health conditions are the leading cause of disability, absence, and presenteeism, with an economic burden estimated at 51 billion dollars per year in Canada, 20 billion of which is from direct workplace losses.

(Fuda, 2026)

## Mental Wellness

Mental wellness refers to a state of psychological well-being in which individuals can cope effectively with normal life stressors, work productively, and contribute to their communities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Mental wellness involves emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, coping abilities, and social connectedness.

Mental wellness is influenced by multiple factors, including:

- Workplace culture
- Job demands
- Leadership quality
- Workload
- Social support
- Financial stress
- Physical health
- Life events
- Access to healthcare and supports

## Emotional Wellness

Emotional wellness refers to the ability to understand, express, and manage emotions effectively. Emotionally well employees are often better equipped to manage conflict, communicate effectively, adapt to change, and maintain positive workplace relationships.

Emotional wellness includes:

- Self-awareness
- Emotional regulation
- Empathy
- Stress management
- Healthy coping skills
- Positive interpersonal relationships

Organizations that foster emotional wellness often experience stronger teamwork, improved morale, and reduced workplace conflict.

## 5.2 WORKPLACE STRESS

Workplace stress continues to rise as organizations and employees adapt to rapid global change and increasing job demands. Common sources of stress include excessive workloads, unclear or conflicting job expectations, and concerns about job security. When stress becomes overwhelming, employees may experience mental and physical health challenges such as depression, difficulty concentrating, memory problems, irritability, and anger. Over time, prolonged stress can lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced effectiveness, cynicism, and burnout. These mental health challenges often contribute to increased absenteeism, lower productivity, and higher employee turnover, all of which can raise organizational costs related to staffing and health benefits. In addition, employees and leaders who struggle to manage ongoing stress may have difficulty adapting to workplace challenges, which can negatively affect leadership performance and organizational stability (Walinga, 2021).



Image by Yan Krukau, Pexels License.

Canadians often cite work as a major source of stress in their lives. According to Foster and Barnettson (2016), “almost three quarters of Canadian workers report that their work entails some stress, with 27% reporting that work is ‘quite a bit’ or ‘extremely’ stressful.”

### Defining Stress



“Stress is a reaction to a situation – it isn’t about the actual situation. We usually feel stressed when we think that the demands of the situation are greater than our resources to deal with that situation. For example, someone who feels comfortable speaking in public may not worry about giving a presentation, while someone who isn’t confident in their skills may feel a lot of stress about an upcoming presentation. Common sources of stress may include major life events, like moving or changing jobs. Long-term worries, like a long-term illness or parenting, can also feel stressful. Even daily hassles like dealing with traffic can be a source of stress.” (CCOHS, 2025b).

“

Workplace stress is the combination of harmful physical and emotional responses that can happen when there is a conflict between job demands on the worker and the amount of control a worker has over meeting these demands. In general, the combination of high demands in a job and a low amount of control over the situation can lead to stress.” (CMHA, n.d.).

Some stress can be positive and motivating. Moderate stress may enhance focus, energy, and performance. However, chronic or excessive stress can negatively affect mental and physical health.

The following graph shows how stress can be both positive and negative on a continuum:

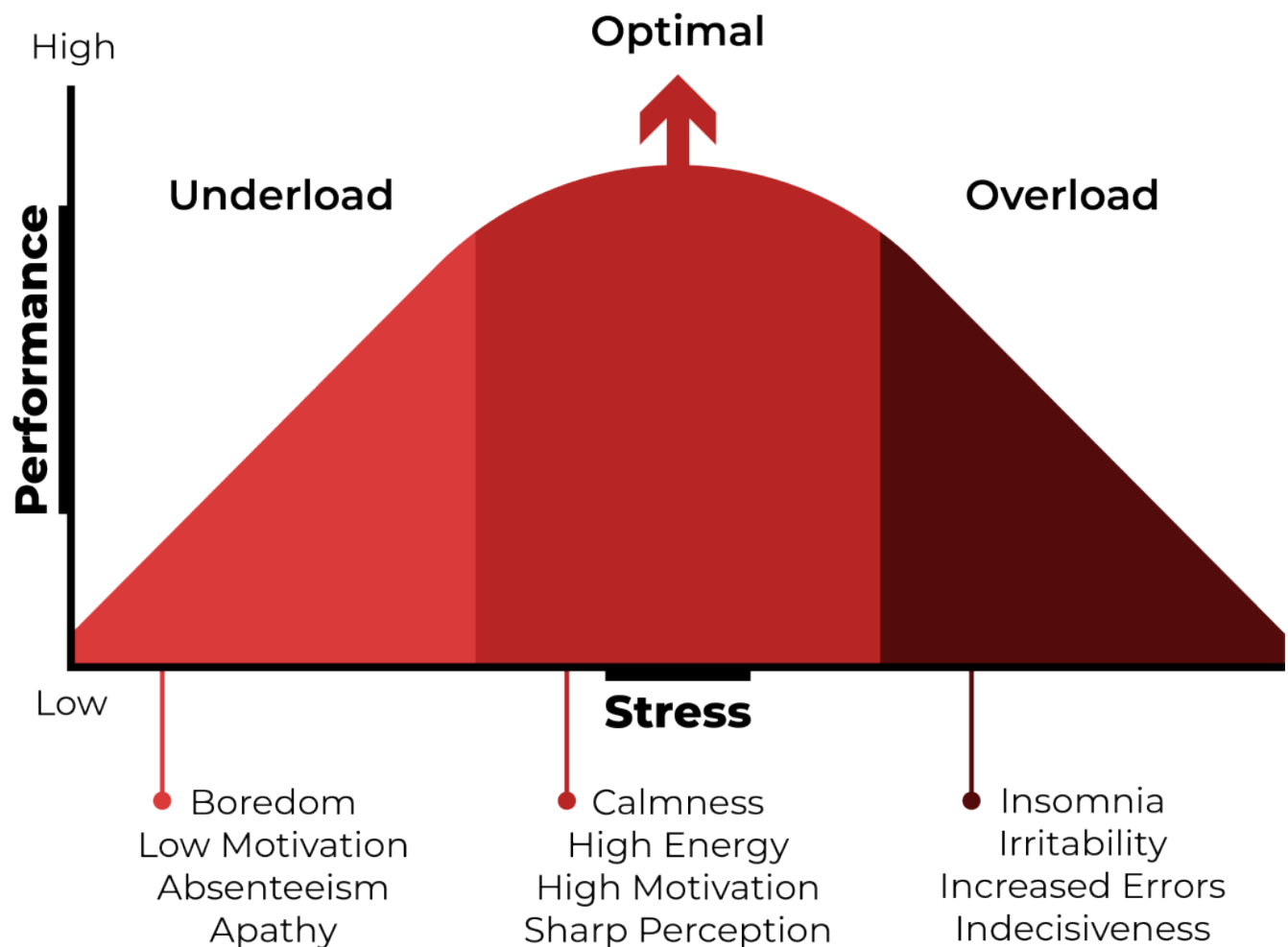


Figure 5.2.1 “The Underload Overload Continuum” from Organizational Behaviour, CC BY 4.0. Mods: Recoloured & redesigned.

**Image Description**

The image depicts a graph that plots the level of stress against employee performance. At the low end of stress, performance decreases due to boredom, absenteeism, apathy, and decreased motivation. At the high end, performance decreases due to insomnia, irritability, increased errors, and indecisiveness. In the middle of the graph, performance is at its highest and is marked as “optimal”. This increase is attributed to high motivation, high energy, sharp perception, and calmness.

## Are the Japanese Working Themselves to Death?

*Karoshi* literally means death from overwork, and unofficial estimates are that as many people die each year from *karoshi* as from traffic accidents in Japan—approximately 10,000. In 2016, the legal claims of *karoshi* rose to a record high of 1,456 according to government figures. Additionally, just under 2,000 suicides linked to work-related causes were reported. In October 2017, the latest employee death that shook the media was 31-year-old journalist Miwa Sado, and before that, 24-year-old Matsui Takahashi, an employee working at Dentsu advertising agency, leapt from the roof on Christmas Day 2015.

These incidents are just two of many that occur more frequently in Japan due to the culture of overtime and stress within the work environment. Each of these women logged over 100 hours of overtime over the course of one month. Often, the causes of death include heart failure, stroke, and suicide due to the stress, lack of sleep, and sleep deprivation that is caused by being overworked. Takahashi posted on Twitter, “It’s 4 a.m. My body’s trembling, I’m going to die. I’m so tired.” Soon after her death, the president of Dentsu resigned from his post.

Many reports suggest that performance reviews are marked negatively for those who don’t work lots of overtime, while others suggest employees must strive to make good impressions on their bosses, and staying late or working extra is perceived as loyalty to their jobs and companies.

The Japanese government has taken strides since the two incidents to implement policies to help to combat *karoshi* for good. One attempt implemented in 2016 is A Premium Friday plan, where Japanese workers are allowed the chance to leave at 3 p.m. on the last Friday of each month. This has only made some employees busier because some companies have organized their monthly finances to hit sales goals before the end of the month. Little success has been seen from this initiative. One Tokyo-based IT Service company forced employees to wear



“Rush Hour at Shinjuku” by Chris 73/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

purple capes on the third Wednesday of the month if they worked late, which was a very bold and visual tactic to showcase the “working late is not cool” vibe. This shaming tactic worked, decreasing the overtime worked by 50 percent. Some companies have implemented individual changes, such as breakfast offerings and allowing time off as needed.

Changing the Japanese work culture will take time. Although these small changes have not made a large impact yet, the discussion is widening, and workplaces are becoming more aware of the need for drastic changes in policy to counteract the growing issue of stress in the workplace.



### Questions:

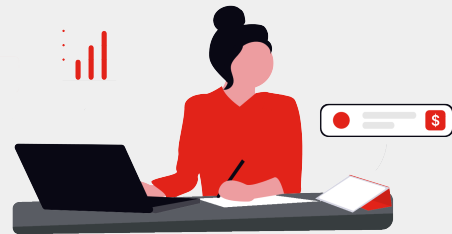
1. What measures can a manager take in order to counteract the stress-related issues within the work environment?
2. What considerations should a manager take before implementing changes to a work environment and policies when managing a global team?
3. What environmental and cultural factors can affect an employee's work ethic and their level of stress in their workday?



## Common Workplace Stressors

Workplace stressors vary across industries and roles, but common examples include:

- **Workload and Time Pressure:** Excessive workloads, unrealistic deadlines, and understaffing can create chronic stress. Employees may feel overwhelmed when expectations exceed available time and resources.
- **Lack of Control:** Employees who have little autonomy over their work often experience higher stress levels. Micromanagement and limited decision-making authority can reduce job satisfaction and increase frustration.
- **Poor Leadership:** Ineffective communication, inconsistent expectations, lack of support, and toxic management practices contribute significantly to workplace stress.
- **Workplace Conflict:** Interpersonal conflict, harassment, bullying, and incivility can create emotionally unsafe work environments.
- **Job Insecurity:** Economic uncertainty, organizational restructuring, layoffs, and precarious employment may increase anxiety and emotional distress.
- **Work-Life Imbalance:** Long working hours, excessive overtime, and difficulty disconnecting from work can interfere with personal responsibilities and recovery time.
- **Organizational Change:** Frequent organizational change, mergers, technological disruption, and role ambiguity can create uncertainty and stress.



**Table 5.2.1 Typical Stressors Faced by Managers**

| Stressor                 | Example                                                             |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Role ambiguity           | Unclear job duties                                                  |
| Role conflict            | Manager is both a boss and a subordinate.                           |
| Role overload            | Too much work, too little time                                      |
| Unrealistic expectations | Managers are often asked to do the impossible.                      |
| Difficult decisions      | Managers have to make decisions that adversely affect subordinates. |
| Managerial failure       | Manager fails to achieve expected results.                          |
| Subordinate failure      | Subordinates let their manager down.                                |

---

“18.2 Organizational Influences on Stress” from Organizational Behaviour by J. Stewart Black et al. is licensed under the Creative Commons 4.0 International License. Modifications: Used Typical Stressors Table and Case Example.

## 5.3 THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE STRESS

---

Chronic stress affects both employees and organizations.

### Individual Effects

Employees experiencing chronic stress may develop:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Sleep disturbances
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Reduced motivation
- Physical health problems
- Substance misuse

Stress may also weaken immune functioning and increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and other chronic illnesses.

## Organizational Effects

Workplace stress can lead to:

- Increased absenteeism
- Presenteeism
- Higher turnover
- Reduced productivity
- Workplace accidents
- Poor morale
- Increased healthcare costs
- Reduced employee engagement

Presenteeism occurs when employees attend work while unwell and function below their normal capacity. In many organizations, the financial costs associated with presenteeism exceed those related to absenteeism.



## How Stressful Is Your Job?

*Download a PDF version of this assessment.*

### **Instructions**

This instrument focuses on the stress level of your current (or previous) job. Think of your job, and answer the following items as frankly and honestly as possible.

| Question                                                                          | Strongly Disagree |   |   | Strongly Agree |   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---|---|----------------|---|
|                                                                                   | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 1. I am often irritable with my coworkers.                                        | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 2. At work, I constantly feel rushed or behind schedule.                          | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 3. I often dread going to work.                                                   | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 4. I often experience headaches, stomachaches, or backaches at work.              | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 5. I often lose my temper over minor problems.                                    | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 6. Everything I do seems to drain my energy level.                                | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 7. I often interpret questions or comments from others as a criticism of my work. | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 8. Time is my enemy.                                                              | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 9. I often have time for only a quick lunch (or no lunch) at work.                | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 10. I spend considerable time at home worrying about problems at work.            | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |

### Scoring

To score this instrument, first add up your score:

- If you scored 1–18 points, you see yourself as having a normal amount of stress.
- If you scored 19–38 points, you feel that stress is becoming a problem.
- If you scored 39–50 points, you feel that stress is a serious problem.

Where did you score on this instrument? Does this seem like an accurate description of the real situation? On the job you described, what could you do to reduce stress levels?

---

How stressful is your job: “Management Skills Application Exercises” from Organizational Behavior by OpenStax – Rice University is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 (CC BY NC-SA) license, except where otherwise noted. Modifications: Used this section only; Added answer key.

## 5.4 BURNOUT

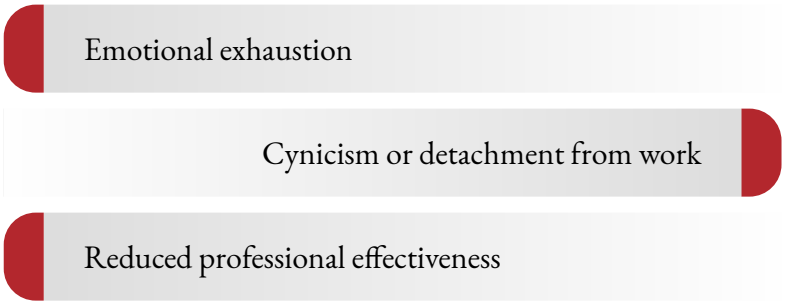
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### Defining Burnout

Black and Bright (2019) define burnout as “a general feeling of exhaustion that can develop when a person simultaneously experiences too much pressure to perform and too few sources of satisfaction.” The World Health Organization (2019) classifies burnout as an occupational phenomenon rather than a medical condition.

Watch the video on page 5.4 Burnout, in the online version of this text.

Burnout typically involves three dimensions:



Emotional exhaustion

Cynicism or detachment from work

Reduced professional effectiveness

## Signs and Symptoms of Burnout

Employees experiencing burnout may display:

- Chronic fatigue
- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced productivity
- Increased irritability
- Withdrawal from coworkers
- Reduced job satisfaction
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Increased absenteeism

## Causes of Burnout

Burnout is often linked to organizational factors rather than individual weakness. Common causes include:

- Excessive workloads
- Lack of recognition
- Insufficient staffing
- Limited control
- Poor leadership
- Unclear expectations
- Lack of social support
- Value conflicts
- Burnout in Helping Professions

Burnout is particularly common in healthcare, education, social services, and caregiving professions due to emotional labour and high job demands.

Emotional labour refers to the management of emotions to meet organizational expectations. Employees in customer service and care-oriented roles may be required to display empathy, positivity, or emotional composure regardless of their true feelings.



## Are You Suffering from Burnout?

### Instructions:

Check whether each item is “mostly true” or “mostly untrue” for you. Answer as honestly as you can. When you have finished, add up the number of checks for “mostly true.”

| Question                                               | Mostly True | Mostly Untrue |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. I usually go around feeling tired.                  | ----        | ----          |
| 1. I think I am working harder but accomplishing less. | ----        | ----          |
| 1. My job depresses me.                                | ----        | ----          |
| 1. My temper is shorter than it used to be.            | ----        | ----          |
| 1. I have little enthusiasm for life.                  | ----        | ----          |
| 1. I snap at people fairly often.                      | ----        | ----          |
| 1. My job is a dead end for me.                        | ----        | ----          |
| 1. Helping others seems like a losing battle.          | ----        | ----          |
| 1. I don't like what I have become.                    | ----        | ----          |
| 1. I am very unhappy with my job.                      | ----        | ----          |

### Scoring

This instrument measures your self-perceptions regarding burnout. To score it, add up the number of times you answered “mostly true.” If you answered mostly true seven or more times, you may be suffering from burnout. If you received a high score, consider what actions you can undertake to reduce the level of burnout.

Are you suffering from burnout: “Management Skills Application Exercises” from Organizational Behavior by OpenStax – Rice University is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share-Alike 4.0 (CC BY NC-SA) license, except where otherwise noted. Used this section only; Added answer key.

## 5.5 STRESS MANAGEMENT AND BURNOUT PREVENTION

Organizations can reduce stress and prevent burnout through proactive strategies.



### Organizational Strategies

**Workload Management:** Organizations should ensure workloads are realistic and manageable. Staffing levels, scheduling practices, and performance expectations should align with employee capacity.

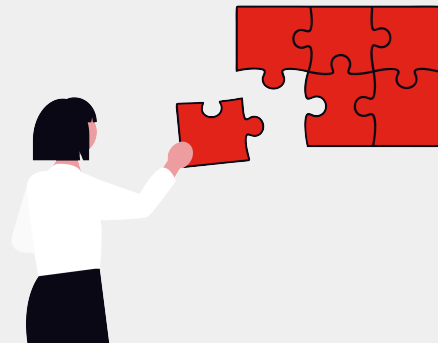
**Supportive Leadership:** Leaders who communicate openly, provide support, and recognize employee contributions can reduce workplace stress.

**Employee Participation:** Employees should have opportunities to participate in decision-making and provide feedback regarding workplace issues.

**Recognition and Appreciation:** Recognition programs can increase morale and reinforce positive workplace culture.

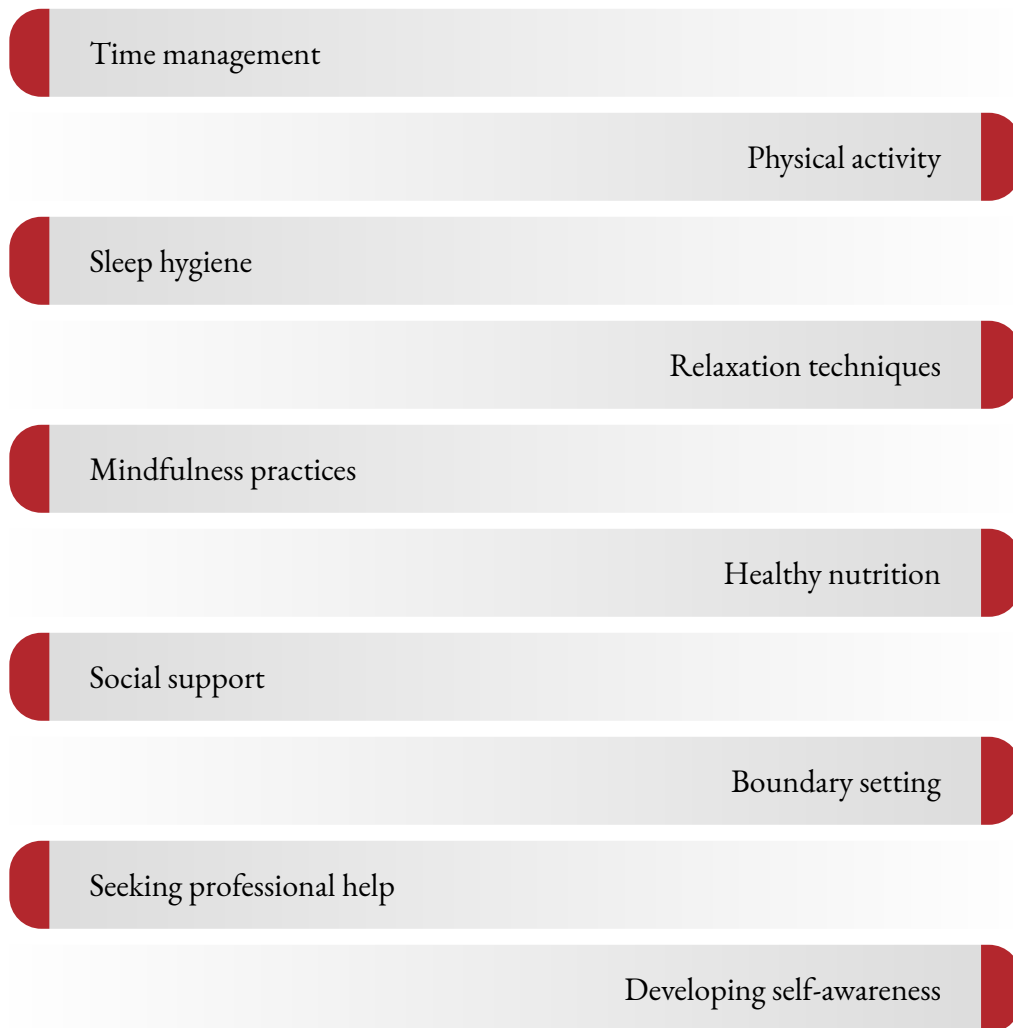
**Clear Communication:** Transparent communication reduces uncertainty and role ambiguity.

**Psychological Safety:** Employees should feel safe expressing concerns, asking questions, and discussing mental health challenges without fear of punishment or stigma. More will be discussed about psychological safety later in this chapter.



## Individual Strategies

Employees can also develop personal stress management strategies, including:



While personal coping strategies are valuable, organizations must avoid placing full responsibility for stress management on employees. Workplace stress often originates from organizational systems and structures.

## 5.6 RESILIENCE

### Defining Resilience

Resilience refers to the ability to adapt positively to adversity, stress, or change. Resilient employees can recover more effectively from setbacks and maintain psychological functioning during challenges. Resilience is not an innate trait possessed by only some individuals. It can be developed through supportive environments, coping skills, social support, and positive workplace culture.



Image by Diva Plavalaguna, Pexels License.

### Building Resilience in the Workplace

Organizations can foster resilience through:

- Training and skill development
- Supportive supervision
- Mentorship programs
- Employee recognition
- Flexible work practices
- Opportunities for recovery and rest
- Access to mental health supports

## Protective Factors

Protective factors that support resilience include:

- Strong social connections
- Psychological safety
- Access to resources
- Emotional intelligence
- Optimism
- Problem-solving skills
- Healthy coping strategies

## 5.7 PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

---

Meredith Boucher began working for Wal-Mart in 1999. She was well regarded and received a number of promotions over the years. In 2008, she was made a Lead Assistant Manager in a Windsor, Ontario, store. Initially, her relationship with the Store Manager, Jason Pinnock, was positive, and her performance appraisals were glowing. Then, in May 2009, Pinnock asked Boucher to falsify a log recording temperature in meat and dairy coolers. Boucher refused. Pinnock, who was worried the incomplete logs would negatively affect the store's ratings in an upcoming inspection, subjected Boucher to a disciplinary meeting.

Concerned about this unfair reprisal, Boucher approached a superior to express her concerns. When Pinnock learned of the complaint, "he subjected her to an unrelenting and increasing torrent of abuse. He regularly used profane language when he spoke to her. He belittled her. He demeaned her in front of other employees. He even called in other employees so he had an audience when he berated her and showed his disdain for her." Boucher complained of Pinnock's escalating harassment to senior management. Their investigation found her complaint was "unsubstantiated," and they threatened her with discipline for making the complaint.

Pinnock's behaviour and Wal-Mart's lack of response negatively affected Boucher's health. "She said that she was stressed out. She could not eat or sleep. She had abdominal pain, constipation and bloating. She lost weight and began vomiting blood. Co-workers testified that Boucher went from a fun-loving, lively, positive leader to a defeated and broken person." On November 18, 2009, Pinnock once again berated Boucher over ten skids of product that were not unloaded. He "grabbed Boucher by the elbow in front of a group of co-workers. He told her to prove to him that she could count to ten." Boucher was so humiliated that she ran out of the store. She never returned to work. Boucher sued for unfair dismissal. At appeal, she was awarded \$300,000 in damages against Wal-Mart and \$110,000 against Pinnock. After her departure from the store, Boucher's health gradually improved.

Workplace harassment—often perpetrated by supervisors on subordinates—is a pervasive issue in workplaces. Wal-Mart’s unwillingness to protect Boucher when she complained is also not uncommon. Interestingly, the hazard posed by harassment and the injury it caused to Boucher were only recognized when she sued her employer, a process entirely separate from Ontario’s OHS and workers’ compensation systems. The case demonstrates both that workplace harassment has real health consequences and that employers are often reluctant to recognize psycho-social hazards as legitimate health and safety concerns.



Image by Yan Krukau, Pexels License.

Psycho-social hazards are the social and psychological factors that negatively affect worker health and safety. Psycho-social hazards can be hard to isolate in the workplace because they reside in the dynamics of human interactions and within the internal world of an individual’s psyche. Yet it is increasingly recognized that social and psychological aspects of work have real and measurable effects on workers’ health. Harassment, bullying, and violence are examples of psycho-social hazards. Other forms include stress, fatigue, and overwork. Even the absence of social interaction, in the form of working alone, produces its own hazards.

## What is Psychological Safety?

Psychological Safety is the foundation of a thriving and humane workplace. It’s an environment where individuals can freely express themselves, ask questions, and admit to mistakes without fear of humiliation or blame. This fosters trust, prompt error reporting, seamless teamwork, and innovation sharing (Ghadiri and Kwantes, 2025).

Psychological safety is associated with:

Improved innovation

Better teamwork

Increased engagement

Reduced workplace conflict

## Enhanced learning and collaboration

A psychologically healthy and safe workplace is one that actively works to prevent harm to workers' psychological health, including in negligent, reckless, or intentional ways, and that promotes psychological well-being (Fuda, 2026).

Types of hazards can take many forms, including trauma, chronic stress (previously discussed), emotional abuse, bullying, or harassment.

## Bullying and Harassment



**Workplace harassment** is behaviour aimed at an individual (or group) that is belittling or threatening in nature. This can include actions (e.g., unwanted touching) or words (e.g., insults, jokes) that have the effect of causing psychological harm to the victim(s). Harassment can take a variety of forms, including racial/ethnic harassment, sexual harassment, and general workplace harassment.

**Bullying** is similar to harassment and comprises repeated actions or verbal comments that lead to mental harm, isolation, or humiliation of a worker (or group), often with the intent to wield power over them. Often, harassment and bullying are used interchangeably, and, indeed, the definitions are highly similar.



## What Can Leaders Do to Ensure Psychological Safety?

Leaders play an important role in creating psychologically safe environments by encouraging respectful communication and responding constructively to employee concerns.

Fuda (2026) outlines 13 psychosocial factors that support employees' psychological health. These include:

1. **Psychological Support:** Availability of support for employees' psychological well-being.
2. **Organizational Culture:** A work environment characterized by trust, honesty, and fairness.
3. **Clear Leadership and Expectations:** Effective leadership that provides clarity on expectations and goals.
4. **Civility and Respect:** Interactions are respectful and considerate.
5. **Psychological Competencies and Requirements:** A good fit between employees' interpersonal and emotional competencies and job requirements.
6. **Growth and Development:** Encouragement of employees' professional and personal growth.
7. **Recognition and Reward:** Acknowledgment and appreciation of employees' contributions.
8. **Involvement and Influence:** Employees have input on decisions affecting their work.
9. **Workload Management:** Tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished within the time available.
10. **Engagement:** Employees feel connected and motivated by their work.
11. **Balance:** Recognition of the need for balance between work, family, and personal life.
12. **Psychological Protection:** Protection against psychological harm.
13. **Protection of Physical Safety:** Ensuring physical safety in the workplace.

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## 5.8 CSA Z1003: PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE

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### Overview of the Standard

Canada was the first country to introduce a national standard for psychological health and safety in the workplace. The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, commonly referred to as CSA Z1003, was introduced in 2013 by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA Group) and the Bureau de normalisation du Québec. The standard provides voluntary guidelines for organizations seeking to promote psychological well-being and prevent psychological harm.



#### Objectives of the Standard

The CSA Z1003 standard aims to:

- Prevent psychological harm
- Promote mental well-being
- Reduce workplace stigma
- Improve organizational culture
- Support early intervention
- Address workplace risk factors



## Key Components

The standard emphasizes:

- Leadership commitment
- Hazard identification
- Employee participation
- Prevention and promotion
- Continuous improvement
- Evaluation and monitoring



## Psychological Risk Factors

The standard identifies several workplace factors that influence psychological health, including:

- Organizational culture
- Workload management
- Civility and respect
- Psychological support
- Growth and development
- Recognition and reward
- Work-life balance
- Clear leadership and expectations



## HR's Role in Implementation

Human resources professionals often coordinate implementation efforts by:

- Developing policies
- Conducting workplace assessments
- Facilitating training
- Monitoring organizational culture
- Supporting accommodations
- Evaluating wellness programs

Although the standard is voluntary, many Canadian organizations use it as a framework for improving workplace mental health.

## 5.9 REDUCING STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

---

Mental health stigma remains a significant barrier to help-seeking in workplaces. Employees may fear judgment, discrimination, career consequences, or social exclusion.

HR professionals can reduce stigma by:



Promoting mental health awareness

Encouraging open dialogue

Providing education and training

Supporting inclusive leadership

Modelling respectful communication

Protecting confidentiality

Leaders who openly discuss mental health can normalize conversations and create more supportive workplace cultures.

One example is The Working Mind (TWM) program. TWM is an evidence-based workplace mental health training program developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada to change how participants think, feel, and act about mental health by reducing stigma, improving mental health literacy, and building resilience through practical coping skills and tools (e.g., the Mental Health Continuum) (Mental Health Commission of Canada, n.d.<sub>b</sub>).

Research shows that TWM is effective in achieving its goals, with meta-analyses demonstrating moderate reductions in stigma and increases in resilience and coping skills, with effects maintained over time and particularly beneficial for individuals with poorer baseline mental health (Dobson et al., 2025).



“The Working Mind Logo” by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, FDEd (CAN).

## 5.10 THE ROLE OF HR PROFESSIONALS

---

HR professionals are central to workplace wellness initiatives. This chapter gives a brief idea of what HR professionals can do – more in Chapter 6.

### Policy Development

HR departments often develop:

- Mental health policies
- Accommodation procedures
- Harassment prevention policies
- Return-to-work programs
- Wellness initiatives

## Training and Education

HR may coordinate training related to:

- Mental health awareness
- Psychological safety
- Conflict resolution
- Leadership development (including training on recruitment and selection to ensure person-job fit)
- Stress management
- Mental Health First Aid

## **5.11 EXAMPLE CASE STUDY: MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS**

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## Case Study: The Burnout Warning Signs

Maya is a project coordinator at a mid-sized technology company. During the past six months, the organization has experienced rapid growth and several major product launches. Maya has consistently worked overtime and frequently answers emails late into the evening.

Recently, her manager noticed that Maya:

- Appears withdrawn during team meetings.
- Has become increasingly irritable with coworkers.
- Missed several project deadlines.
- Reports difficulty concentrating.
- Has used more sick days than usual.

Although Maya insists she is “fine,” coworkers have expressed concern about her well-being.

The HR department has received similar reports regarding several employees across the organization.

### Discussion Questions

1. What warning signs of stress and emotional strain are present in this case?
2. How might prolonged workplace stress affect employee performance and well-being?
3. What responsibilities do managers have when they observe signs of burnout?
4. What organizational factors may be contributing to employee stress?
5. How can HR create a psychologically supportive work environment?
6. What preventative measures could reduce future burnout risks?

### HR Analysis

Research on workplace stress indicates that excessive workloads, lack of recovery time, and insufficient support can negatively affect mental and emotional well-being. Stress can influence concentration, relationships, productivity, and overall wellness. Effective organizational responses include:

- Workload assessments.
- Manager training on recognizing mental health concerns.
- Employee stress management education.
- Flexible scheduling options.
- Regular wellness check-ins.
- Psychological health and safety initiatives.

HR should focus on both individual supports and organizational factors that contribute to workplace stress.

## Reflection

- What should Maya's manager do immediately, and what longer-term organizational changes would you recommend?

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OpenAI. (2026, June 11). ChatGPT. [Generative AI chat]. <https://chatgpt.com>

*Content has been reviewed.*

Prompt

Using the OER: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/employeehealthwellness/>, please create a case study for chapter 5 similar to the case studies in the other chapters

## 5.12 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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### Reflective Questions

1. What are the most common causes of workplace stress?
2. How can organizations prevent employee burnout?
3. Why is psychological safety important in the workplace?
4. What role should HR professionals play in supporting employee mental health?
5. How does the CSA Z1003 standard support workplace wellness?

## 5.13 SUMMARY

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### Mental and Emotional Wellness

Mental and emotional wellness are essential components of healthy workplaces. Chronic stress, burnout, and psychologically unsafe environments negatively affect employees and organizations alike. HR professionals play a critical role in developing supportive policies, fostering psychological safety, reducing stigma, and implementing wellness initiatives.

The CSA Z1003 Psychological Health and Safety Standard provides Canadian organizations with an evidence-based framework for promoting workplace mental health. By prioritizing mental and emotional wellness, organizations can create healthier, more productive, and more sustainable workplaces.

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Microsoft. (2026). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Provide a summary for the above chapter from a university-level course on employee health and wellness.

# CHAPTER 6 - MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

## Chapter Outline

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Workplace Mental Health Supports
- 6.2 Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- 6.3 Mindfulness and Stress Reduction Programs
- 6.4 Mental Health First Aid
- 6.5 Psychological Support in the Workplace
- 6.6 Work Life Balance
- 6.7 Flexible Work Arrangements
- 6.8 Remote and Hybrid Work
- 6.9 Time-Off Policies and Recovery
- 6.10 Common Barriers
- 6.11 HR's Role in Workplace Mental Health Support
- 6.12 Emerging Trends in Workplace Wellness
- 6.13 Example Case Study: Mental Health Supports and Work-Life Balance
- 6.14 Reflective Questions
- 6.15 Summary
- 6.16 Resources



Image by Ketut Subiyanto, Pexels License.

## 6.0 INTRODUCTION

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### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Explain the importance of workplace mental health supports.
- Describe the purpose and functions of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).
- Evaluate workplace mental health initiatives such as mindfulness programs and Mental Health First Aid training.
- Identify strategies organizations use to support employee well-being.
- Explain the relationship between work-life balance and employee wellness.
- Examine flexible work arrangements and time-off policies.
- Discuss the impact of remote and hybrid work on employee mental health.
- Analyze organizational barriers to accessing mental health support.
- Explain the role of HR professionals in promoting supportive workplace practices.
- Evaluate emerging trends in workplace wellness and mental health supports.

## Overview

Organizations increasingly recognize that supporting employee mental health is both an ethical responsibility and a strategic business priority. Workplace mental health initiatives can improve employee well-being, productivity, retention, and organizational culture.

Employees today face numerous challenges, including increased workloads, economic pressures, caregiving responsibilities, technological changes, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life. As a result, organizations are expanding wellness initiatives and support systems.

Human resources professionals often lead the development and implementation of workplace mental health programs. These initiatives may include Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), mental health education, flexible work arrangements, wellness benefits, and policies that support work-life balance.

This chapter explores workplace mental health supports and the role of HR professionals in fostering healthy, supportive, and balanced work environments.



Image by Timur Weber, Pexels License.

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Microsoft. (2026, May 27). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Write two chapters for me of my college textbook about mental and emotional wellness in the textbook on employee health and wellness for hr professionals.

## 6.1 WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

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### Why Mental Health Supports Matter

Mental health supports help employees manage stress, access professional resources, and maintain psychological well-being.



“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community...Mental health exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next. At any one time, a diverse set of individual, family, community and structural factors may combine to protect or undermine mental health. Although most people are resilient, people who are exposed to adverse circumstances are at higher risk of developing a mental health condition” (WHO, 2025).

# Signs and Symptoms of Mental Health Issues in the Workplace

## Behaviours

- Decreased productivity
- Loss of motivation
- Loss of interest/enjoyment
- Isolation/Withdrawal
- Addictive Behaviours

(Fuda, 2026)

## Emotional

- Excessive inappropriate worry
- Anger/Irritability
- Prolonged Sadness
- Hopelessness/helplessness

(Fuda, 2026)

## Thoughts

- Excessively Negative
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Speeding/Slowing of thoughts
- Suicidal Thinking

(Fuda, 2026)

## Physical

- Easily tired / Disturbed sleep
- Body aches & pains (headaches, back pain)
- Heart palpitations, chest pain, flushing
- Hyperventilation, shortness of breath
- Dizziness, headache, sweating, tingling/numbness
- Gastrointestinal nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

(Fuda, 2026)

“So often, manageable problems spiral out of control because no one recognizes that a treatable illness is the source of the difficulty,” Ron Myhr, HR Consultant

## Professional Treatment:

Family Doctor

Psychiatrists vs. Psychologists

Counsellors and Mental Health Therapists

Self Care

80-90% of all people with depression and anxiety respond to treatment and get at minimum some relief from their symptoms (Fuda, 2026).

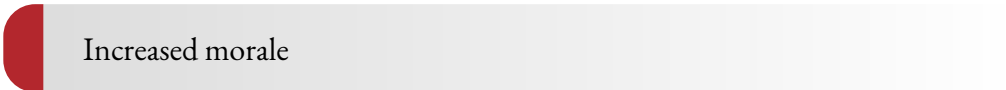
Organizations that invest in mental health supports may experience:

Reduced absenteeism

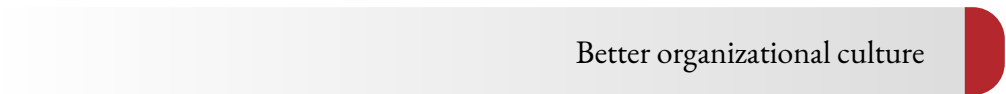
Lower turnover

Improved engagement

Enhanced productivity



Increased morale



Better organizational culture

Supportive workplaces also contribute to psychological safety and reduce stigma surrounding mental health.

## 6.2 EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS (EAPS)

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### What Are EAPs?

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are employer-sponsored services that provide confidential support to employees experiencing personal or work-related challenges.

EAP services commonly include:

- Short-term counselling
- Crisis support
- Mental health referrals
- Financial counselling
- Legal consultation
- Substance use support
- Family and relationship counselling

Many EAPs also offer online resources, wellness apps, and virtual counselling services.



## Benefits of EAPs

EAPs can help employees address challenges before problems escalate. Research shows EAPs can improve employee well-being and reduce absenteeism when effectively utilized (Attridge, 2019).

Benefits for employers may include:

- Improved productivity
- Reduced disability claims
- Lower turnover
- Enhanced employee morale
- Reduced workplace conflict
- Challenges and Limitations

Despite their potential benefits, EAPs may be underutilized due to:

Mental health stigma

Lack of awareness

Concerns about confidentiality

Limited access

Cultural barriers

Fanshawe College employs Homewood Health EFAP (Employee and Family Assistance Program). Homewood Health offers counselling services (both virtual (chat and appointment-based) and in person), health/life balance/career coaching, and online resources (including a mental health toolkit, online articles/library, e-courses, and assessments).

HR professionals should ensure employees understand that EAP services are confidential and accessible.

## 6.3 MINDFULNESS AND STRESS REDUCTION PROGRAMS

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### Mindfulness in the Workplace

Mindfulness involves intentionally focusing attention on the present moment without judgment. Workplace mindfulness programs have become increasingly common.

Mindfulness practices may include:

- Meditation
- Breathing exercises
- Guided relaxation
- Yoga
- Mindful communication

### Potential Benefits

In my in-person classroom teaching, I include a “minute of mindful meditation” at the beginning of every class. This guided practice has students come into their bodies and focus on physical, mental, and emotional well-being while breathing and body scanning. I’ve been including this practice for the past 7-8 years and have had wonderful feedback from students. I have run into students years later who still rave about the mindfulness practice. I have other co-workers who include a mindful journaling practice at the beginning of each class. There are many other examples of workplaces and classrooms that do similar activities with very positive results for all parties involved.

Research suggests mindfulness may support:

- Stress reduction
- Emotional regulation

- Improved concentration
- Reduced anxiety
- Enhanced resilience

Monzani, et al. (2024) in their study of *Mindfulness, Character, and Workplace Happiness: The Moderating Role of Baseline Levels of Employee Wellbeing* found that Mindfulness interventions—especially those enriched with spiritual and character elements—are not just productivity tools; they are powerful mechanisms for increasing employee happiness, with the greatest impact on those who need it most. Some of the key findings in this study include:

An enriched mindfulness-based spiritual intervention significantly improves employee happiness, especially for individuals with low baseline psychological well-being.

These interventions provide a compensatory benefit—those struggling most (e.g., burnout, distress) gain the greatest improvements.

However, mindfulness programs should complement—not replace—organizational efforts to address workplace stressors.

## Criticisms of Workplace Mindfulness

Some critics argue that organizations may overemphasize individual coping strategies while failing to address systemic issues such as excessive workloads or toxic workplace culture. Effective wellness programs should combine individual supports with organizational change.

## 6.4 MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

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Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a training program designed to help individuals recognize, understand, and respond to signs of mental health challenges.

MHFA training teaches participants how to:

- Recognize signs of distress
- Provide initial support
- Respond to crises
- Encourage professional help-seeking
- Reduce stigma



Image by Chokniti Khongchum, Pexels License.



### Applications in the Workplace

Many organizations provide MHFA training to managers, supervisors, and employees.

Potential benefits include:

- Increased awareness
- Earlier intervention
- Improved communication
- Reduced stigma
- Greater confidence in supporting coworkers

Fanshawe College offers MHFA training to faculty for free. I completed my training 8 years ago over 3 days. It was extremely beneficial to help students facing mental health challenges, and I have also used the training in my personal life (for both me and those around me).

MHFA training does not replace professional mental health treatment but may improve workplace support and awareness.

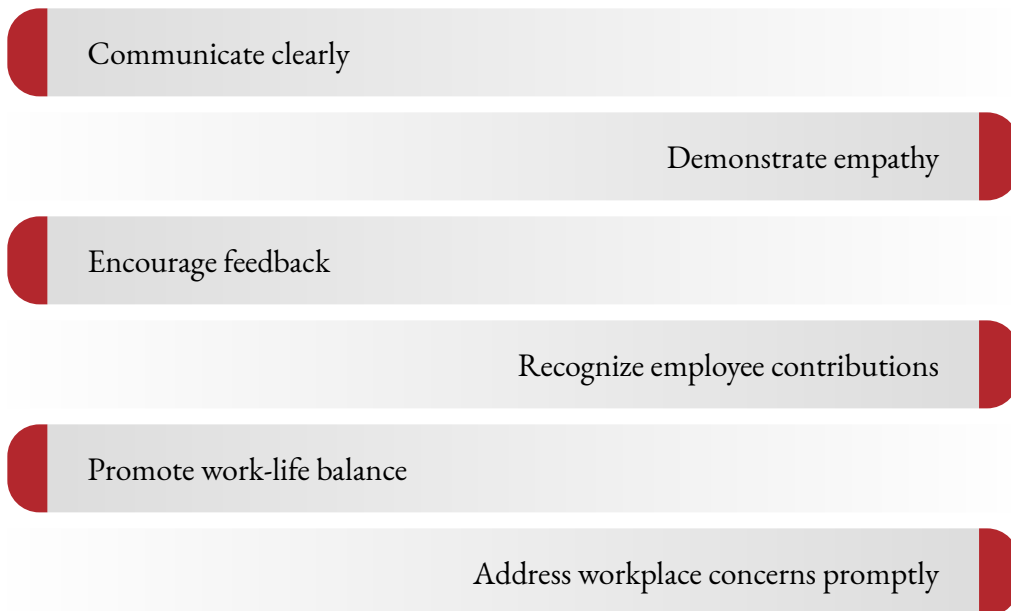
## 6.5 PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

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### Supportive Leadership

Leadership quality strongly influences workplace mental health.

Supportive leaders typically:



Employees who feel supported by supervisors are generally more engaged and less likely to experience burnout.

### Peer Support Programs

Some organizations establish peer support networks in which trained employees provide informal emotional support and resource guidance.

Peer support can:

Reduce isolation

Normalize help-seeking

Increase connectedness

Strengthen organizational culture

## 6.6 WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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Work-life balance refers to the ability to effectively manage work responsibilities alongside personal, family, and community obligations. Sharkawy and Nafea (2023) further defined work-life balance as: “Satisfaction and good functioning at work and home with a minimum of role conflict”. Their research findings concluded that the balance of work and life helps to reduce “occupational stress, enhancing employee satisfaction and overall well-being” (Sharkawy and Nafea, 2023).

Poor work-life balance can contribute to:

- Chronic stress
- Burnout
- Relationship conflict
- Sleep problems
- Reduced well-being
- Lower job satisfaction

Achieving balance may look different for each employee depending on life stage, caregiving responsibilities, cultural expectations, and personal priorities. More on work-life balance is also very much tied to social wellness, which is discussed in Chapter 7.

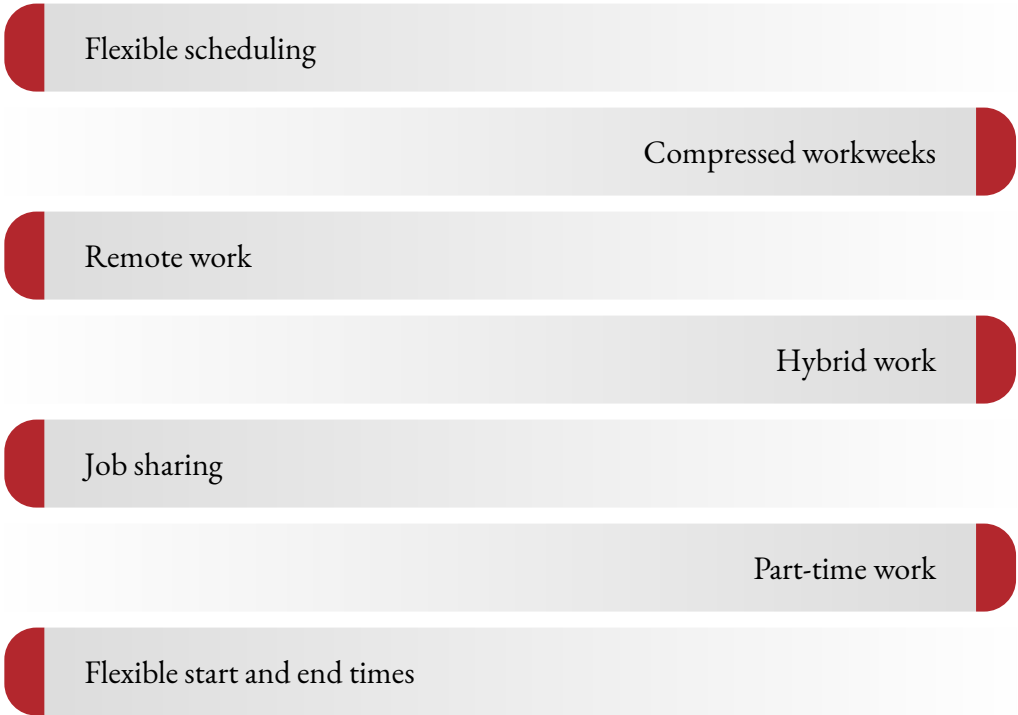
## 6.7 FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

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### Types of Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements provide employees with greater control over when, where, or how they work.

Examples include:



Flexible scheduling

Compressed workweeks

Remote work

Hybrid work

Job sharing

Part-time work

Flexible start and end times

## Benefits of Flexible Work

Flexible work arrangements may improve:

- Employee satisfaction
- Recruitment and retention
- Productivity
- Work-life balance
- Inclusion and accessibility

Flexibility may be especially beneficial for employees with caregiving responsibilities, disabilities, or long commutes.

## Challenges of Flexible Work

Flexible work arrangements may also create challenges, including:

- Communication difficulties
- Social isolation
- Blurred work-life boundaries
- Increased expectations for constant availability
- Technology-related stress

Organizations should establish clear expectations and communication practices to support employee well-being.

## 6.8 REMOTE AND HYBRID WORK

### The Rise of Remote Work

Remote and hybrid work arrangements expanded significantly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many employees value remote work because it:

- Reduces commuting time
- Increases flexibility
- Supports autonomy
- Improves work-life integration



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### Mental Health Considerations

Remote work may support wellness for some employees while creating challenges for others.

Potential challenges include:

- Isolation
- Reduced social connection
- Difficulty disconnecting from work
- Home distractions
- Ergonomic concerns



HR professionals should consider employee preferences, accessibility, organizational culture, and job requirements when developing remote work policies.

## 6.9 TIME-OFF POLICIES AND RECOVERY

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### Importance of Recovery Time

Rest and recovery are essential for mental and emotional wellness.

Organizations may support recovery through:

- Vacation policies
- Personal leave
- Mental health days
- Sick leave
- Family leave
- Bereavement leave

Employees who are unable to disconnect from work may experience increased stress and reduced well-being.

### Vacation Culture

Some employees may avoid taking vacation time due to workload pressures or workplace culture.

HR professionals can encourage healthy practices by:

- Modelling time-off use
- Encouraging boundaries
- Discouraging after-hours communication
- Ensuring workload coverage during absences

- Removing barriers to Accessing Mental Health Supports

Despite increased awareness, employees may still face barriers when seeking support.

## 6.10 COMMON BARRIERS

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### Stigma

Fear of judgment or discrimination may discourage employees from accessing support.

### Confidentiality Concerns

Employees may worry that seeking support could affect career advancement or workplace relationships.

### Cost and Accessibility

Limited insurance coverage, long wait times, or a lack of services may create barriers.

## Cultural Factors

Cultural beliefs and language barriers may influence attitudes toward mental health support.

HR professionals should work to create inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive wellness programs.

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Icons: “Diversity“, “Financial Controller“, “Loneliness“, & “Data Privacy” by gravisio, Flaticon License.

## 6.11 HR'S ROLE IN WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

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Human resources professionals are often responsible for coordinating wellness initiatives and supporting employees.

### Program Development

HR professionals may:



Conduct wellness assessments

Develop policies



Coordinate training

Evaluate wellness initiatives



Manage disability and accommodation processes

### Education and Communication

HR can increase awareness by:



Sharing wellness resources

Providing mental health education



Promoting available supports

Encouraging respectful communication

## Leadership Support

HR departments often advise leaders on:

Supporting employees in distress

Managing accommodations

Addressing workplace conflict

Fostering psychologically safe workplaces

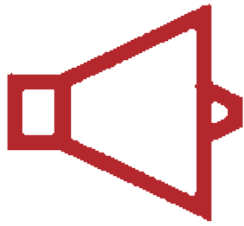
Ballard et al. (2025) included a helpful framework in their study on mental health at work:

### The 3 Ps Framework



#### Protect

Protection of mental health by eliminating psychosocial hazards and minimizing risks that can negatively affect workers.



## Promote

Promotion of psychological well-being by developing the positive aspects of work, as well as worker strengths and positive capacities



## Provide

Provision of access to information, resources, and services that enable corrective organizational actions to address workforce mental health needs regardless of their cause.

The above framework can be summarized below, along with helpful interventions:

Protecting workers' mental health focuses on preventing issues before they arise by identifying and reducing workplace risks. This includes hazard assessments, stigma-reduction training, and policies to prevent bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

- Promotion emphasizes enhancing positive mental well-being through organizational, team, and individual initiatives. This includes fostering psychological safety, supportive leadership, strong relationships, healthy work design, and wellness programs like mindfulness.
- Provision ensures employees have access to mental health support when needed. This includes access to treatment and counselling, manager training to recognize distress, and resources such as return-to-work plans for those recovering from mental health challenges.

Ballard et al. (2025) also included the “mental health at work index categories,” which are helpful in building a wellness program that incorporates the 3 P's in the previous framework.

## Mental Health at Work Index Categories

The index measures the maturity of mental health at work programs using 10 categories. Each category plays a key role in building a program that effectively spans the 3 Ps.

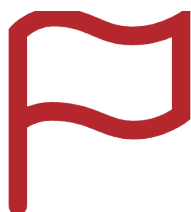
Please click on each of the categories below to better understand the mental health index measurables:

### Mental Health Strategy



The organization's overall approach to addressing workforce mental health, including goals, actions, and resources. This includes mechanisms for assessing hazards and risks, prioritizing and coordinating actions, allocating resources, establishing accountability, measuring and reporting results, and continually improving the organization's efforts.

### Leadership



Commitment to workforce mental health as demonstrated by executive leadership support, governing body involvement, and the organization's engagement with the broader community in promoting mental health. This includes leadership involvement with mental health strategy, how they support workforce mental health, and their accountability for doing so.

### Organizational Culture and Impact



How the organization's culture (i.e. norms, values, beliefs, and associated behaviours) affects workforce mental health. This includes the impact of the organization's human capital strategy, decision-making practices, and products, services, and footprint on the psychological well-being of internal and external stakeholders.

### Workforce Involvement and Engagement



How the organization facilitates worker participation in efforts for mental health protection, promotion, and provision of programs and services. This includes involvement in developing, implementing, evaluating, and improving workforce mental health efforts, supervisor support of worker participation, and mechanisms for worker input and feedback.

### Work Design and Environment



The ways in which work is organized and structured to eliminate hazards, minimize risks, and promote worker health, safety, and psychological well-being. This includes how work is designed, how performance is measured and monitored, social/interpersonal aspects of work, and the work environment/workplace conditions.

### Communication



How information sharing about workforce mental health occurs in the organization. This includes content and channels of communication used to demonstrate organizational and leadership commitment, increase awareness, reduce stigma, encourage use of resources, and provide updates.

### Training Specific to Mental Health



Mental health education and training that increases awareness, improves mental health literacy, promotes supportive behaviour, encourages use of available resources, and reduces stigma. This includes training frequency, quality, content, and customization based on role in the organization.

### Mental Health Resources and Benefits.



Organizational Capacity to ensure access to appropriate mental health resources/benefits. This includes consideration of quality, affordability, barriers to access, legal or regulatory requirements, and program integration.

### Related Employment Practices



Policies and practices that are not specific to mental health, but can affect workers' psychological well-being. This includes work-life support, reward and recognition, health, safety, and wellness, job training and career development, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging initiatives, and change management.

### Measuring, Monitoring, and Reporting



The systematic process for assessing the mental health needs of the organization and its workforce. This includes risk assessment, measuring and monitoring activities related to the mental health strategy, addressing performance gaps, identifying opportunities to improve worker mental health, and reporting results to stakeholder groups.

## Measuring Wellness Program Effectiveness

Organizations should evaluate wellness initiatives to determine effectiveness.

Possible evaluation methods include:

Employee surveys

Participation rates

Absenteeism data

Turnover statistics

Engagement scores

Health claims data

Evaluation helps organizations identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement.

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“3 Ps Framework” and “Mental Health at Work Index Categories”: “Mental health at work: a practical frame-

work for employers” in *Frontiers* by David W. Ballard, Grace G. Lodge, and Kathleen M. Pike is used under a Creative Commons 4.0 International License. Modifications: Reformatted.

## 6.12 EMERGING TRENDS IN WORKPLACE WELLNESS

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Several emerging trends are influencing workplace wellness programs:

- Digital mental health platforms
- Wellness apps and virtual therapy
- Trauma-informed workplaces
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives
- Four-day workweek discussions
- Expanded family support benefits
- Mental health literacy training



Image by Jopwell, Pexels License.

Organizations increasingly recognize that employee wellness is interconnected with organizational culture, leadership, and social responsibility.

## **6.13 EXAMPLE CASE STUDY: MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

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## Case Study: Supporting a Returning Employee

Jordan has worked for a municipal government office for seven years. Following a period of significant personal challenges, Jordan took a three-month leave of absence. Upon returning to work, Jordan expresses concern about managing workload demands while readjusting to the workplace.

Jordan's supervisor wants to be supportive but is uncertain about what accommodations may be appropriate. Meanwhile, coworkers are unsure whether to discuss Jordan's absence, and some have begun making assumptions about the reasons for the leave.

The organization offers:

- An Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Flexible scheduling options
- Hybrid work arrangements
- Mental health resources through its benefits plan

However, employee awareness and utilization of these supports remain low.

### Discussion Questions

1. What challenges might Jordan experience when returning to work?
2. How can the supervisor provide support while respecting privacy and confidentiality?
3. What role should HR play in facilitating a successful return-to-work process?
4. How can organizations reduce stigma surrounding mental health?
5. What strategies can improve employee awareness of available supports?
6. How might flexible work arrangements contribute to work-life balance?

### HR Analysis

Positive mental health is supported when employees feel safe, respected, connected, and able to access appropriate resources. Workplace supports such as EAPs, accommodation processes, flexible

scheduling, and supportive leadership can improve employee well-being and retention.

Organizations should also address stigma through education and open dialogue while maintaining confidentiality and respecting employee privacy. Mental health support is most effective when embedded within organizational culture rather than offered only as a reactive measure.

## Reflection

What actions should HR, the supervisor, and coworkers each take to support Jordan's successful return to work?

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OpenAI. (2026, June 11). ChatGPT. [Generative AI chat]. <https://chatgpt.com>

*Content has been reviewed.*

Prompt

Using the OER: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/employeehealthwellness/>, please create a case study for chapter 6 similar to the case studies in the other chapters

## 6.14 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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### Reflective Questions

1. What are the advantages and limitations of Employee Assistance Programs?
2. How can organizations improve work-life balance?
3. What challenges are associated with remote and hybrid work?
4. Why is leadership support important for workplace mental health?
5. How can HR professionals reduce barriers to accessing mental health supports?

## 6.15 SUMMARY

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### Mental Health Supports and Work-Life Balance

Workplace mental health supports and work-life balance initiatives are essential components of employee wellness. Organizations that invest in supportive policies, flexible work practices, and mental health resources can improve both employee well-being and organizational performance.

Human resources professionals play a vital role in developing wellness programs, supporting psychologically healthy workplaces, and reducing barriers to care. As workplace expectations continue to evolve, HR professionals must remain responsive to emerging mental health challenges and changing employee needs.

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Microsoft. (2026). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Provide a summary for the above chapter from a university-level course on employee health and wellness.

## 6.16 RESOURCES

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### **Crisis Support:**

- If you're in immediate danger or need urgent medical support, call 911.
- If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide:
  - Call or Text 988, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, free of charge to access the Canada-wide Suicide Crisis Helpline.
  - Contact Talk Suicide Canada. Call 1-833-456-4566, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week or text 45645 from 4 p.m. to 12 p.m. EST.
- If you need mental health or substance-use support, contact Wellness Together Canada for free and virtual 24/7 support.
  - Call 1-888-668-6810 or text WELLNESS to 686868 for youth
  - Call 1-866-585-0445 or text WELLNESS to 741741 for adults
- If you are First Nations, Inuit, or Métis seeking support, crisis intervention, or referrals to community-based services, contact Hope for Wellness. Help is available 24/7 to all Indigenous people across Canada. Call 1-855-242-3310 (toll-free) or connect to [hopeforwellness.ca](https://hopeforwellness.ca) to chat.

# CHAPTER 7 - SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL WELLNESS

## Chapter Overview

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Understanding Social Wellness
- 7.2 Social Connection and Inclusion
- 7.3 Financial Stress and Workplace Performance
- 7.4 Diversity in Wellness Needs
- 7.5 The Role of HR in Social and Financial Wellness
- 7.6 Example Case Study
- 7.7 Reflective Questions
- 7.8 Summary



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## 7.0 INTRODUCTION

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### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Define social wellness and financial wellness in the workplace.
- Identify ways organizations can support social connection and inclusion at work.
- Explain how financial stress can affect employees and workplace performance.
- Describe basic financial wellness concepts such as budgeting and retirement planning.
- Identify workplace programs that support employee financial wellness.
- Recognize the diverse wellness needs of employees in the workplace.
- Describe the role of HR professionals in supporting social and financial wellness.

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Microsoft. (2026, May 28). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Please create learning objectives (LOs) out of the following to start the chapter: • Work-life balance, social connection, and inclusion • Financial literacy and support programs • Financial wellness (budgeting, retirement planning) • Addressing diverse employee needs.

## Overview

As organizations increasingly recognize a holistic approach to employee well-being, social and financial wellness have emerged as critical dimensions alongside physical, mental, and emotional health. These areas are deeply interconnected: employees who feel socially supported and financially secure are more likely to be engaged, productive, and committed to their organizations. On the flipside, financial stress, social isolation, and poor work-life balance can significantly affect job performance, absenteeism, morale, and mental health.



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Social wellness refers to the quality of an employee's relationships, sense of belonging, and ability to connect meaningfully with others in the workplace. It emphasizes inclusion, communication, and community. A socially healthy workplace promotes collaboration, respect, and psychological safety, allowing employees to contribute fully without fear of exclusion or discrimination (NHS Forth Valley, n.d.).

Financial wellness, on the other hand, relates to an individual's ability to manage financial responsibilities effectively, feel secure about their financial future, and make informed financial decisions. Financial well-being is not solely determined by income level; it also involves financial literacy, access to resources, and the ability to cope with unexpected expenses (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau [CFPB], 2015).

For HR professionals, these dimensions are especially important because they directly influence engagement, retention, and overall organizational performance. Employees who feel connected and financially secure are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction and lower stress levels.

Human resource professionals play a key role in supporting employees in these areas. HR departments often help design workplace policies, wellness initiatives, and financial education opportunities that improve employees' overall quality of life.

This chapter explores the concepts of social wellness and financial wellness, the importance of inclusion and belonging, and practical ways organizations can support diverse employee needs.

## 7.1 UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL WELLNESS

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Social wellness refers to the quality of an individual's relationships, social interactions, and sense of belonging. In the workplace, social wellness involves feeling respected, connected, supported, and included by coworkers and leadership.

Humans are social beings, and healthy relationships contribute to emotional resilience, collaboration, and overall mental health. Positive workplace relationships can improve teamwork, communication, and job satisfaction, while toxic workplace relationships can increase stress, burnout, and turnover.

Social wellness in the workplace includes:



Positive communication

Respectful relationships

Team collaboration

Inclusion and belonging

Psychological safety

Social support systems

Healthy conflict resolution

Employees who feel socially connected at work are generally more engaged and committed to their organizations. According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), supportive

workplace relationships are strongly connected to psychological health and workplace satisfaction (CCOHS, 2023).

## 7.2 SOCIAL CONNECTION AND INCLUSION

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### The Importance of Belonging

A sense of belonging is an important aspect of employee wellness. Employees who feel accepted and valued are more likely to participate fully in workplace activities and contribute positively to organizational culture. Inclusion means creating an environment where employees of diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences feel respected and supported.

Inclusive workplaces recognize and value differences related to:

- Age
- Gender identity
- Race and ethnicity
- Disability
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Family status
- Socioeconomic background

Inclusive workplace cultures support employee engagement, innovation, and collaboration.

### Supporting Social Connection and Inclusion

A socially healthy workplace is one where employees feel seen, heard, and valued. HR plays a central role in fostering these conditions.

A study by Zega and Zona (2025) on Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012) employees emphasizes that social connection in the workplace plays a key role in enhancing employees' psychological well-being. Positive relationships with coworkers—characterized by support, comfort, and effective collabora-

tion—strengthen the benefits of work–life balance. When employees feel socially included and supported, they experience greater motivation, appreciation, and emotional well-being. Overall, a supportive and connected work environment amplifies the positive impact of work–life balance on mental health (Zega and Zona, 2025).

Organizations can strengthen social wellness by:

- Encouraging team collaboration and communication
- Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives
- Designing inclusive policies and practices
- Creating safe spaces for feedback and dialogue

Social connection also contributes to psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable sharing ideas and concerns.

## Workplace Loneliness and Isolation

Although technology has improved workplace flexibility, remote and hybrid work environments can sometimes increase feelings of isolation and loneliness. Employees who lack meaningful workplace interactions may experience reduced engagement and emotional well-being.

Organizations can support social connection through:

- Team-building activities
- Mentorship programs
- Wellness events
- Collaborative workspaces
- Regular check-ins and meetings

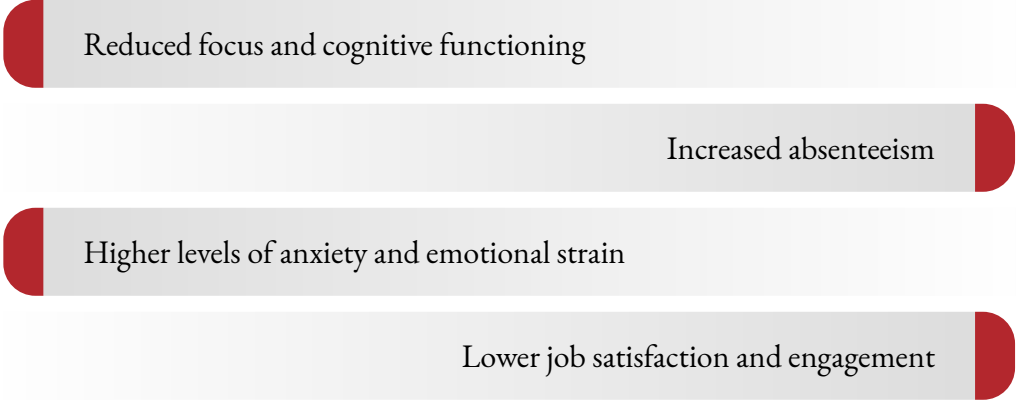
Building supportive workplace communities can strengthen employee relationships and organizational culture.

## 7.3 FINANCIAL STRESS AND WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE

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Financial stress is one of the most common yet often overlooked challenges affecting employees. It can lead to anxiety, distraction, and decreased workplace performance. Employees experiencing financial difficulties may struggle to concentrate, miss work, or seek additional employment, all of which impact productivity (Kim & Garman, 2003).

Common effects of financial stress include:



Reduced focus and cognitive functioning

Increased absenteeism

Higher levels of anxiety and emotional strain

Lower job satisfaction and engagement

For HR professionals, addressing financial stress is not only a matter of employee support but also an organizational performance issue.

# Financial Wellness

## Defining Financial Wellness

Financial wellness refers to an individual's ability to manage financial responsibilities, plan for the future, and feel secure about their financial situation. Financial stress is one of the leading causes of anxiety among working adults. Employees experiencing financial difficulties may struggle to concentrate, experience increased absenteeism, and face mental health challenges.

Common sources of financial stress include:

- Debt
- Rising living costs
- Housing affordability
- Childcare expenses
- Insufficient savings
- Retirement concerns
- Unexpected emergencies

Financial wellness is closely connected to mental and emotional health. Employees under financial strain may experience chronic stress that affects workplace performance and overall well-being.

## Financial Literacy and Education

Financial literacy refers to the knowledge and skills needed to make informed financial decisions. Many employees receive little formal education about budgeting, credit management, taxes, or retirement planning. Organizations increasingly offer financial wellness programs to help employees build financial confidence and reduce stress.

Examples of financial wellness supports include:

- Budgeting workshops
- Financial planning seminars
- Retirement education
- Access to financial advisors
- Employee savings programs
- Debt management resources
- Tuition assistance programs

Financial education can empower employees to make informed decisions and develop long-term financial stability.

## Budgeting and Debt Management

Budgeting is a foundational financial wellness skill. A budget helps individuals track income, expenses, savings, and financial goals.

Basic budgeting strategies include:

- Tracking monthly expenses
- Identifying needs versus wants
- Building emergency savings
- Reducing unnecessary spending
- Paying down high-interest debt

Debt can become a major source of stress when employees struggle with loan payments, credit card balances, or unexpected financial obligations. Financial wellness programs that include debt management education can help employees improve financial control and reduce anxiety.

## Retirement Planning

Retirement planning involves preparing financially for life after employment. Many employees may not fully understand pension plans, investment options, or retirement savings programs.

Canadian employers may offer retirement supports such as:

- Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs)
- Pension plans
- Group retirement savings programs
- Employer matching contributions

HR professionals often play an important role in helping employees understand workplace benefits and retirement options.

Employees who feel more financially prepared for retirement may experience lower financial stress and greater long-term security.



## Core Financial Wellness Concepts

To support financial wellness, employees benefit from basic financial literacy. Key concepts include:

- **Budgeting:** Tracking income and expenses to manage spending effectively
- **Saving:** Building emergency funds and long-term financial security
- **Debt management:** Understanding and reducing personal debt
- **Retirement planning:** Preparing financially for life after employment



Financial literacy empowers employees to make informed decisions and reduces uncertainty about the future. HR can facilitate this knowledge through educational resources and programs.

## 7.4 DIVERSITY IN WELLNESS NEEDS

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Employees are not a homogeneous group; their social and financial needs vary based on life stage, cultural background, income level, and personal responsibilities. For example:

1. Early-career employees may prioritize debt repayment and budgeting
2. Mid-career employees may focus on family responsibilities and saving
3. Late-career employees may emphasize retirement planning



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Similarly, social wellness needs differ across individuals, especially in diverse and global workplaces. HR professionals must adopt inclusive and flexible strategies that recognize these differences.

### Equity and Accessibility

Equity means providing employees with the specific supports they need to succeed, rather than treating all employees identically.

Accessible wellness programs should consider:

Language barriers

Technology access

Cultural differences

Scheduling flexibility

Physical accessibility

Economic barriers

HR professionals must ensure that wellness initiatives are inclusive, equitable, and accessible to all employees.

## 7.5 THE ROLE OF HR IN SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL WELLNESS

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HR professionals contribute significantly to employee wellness through policy development, organizational culture, communication, and employee support programs.

Key HR responsibilities include:



Developing inclusive workplace policies

Supporting flexible work arrangements

Coordinating wellness programs

Promoting diversity and inclusion

Educating employees about benefits and resources

Monitoring employee engagement and workplace culture

Supporting psychologically safe workplaces

Effective HR professionals understand that employee wellness is multidimensional and interconnected. Social, emotional, financial, and physical health all influence workplace performance and organizational success. Ultimately, HR acts as both a strategist and an advocate—ensuring that employee well-being aligns with organizational goals.

## 7.6 EXAMPLE CASE STUDY: SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

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## Case Study: Supporting Employee Wellness at MapleTech Solutions

MapleTech Solutions, a mid-sized Canadian technology company, noticed increasing employee turnover and burnout following a transition to hybrid work. Employees reported feeling isolated and financially stressed due to rising living costs.

The HR department introduced several wellness initiatives, including:

- Flexible scheduling
- Virtual social events
- Peer mentorship programs
- Financial literacy workshops
- Expanded mental health benefits
- Retirement planning seminars

After one year, employee engagement scores improved, turnover decreased, and employees reported stronger workplace relationships and reduced financial stress.

This example demonstrates how organizations can support multiple dimensions of wellness simultaneously.

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OpenAI. (2026, May 28). ChatGPT. [Generative AI chat]. <https://chatgpt.com>

*Content has been reviewed.*

Prompt

Using the OER: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/employeehealthwellness/>, please create a case study for chapter 7 similar to the case studies in the other chapters

## 7.7 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS



### Reflective Questions

1. Reflect on your own social wellness. What is one relationship or social connection that has had a positive impact on your overall well-being? What makes that relationship meaningful?
2. This chapter discusses the importance of building and maintaining healthy relationships. Which strategy for strengthening social connections do you think would be the most valuable for you, and why?
3. Financial wellness means different things to different people. What does being “financially well” mean to you at this stage of your life? How do you think your definition might change over the next 10 years?
4. Think about a time when financial stress affected your mood, school performance, work, or relationships. Looking back, is there anything you could have done differently to better manage the situation?
5. The chapter explains that social and financial wellness are connected to other dimensions of wellness. Describe one example of how challenges in either area can affect a person’s physical or mental health.
6. Many employers now offer programs that support employees’ financial or social well-being. Which type of workplace support discussed in this chapter do you think would have the greatest impact on employee wellness? Explain your choice.
7. After reading this chapter, what is one habit related to your social or financial wellness that you would like to improve? What is one realistic step you could take this month to get started?
8. If you were creating a workplace wellness program, how would you promote both social and financial wellness among employees? Which initiatives would you include, and why?

## 7.8 SUMMARY

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### Social and Financial Wellness

Social and financial wellness are essential components of overall employee well-being. Employees who experience strong social connections, a healthy work-life balance, financial stability, and an inclusive workplace culture are more likely to thrive personally and professionally.

Organizations increasingly recognize that wellness initiatives must address the whole employee, not just physical health. HR professionals play an important role in developing inclusive, accessible, and supportive wellness programs that improve both employee outcomes and organizational performance.

As workplaces continue to evolve, social connection, inclusion, flexibility, and financial support will remain critical aspects of effective employee wellness strategies.

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Microsoft. (2026). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Provide a summary for the above chapter from a university-level course on employee health and wellness.

# CHAPTER 8: DESIGNING A COMPREHENSIVE WELLNESS PROGRAM

## Chapter Overview

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Understanding Comprehensive Workplace Wellness Programs
- 8.2 The Role of HR in Wellness Program Design
- 8.3 Conducting Needs Assessments
- 8.4 Using Organization Data to Support Wellness Planning
- 8.5 Setting SMART Goals
- 8.6 Aligning Wellness Programs With Organizational Strategy
- 8.7 Budgeting and Resource Planning
- 8.8 Designing Inclusive Wellness Programs
- 8.9 Implementing Wellness Initiatives
- 8.10 Challenges in Wellness Program Design
- 8.11 Best Practices for Comprehensive Wellness Programs
- 8.12 Case Study: Designing a Wellness Program
- 8.13 Reflective Questions
- 8.14 Summary



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## 8.0 INTRODUCTION

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### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Identify the purpose of workplace wellness programs.
- Describe methods used to conduct employee needs assessments and surveys.
- Recognize the components of SMART goals in workplace wellness planning.
- Explain how wellness initiatives align with organizational strategy.
- Identify budgeting and resource planning considerations for wellness programs.
- Recognize the types of resources required to implement a comprehensive wellness program.

### Overview

Organizations across Canada are increasingly recognizing the importance of workplace wellness programs as part of a healthy, productive, and sustainable work environment. Wellness programs are no longer viewed as optional perks. Instead, they are considered strategic organizational initiatives that support employee well-being, reduce workplace risks, improve morale, and contribute to organizational performance.

Human resources (HR) professionals play a central role in the development, implementation, and evaluation of workplace wellness initiatives. Effective wellness programs consider multiple dimensions of wellness, including physical, mental, emotional, social, and financial wellness (discussed in previous chapters). A comprehensive wellness program aligns with organizational goals while also addressing employee needs and workplace challenges.



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According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), healthy workplaces support employee physical, psychosocial, and mental well-being while also improving organizational effectiveness (CCOHS, 2025). Canadian employers are increasingly adopting holistic approaches that integrate occupational health and safety, mental health supports, employee engagement, and wellness promotion.

This chapter explores the steps involved in designing a comprehensive workplace wellness program. Topics include conducting needs assessments, developing employee surveys, establishing SMART goals, aligning wellness strategies with organizational objectives, budgeting, resource planning, implementation, communication, and program evaluation.

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Microsoft. (2026, May 29). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Create chapter 8 “Designing a Comprehensive Wellness Program” within the Canadian college textbook “Employee Health and wellness for HR professionals”. Previous chapters include: Introduction to Workplace Wellness & Organizational Health, Legal and Ethical Foundations, Organizational Culture and the Role of HR & Organizational Health and Safety (OHS), Physical Wellness in the Workplace, Mental and Emotional Wellness, Mental Health Supports and Work-Life Balance, Social and Financial Wellness. Ensure you cite and reference using APA and use OER resources. Also, turn the following into 5-6 chapter LOs that are at first-level Bloom taxonomy: ● Needs assessments and employee surveys ● Setting SMART goals and aligning with organizational strategy ● Budgeting and resource planning

## 8.1 UNDERSTANDING COMPREHENSIVE WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAMS

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A comprehensive workplace wellness program is an organized approach designed to support and improve employee health and well-being across multiple dimensions. Comprehensive programs move beyond isolated activities such as gym memberships or occasional wellness events. Instead, they involve coordinated strategies, policies, supports, and organizational practices.

Effective wellness programs often include:



Health promotion initiatives

Mental health supports

Work-life balance practices

Ergonomic and safety initiatives

Financial wellness education

Social connection and inclusion activities

Healthy workplace culture initiatives

Employee assistance programs (EAPs)

Training and awareness programs

Comprehensive wellness programs are most successful when they are integrated into organizational culture rather than treated as temporary initiatives. Leadership support, employee participation, and ongoing evaluation are essential components. The Government of Canada emphasizes that psychologically healthy work-

places contribute to employee engagement, productivity, retention, and organizational effectiveness (Government of Canada, 2024).

## 8.2 THE ROLE OF HR IN WELLNESS PROGRAM DESIGN

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HR professionals are often responsible for coordinating workplace wellness initiatives. Their role includes assessing employee needs, developing wellness strategies, collaborating with leadership, ensuring legal compliance, communicating initiatives, and evaluating outcomes.

HR professionals may also work closely with:



Because HR professionals often oversee employee engagement, attendance management, accommodations, benefits, and organizational culture, they are well positioned to lead workplace wellness initiatives.

Key responsibilities of HR in wellness program design include:

**Table 8.2.1: HR Responsibilities**

| HR Responsibility        | Description                                         |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Needs assessment         | Gathering employee feedback and organizational data |
| Program planning         | Developing wellness goals and initiatives           |
| Policy development       | Supporting healthy workplace practices              |
| Budget management        | Allocating resources for wellness initiatives       |
| Communication            | Promoting awareness and participation               |
| Evaluation               | Measuring program effectiveness                     |
| Leadership collaboration | Aligning wellness with organizational strategy      |

## 8.3 CONDUCTING NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

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A needs assessment is the foundation of an effective workplace wellness program. It helps organizations understand employee concerns, workplace risks, organizational priorities, establish a baseline for evaluation, and identify gaps in current supports.

Without a needs assessment, organizations may invest in wellness initiatives that employees do not value or use. Needs assessments help ensure that wellness programs are relevant, evidence-informed, and aligned with employee needs.

### Sources of Information for Needs Assessments

Organizations may collect information from multiple sources, including:

- Employee surveys
- Focus groups
- Exit interviews
- Attendance and absenteeism data
- Workplace injury reports
- Benefit utilization data
- Employee assistance program (EAP) usage trends
- Workplace inspections
- Organizational climate surveys
- Health and safety committee feedback

Using multiple sources provides a more accurate understanding of workplace wellness needs.

### Employee Surveys

Employee surveys are one of the most common tools used to gather wellness-related information. Surveys allow employees to share feedback about workplace stressors, wellness interests, workplace culture, mental health supports, and organizational challenges.

Effective surveys should:

- Be anonymous when possible
- Use clear and respectful language
- Include both quantitative and qualitative questions
- Be accessible to all employees
- Avoid overly lengthy questionnaires
- Explain how information will be used

**Table 8.3.1: Sample Employee Wellness Questions**

| Topic               | Sample Question                                                                            |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Work-life balance   | Do you feel you can maintain a healthy balance between work and personal responsibilities? |
| Mental health       | Do you feel supported when experiencing workplace stress?                                  |
| Physical wellness   | What wellness activities would you be interested in participating in?                      |
| Workplace culture   | Do you feel respected and included in your workplace?                                      |
| Financial wellness  | Would financial education resources be helpful to you?                                     |
| Program preferences | Which wellness initiatives would you most likely participate in?                           |

**Table 8.3.2: Workplace Climate Survey.** Reproduced from *Workplace Health Promotion Programs: Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation* by Carl I. Fertman under fair dealing for purposes of education.

| <p><b>Dear Employee,</b><br/>         We are interested in finding out what you feel about health and well-being, that is, your feelings, thoughts, relationships, and behaviour. We greatly appreciate your time and effort in completing this survey.</p> |                |       |          |                   |             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|-------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Do Not Know |
| 1. I like coming to my Workplace.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                |       |          |                   |             |
| 2. I feel safe at my workplace.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                |       |          |                   |             |
| 3 I have someone to talk to at my workplace if I need help or advice                                                                                                                                                                                        |                |       |          |                   |             |
| 4. I think the workplace rules are fair.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                |       |          |                   |             |
| 5. Our workplace deals fairly and quickly with bullying and harassment problems.                                                                                                                                                                            |                |       |          |                   |             |
| 6. I get information about health and well-being issues.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                |       |          |                   |             |
| 7. I Learn about different health and well-being issues.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                |       |          |                   |             |

|                                                                                 |  |  |  |  |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 8. I feel like I belong.                                                        |  |  |  |  |  |
| 9. I get to do work that I enjoy and find interesting                           |  |  |  |  |  |
| 10. I have friends at my workplace.                                             |  |  |  |  |  |
| 11. I know who to go to if I need help with health and well-being issues.       |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12. There are staff members who understand my issues.                           |  |  |  |  |  |
| 13. My Employer shows that the health and well-being of employees is important. |  |  |  |  |  |

Organizations should communicate survey results to employees and explain how feedback will shape wellness initiatives. This transparency helps build trust and encourages participation.

## 8.4 USING ORGANIZATIONAL DATA TO SUPPORT WELLNESS PLANNING

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Needs assessments should include both employee feedback and organizational data. Data analysis helps HR professionals identify patterns and areas of concern.

Examples of useful organizational data include:



For example, increasing stress-related absences may indicate a need for mental health supports or workload management strategies. Organizations should also consider demographic factors such as age diversity, remote work arrangements, shift work, accessibility needs, and workforce diversity.

# 8.5 SETTING SMART GOALS

Once the needs assessment is complete, organizations can establish goals for the wellness program. Goals provide direction and help organizations measure success.

SMART goals are commonly used in workplace planning.

## SMART goals are:

Table 8.5.1: SMART Goals

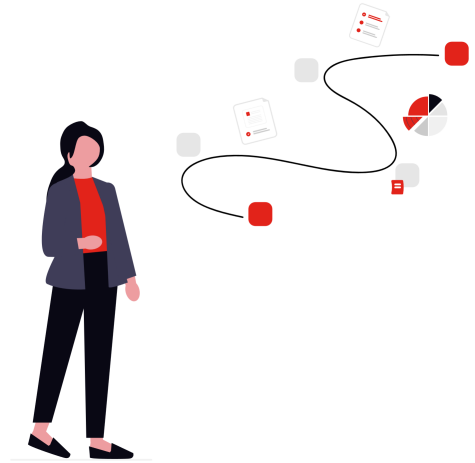
| SMART Element | Description                              |
|---------------|------------------------------------------|
| Specific      | Clearly identifies what will be achieved |
| Measurable    | Includes measurable outcomes             |
| Achievable    | Realistic and attainable                 |
| Relevant      | Aligns with organizational needs         |
| Time-bound    | Includes a timeline                      |



### Example of a SMART Goal

“Increase employee participation in workplace wellness activities by 20% within 12 months through improved communication and expanded programming options.”

SMART goals help organizations:



Wellness goals should address both employee well-being and organizational objectives.

## 8.6 ALIGNING WELLNESS PROGRAMS WITH ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

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Wellness initiatives are more likely to succeed when they align with organizational goals and culture. Wellness programs should support broader organizational priorities such as:

Employee engagement

Recruitment and retention

Productivity

Diversity, equity, and inclusion

Occupational health and safety

Organizational sustainability

Psychological health and safety

For example, an organization focused on reducing burnout may integrate wellness initiatives with workload management, flexible scheduling, and leadership training. Alignment with organizational strategy also increases leadership support and funding opportunities.

### Leadership Support

Leadership commitment is essential for successful wellness initiatives. Employees are more likely to participate when leaders actively support wellness programs.

Leadership support may include:

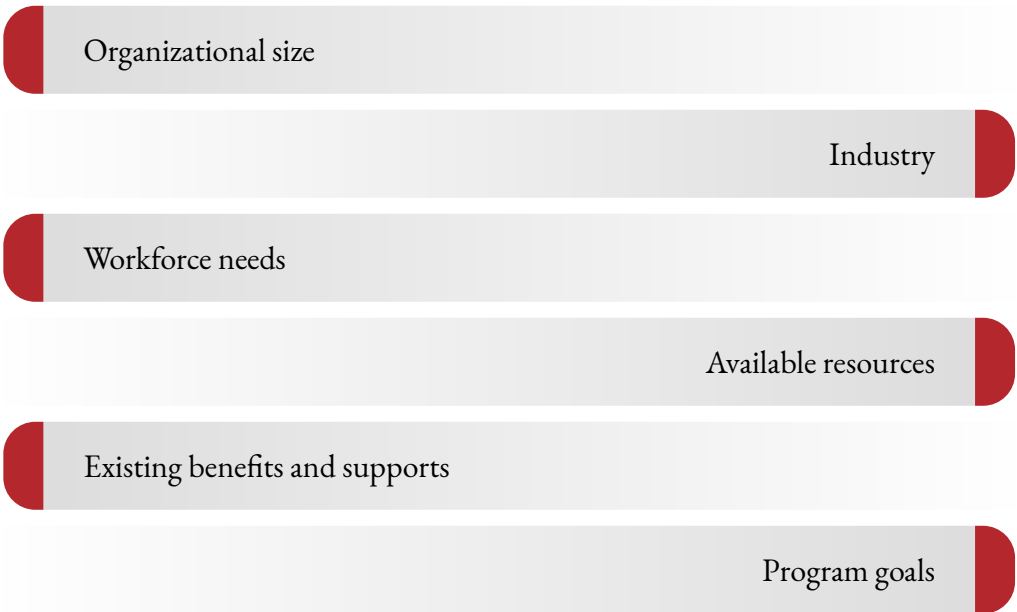
- Participating in wellness initiatives
- Allocating budgets and resources
- Encouraging work-life balance
- Promoting psychologically safe workplaces
- Communicating the value of wellness
- Modelling healthy workplace behaviours

Organizations with strong leadership support often experience higher participation and more sustainable wellness programs. Strategic alignment increases leadership support and ensures sustainability (WHO, 2010).

# 8.7 BUDGETING AND RESOURCE PLANNING

Wellness programs require careful financial planning and resource allocation. Budgets help organizations determine what initiatives are realistic and sustainable.

The size of a wellness budget depends on factors such as:



**Table 8.7.1: Common Wellness Program Expenses**

| Expense Category    | Examples                                   |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Training            | Mental health training, wellness workshops |
| Wellness activities | Fitness programs, wellness challenges      |
| External providers  | Counsellors, facilitators, consultants     |
| Communication       | Promotional materials and campaigns        |
| Technology          | Wellness apps or online platforms          |
| Incentives          | Participation rewards                      |
| Evaluation          | Surveys and program assessment tools       |

Not all wellness initiatives require large budgets. Many organizations implement low-cost strategies such as flexible scheduling, walking meetings, peer support initiatives, wellness newsletters, or mental health awareness campaigns.

## Resource Planning

In addition to budgeting, organizations must identify the human and operational resources required for implementation.

Resource planning may include:

- Assigning wellness coordinators
- Creating wellness committees
- Identifying community partnerships
- Training managers and supervisors
- Scheduling wellness activities
- Developing communication plans

Organizations should also consider accessibility and inclusivity when planning wellness initiatives.

## 8.8 DESIGNING INCLUSIVE WELLNESS PROGRAMS

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Inclusive wellness programs recognize that employees have diverse backgrounds, abilities, identities, and experiences.

An inclusive wellness program:

- Provides accessible programming
- Considers cultural diversity
- Supports remote and hybrid workers
- Recognizes different financial realities
- Accommodates varying abilities and health needs
- Avoids one-size-fits-all approaches

For example, not all employees may be interested in fitness-focused initiatives. Some employees may prefer mental health supports, flexible work arrangements, caregiving supports, or financial education.

HR professionals should consider equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles throughout program design.

## 8.9 IMPLEMENTING WELLNESS INITIATIVES

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Implementation involves putting the wellness plan into action. Successful implementation requires communication, leadership support, employee engagement, and ongoing monitoring.

### Steps in Program Implementation



Organizations often begin with pilot projects before expanding programs organization-wide.

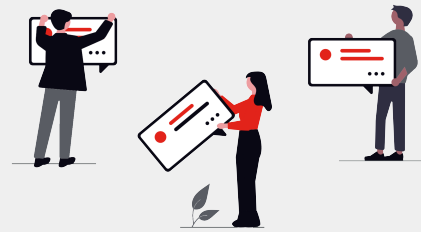


## Communication Strategies

Communication is critical to program participation and awareness.

Organizations may communicate wellness initiatives through:

- Email campaigns
- Intranet announcements
- Posters and bulletin boards
- Staff meetings
- Wellness ambassadors
- Social media platforms
- Leadership messages



Clear communication helps employees understand available supports and encourages engagement.

## 8.10 CHALLENGES IN WELLNESS PROGRAM DESIGN

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Designing workplace wellness programs can present challenges.

Common challenges include:

Limited budgets

Low employee participation

Lack of leadership support

Privacy concerns

Resistance to change

Inconsistent communication

Time constraints

Remote workforce challenges

HR professionals can address these challenges by involving employees in planning, communicating clearly, and continuously adapting programs based on feedback.

## 8.11 BEST PRACTICES FOR COMPREHENSIVE WELLNESS PROGRAMS

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Research and professional practice suggest several best practices for successful wellness programs.

### Best Practices:

- Conduct regular needs assessments.
- Involve employees in program planning.
- Align wellness initiatives with organizational strategy.
- Ensure leadership support.
- Promote inclusivity and accessibility.
- Use evidence-informed approaches.
- Evaluate programs regularly.
- Communicate consistently.
- Integrate wellness into workplace culture.
- Support psychological health and safety.

Organizations that treat wellness as part of organizational culture rather than a short-term initiative are more likely to achieve long-term success.

## 8.12 EXAMPLE CASE STUDY: DESIGNING A WELLNESS PROGRAM

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## Case Study: Designing a Wellness Program

### Scenario

A mid-sized Canadian organization has experienced increased absenteeism, employee stress, and turnover following rapid organizational growth. Employees report workload concerns, communication issues, and challenges with work-life balance.

The HR department is tasked with developing a comprehensive wellness program.

### HR Actions

The HR team:

- Conducts anonymous employee wellness surveys
- Reviews absenteeism and turnover data
- Form a workplace wellness committee
- Develops SMART goals
- Introduces flexible work options
- Provides mental health training for managers
- Launches financial wellness workshops
- Creates monthly wellness communication campaigns
- Evaluates participation and employee feedback quarterly

### Outcomes

After one year, the organization reports:

- Improved employee engagement
- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased participation in wellness activities
- Positive employee feedback

- Improved workplace morale

This example demonstrates the importance of planning, leadership support, employee involvement, and ongoing evaluation.

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OpenAI. (2026, May 29). ChatGPT. [Generative AI chat]. <https://chatgpt.com>

*Content has been reviewed.*

Prompt

Using the OER: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/employeehealthwellness/>, please create a case study for chapter 8 similar to the case studies in the other chapters

## 8.13 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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### Reflective Questions

1. Why are needs assessments important when developing workplace wellness programs?
2. How can employee surveys improve wellness planning?
3. What are the benefits of using SMART goals in wellness program design?
4. Why is leadership support important for workplace wellness initiatives?
5. What challenges might organizations face when implementing wellness programs?
6. How can HR professionals promote inclusivity in wellness initiatives?
7. Why is ongoing evaluation important for workplace wellness programs?

## 8.14 SUMMARY

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### Designing a Comprehensive Wellness Program

Comprehensive workplace wellness programs support employee health, engagement, and organizational success. HR professionals play an important role in designing and implementing wellness initiatives that align with organizational strategy and employee needs.

Effective wellness programs begin with needs assessments and employee feedback. Organizations use surveys, workplace data, and employee participation to identify priorities and develop SMART goals.

Budgeting, resource planning, leadership support, communication, and inclusivity are essential components of successful wellness initiatives. Regular evaluation allows organizations to measure outcomes and improve programs over time.

As workplaces continue to evolve, comprehensive wellness programs remain an important strategy for supporting healthy, safe, and productive work environments.

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Microsoft. (2026). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Provide a summary for the above chapter from a university-level course on employee health and wellness.

# CHAPTER 9: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

## Chapter Overview

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 From Planning to Action
- 9.2 The Role of Leadership in Implementation
- 9.3 Communication Strategies for Wellness Programs
- 9.4 Employee Engagement and Participation
- 9.5 Creating Wellness Champions
- 9.6 Understanding Organizational Change
- 9.7 Leveraging Technology and Wellness Platforms
- 9.8 Implementing Wellness Programs in Diverse Workplaces
- 9.9 Keys to Successful Implementation
- 9.10 Case Study
- 9.11 Reflective Questions
- 9.12 Summary



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## 9.0 INTRODUCTION



### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Identify key communication strategies used to promote employee wellness initiatives.
- Recognize methods for engaging employees in workplace health and wellness programs.
- Describe common sources of resistance to workplace wellness initiatives.
- Identify basic change management principles that support successful wellness program implementation.
- Recognize the role of technology and digital wellness platforms in supporting employee health and well-being.
- List factors that contribute to the successful implementation of workplace wellness programs.

### Overview

Designing a workplace wellness program is only the beginning of the wellness journey. Even the most thoughtfully developed wellness initiatives can fail if they are not implemented effectively. Implementation refers to the process of putting plans into action and ensuring that wellness initiatives are integrated into the organization's daily operations and culture.

Human Resources (HR) professionals play a critical role in guiding implementation efforts. They serve as facilitators, communicators, change agents, and champions of employee well-



Image by Tima Miroshnichenko, Pexels License.

being. Effective implementation requires careful planning, clear communication, employee engagement, leadership support, and the strategic use of technology.

This chapter explores practical implementation strategies that help organizations move from planning to action. Students will examine communication and engagement techniques, approaches to managing organizational change, methods for addressing resistance, and the role of technology in supporting wellness initiatives.

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Microsoft. (2026, June 1). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Create chapter 9 “Implementation Strategies” within the Canadian college textbook “employee health and wellness for HR professionals”. Previous chapters include: Introduction to Workplace Wellness & Organizational Health, Legal and Ethical Foundations, Organizational Culture and the Role of HR & Organizational Health and Safety (OHS), Physical Wellness in the Workplace, Mental and Emotional Wellness, Mental Health Supports and Work-Life Balance, Social and Financial Wellness, and Designing a Comprehensive Wellness Program. Two future chapters will be (so don’t cover these): Evaluation and Continuous Improvement, and Risk Management and Safety Integration. Ensure you cite and reference using APA and use OER resources. Also, turn the following into 5-6 chapter LOs that are at first-level Bloom taxonomy: ● Communication and engagement techniques ● Change management and overcoming resistance ● Leveraging technology and wellness platforms.

## 9.1 FROM PLANNING TO ACTION

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The previous chapter focused on designing comprehensive wellness programs. Once a program has been designed, organizations must determine how it will be introduced, promoted, and sustained. Implementation is often where organizations encounter challenges. Employees may be uncertain about the purpose of a wellness initiative, managers may struggle to support participation, and competing organizational priorities can reduce engagement.

Successful implementation requires:

- Clear roles and expectations across HR, leadership, employees, and any other stakeholders
- Alignment with organizational goals and culture
- Leadership commitment
- Employee involvement
- Effective communication
- Ongoing support and resources
- Continuous monitoring and adjustment, especially during rollout

Implementation is not a one-time event but an iterative process that evolves as feedback is gathered and workplace needs shift (Canadian Standards Association, 2013). According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), workplace health promotion initiatives are most effective when they are integrated into organizational culture and supported by all levels of the organization (CCOHS, n.d.). HR professionals help coordinate these efforts by aligning wellness initiatives with organizational objectives and employee needs.

## 9.2 THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN IMPLEMENTATION

---

Leadership support is one of the strongest predictors of wellness program success. Employees often look to leaders for cues about organizational priorities. When leaders actively support wellness initiatives, employees are more likely to perceive wellness as a valued component of workplace culture.

Leadership support can take many forms:

- Participating in wellness activities
- Communicating the importance of wellness
- Allocating resources and funding
- Encouraging employee participation
- Modelling healthy workplace behaviours

Visible leadership involvement helps establish credibility and reinforces organizational commitment. For example, a manager who attends wellness workshops or openly discusses work-life balance may encourage employees to engage in similar activities. Conversely, if leaders promote wellness while rewarding excessive overtime or discouraging time off, employees may perceive a disconnect between organizational messaging and workplace practices. Authentic leadership support contributes to trust, engagement, and long-term sustainability.

## 9.3 COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR WELLNESS PROGRAMS

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Communication is essential throughout the implementation process. Employees cannot participate in programs they do not understand, know about, or perceive as valuable.

Effective wellness communication should be:

### Clear

Messages should explain:

- The purpose of the initiative
- Available resources and supports
- Participation opportunities
- Expected benefits

Avoiding technical language and using plain, accessible communication can improve understanding across diverse employee groups.

Research shows that clear communication significantly improves employee awareness and participation in wellness initiatives (Kent et al., 2016).

## Consistent

Repeated messaging helps reinforce awareness and maintain momentum. Wellness communication should occur regularly rather than only during program launches.

Organizations may use:

- Email newsletters
- Staff meetings
- Intranet announcements
- Posters and digital signage
- Team briefings
- Social media platforms

## Relevant

Employees are more likely to engage when communication reflects their needs and interests. Tailoring messages to different employee groups can increase participation and perceived value.

## Transparent

Transparency builds trust. Employees should understand:

- Why wellness initiatives are being introduced
- How information will be used
- Whether participation is voluntary
- How privacy will be protected

Transparency is particularly important when wellness initiatives involve health assessments, surveys, or digital wellness platforms.

## 9.4 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

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Employee engagement refers to the degree to which employees are actively involved in workplace initiatives and committed to organizational goals. Wellness programs are generally more successful when employees participate in their development and implementation.

Engagement strategies may include:

- Wellness committees
- Employee focus groups
- Wellness ambassadors
- Peer champions
- Employee surveys
- Recognition programs

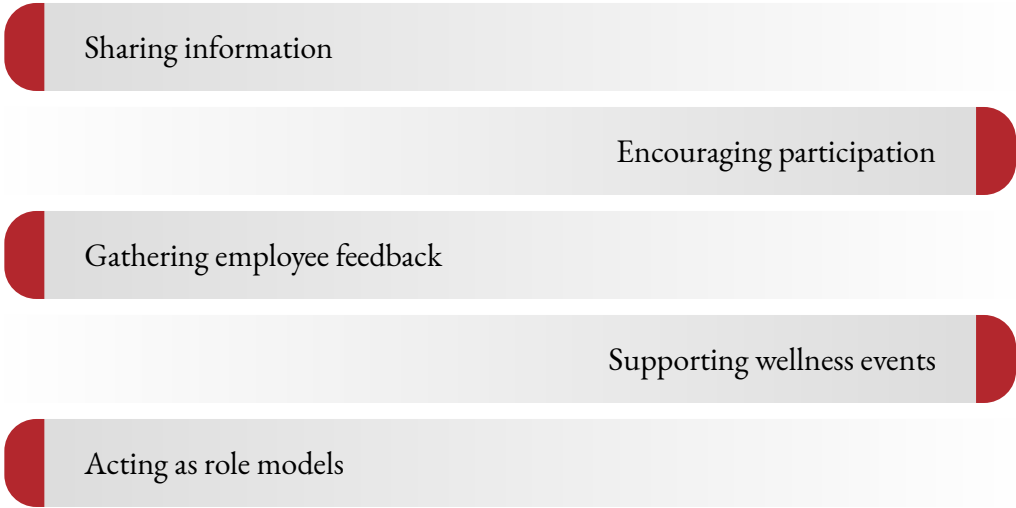
Employee involvement increases program relevance and helps ensure initiatives reflect actual workplace needs. For example, employees may identify barriers that management has overlooked, such as scheduling challenges, accessibility concerns, or communication gaps. Participation also increases when employees believe programs are inclusive, voluntary, and supportive rather than mandatory or punitive.

## 9.5 CREATING WELLNESS CHAMPIONS

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Many organizations use wellness champions to help promote participation and create enthusiasm.

Wellness champions are employees who voluntarily support wellness initiatives by:



Sharing information

Encouraging participation

Gathering employee feedback

Supporting wellness events

Acting as role models

Champions can be particularly effective because they provide peer-to-peer influence. Employees often respond positively to colleagues who share similar experiences and workplace realities. HR professionals frequently coordinate wellness champion networks and provide training, resources, and ongoing support.

## 9.6 UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Implementing a wellness program often requires organizational change. Change may involve new policies, new technologies, altered work practices, or shifts in workplace culture. Change can create uncertainty, even when intended to improve employee well-being. Resistance to change is a natural response, particularly when wellness initiatives alter routines, expectations, or workplace norms.

Employees may ask:

Why is this change happening?

How will this affect me?

Will my workload increase?

Is participation expected?

Will my privacy be protected?

Addressing these questions proactively can reduce uncertainty and improve acceptance.

### Change Management Principles

Change management refers to structured approaches that help organizations transition from current practices to desired future states.

Although many change models exist, several common principles are particularly relevant to wellness initiatives.



## Establishing a Clear Vision

Employees are more likely to support change when they understand its purpose.

Organizations should communicate:

- Why wellness matters
- How initiatives support organizational goals
- Expected benefits for employees



## Building Leadership Support

Visible support from leaders reinforces the importance of wellness initiatives and encourages participation.

## **Involving Employees**

Employee involvement improves buy-in and helps identify practical implementation challenges.

## **Providing Training and Resources**

Employees and managers may require guidance on using wellness resources, digital platforms, or new workplace practices.

## **Celebrating Successes**

Recognizing milestones and achievements can build momentum and maintain engagement.

Structured change management models, such as Kotter's 8-Step Model or Lewin's Change Theory, can guide implementation and are key principles in the above 5 elements.

**Table 9.6.1: “Kotter’s 8-Step Model Applied to WFM” by WFM Labs is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License unless otherwise indicated. Modifications: Summarized content into a table.**

| Step                                      | Kotter’s Principle                                                                                                                          | Actions                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1: Create a sense of urgency              | Without urgency, people default to the status quo. Complacency is the enemy of change.                                                      | Make the cost of the current state visible and undeniable                                                                                                                                          |
| 2: Build a guiding coalition              | No single leader can drive transformation alone. A coalition with position power, expertise, credibility, and leadership is required.       | The transformation requires active support from all areas, including operations, finance, IT, & HR.                                                                                                |
| 3: Form a strategic vision and initiative | A clear, compelling vision provides direction. Without it, change efforts dissolve into a list of confusing projects.                       | The vision must be concrete enough to guide decisions and inspiring enough to motivate effort.                                                                                                     |
| 4: Enlist a volunteer army                | Large-scale change requires a large force of people who are willing, not just compliant. You need volunteers, not conscripts.               | The coalition leads; the volunteer army executes. The volunteer army should include participants from across the organization.                                                                     |
| 5: Enable action by removing barriers     | Even motivated people can’t change if structural barriers remain. Leaders must actively remove obstacles.                                   | Barriers could include: legacy technology, old data, policy blocks, organizational silos, & skills gaps.                                                                                           |
| 6: Generate short-term wins.              | Visible, unambiguous wins within 6-12 months are essential. They build credibility, reward volunteers, silence critics, and build momentum. | The win must be observable by the coalition, the volunteer army, and leadership and be clearly attributable to the transformation.                                                                 |
| 7: Sustain acceleration                   | Don’t declare victory too soon. Use the credibility from quick wins to drive bigger changes.                                                | The temptation is to celebrate, reduce intensity, and move to “business as usual.” The transformation isn’t complete until the new way of working is universal.                                    |
| 8: Institute change                       | Change must be anchored in organizational culture to survive leadership transitions, market shifts, and organizational memory loss.         | The new way of working must become “how we do things here”. This includes embedding in onboarding, writing the SOPs, aligning KPIs, removing legacy tools, and building in a regular review cycle. |

## Overcoming Resistance

Resistance to change is a normal part of organizational life. Resistance does not necessarily indicate opposition; it often reflects uncertainty, concern, or previous experiences with unsuccessful initiatives.

Common sources of resistance include:

- Lack of understanding
- Fear of change
- Increased workload concerns
- Limited trust in management
- Privacy concerns
- Competing priorities

HR professionals can address resistance by:

- Listening to employee concerns
- Providing accurate information
- Encouraging dialogue
- Demonstrating leadership commitment
- Involving employees in decision-making

Organizations that respond respectfully to concerns are more likely to build trust and achieve long-term participation. Supporting employees through transitions, providing training, and acknowledging challenges can reduce resistance and foster buy-in.

## 9.7 LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND WELLNESS PLATFORMS

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Technology has become an increasingly important component of workplace wellness programs. Digital tools can improve accessibility, communication, participation, and program administration.

Examples include:

- Wellness portals
- Mobile wellness applications
- Virtual fitness programs
- Mental health support platforms
- Online learning modules
- Health risk assessments
- Employee assistance program (EAP) portals

Technology can be particularly valuable for:

- Remote workers
- Hybrid workplaces
- Multi-site organizations
- Shift workers

Digital wellness platforms often allow employees to access resources at times and locations that fit their schedules.

### Benefits of Wellness Technology

Technology can support implementation by:

**Increasing Accessibility:** Employees can access resources regardless of location or work schedule.

**Enhancing Communication:** Digital platforms allow organizations to share wellness information quickly and efficiently.

**Supporting Data Collection:** Organizations can track participation rates, engagement levels, and program utilization.

**Personalizing Wellness Experiences:** Some platforms provide customized recommendations based on employee interests and goals.

**Improving Convenience:** Employees often appreciate on-demand access to wellness resources.

These benefits can increase participation and support long-term engagement.

## Privacy and Ethical Considerations

While technology offers many advantages, organizations must carefully address privacy and confidentiality concerns. Canadian privacy legislation and organizational policies require responsible collection, storage, and use of personal information.

Employees should understand:

- What information is being collected
- Why information is collected
- Who can access data
- How information will be protected

Participation in wellness technologies should generally remain voluntary whenever possible. Protecting employee privacy helps maintain trust and supports ethical wellness practices.

## 9.8 IMPLEMENTING WELLNESS PROGRAMS IN DIVERSE WORKPLACES

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Canadian workplaces are increasingly diverse with respect to age, culture, language, ability, gender identity, family structure, and work arrangements. Implementation strategies should reflect this diversity.

Inclusive wellness programs:



Consider accessibility needs

Provide multiple participation options

Use inclusive language

Respect cultural differences

Recognize varying health and wellness priorities

An inclusive approach helps ensure all employees have opportunities to benefit from wellness initiatives.

## 9.9 KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

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Organizations that successfully implement wellness initiatives often share several characteristics:

Strong leadership support

Effective communication

Employee involvement

Inclusive program design and accessibility

Appropriate use of technology

Adequate resource allocation (budgeting, staffing, and time are essential to sustain implementation efforts)

**Phased rollout** – implementing programs in phases allows organizations to test initiatives, gather feedback, and refine approaches before full-scale deployment

**Continuous feedback** – collecting employee feedback during implementation helps identify barriers and opportunities for improvement in real time (more on this in Chapter 10)

Respect for privacy and confidentiality

Implementation is not a single event but an ongoing process that evolves alongside organizational needs and employee expectations.

## 9.10 EXAMPLE CASE STUDY: IMPLEMENTING WELLNESS

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## Case Study: Implementing Wellness at MapleTech Solutions

### Background

MapleTech Solutions is a mid-sized Canadian technology company with approximately 350 employees working in a hybrid environment. Following employee surveys and increased reports of stress, burnout, and work-life balance concerns, the Human Resources department developed a comprehensive workplace wellness program.

The wellness program included:

- Mental health awareness training
- Access to virtual counselling services
- Flexible work arrangements
- Financial wellness webinars
- Monthly wellness challenges
- A digital wellness platform for tracking goals and accessing resources

Although the program was well designed, participation rates remained low during the first six months. Only 20% of employees accessed the wellness platform, and attendance at wellness events was inconsistent.

After reviewing employee feedback, HR identified several implementation challenges:

- Many employees were unaware of the available resources
- Managers were not actively promoting participation
- Employees expressed concerns about privacy and data collection through the wellness platform
- Some staff believed participation would add to their workload
- Remote employees felt disconnected from wellness activities

To address these concerns, HR developed an implementation strategy that included:

- Enhanced communication campaigns using multiple channels

- Leadership training on wellness advocacy
- Wellness champions within each department
- Clear explanations of privacy protections
- Virtual and in-person participation options
- Monthly success stories highlighting employee experiences

Within one year, participation rates increased significantly, employee awareness improved, and engagement survey results showed higher levels of perceived organizational support for employee well-being.



## Discussion Questions

1. What implementation barriers did MapleTech encounter?
2. How did communication challenges affect employee participation?
3. Why was leadership involvement important to the program's success?
4. How did wellness champions contribute to employee engagement?
5. What role did trust and privacy play in employee acceptance of the wellness platform?
6. Which implementation strategy do you believe had the greatest impact on participation? Why?
7. What additional recommendations would you make to strengthen the program?

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OpenAI. (2026, June 1). ChatGPT. [Generative AI chat]. <https://chatgpt.com>

*Content has been reviewed.*

Prompt

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## 9.11 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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### Personal Reflection

1. Think about a workplace, volunteer organization, school, or community group you have participated in. How was information about new initiatives communicated to members?
2. What communication methods are most effective for keeping you informed and engaged? Why?
3. How do you typically respond when significant organizational changes are introduced? What factors influence your reaction?
4. What concerns might employees have about participating in workplace wellness programs?



### Application to HR Practice

1. Why is implementation often more challenging than program design?
2. How can HR professionals encourage employee participation without making wellness activities feel mandatory?
3. What strategies can organizations use to build trust when introducing wellness technologies that collect employee information?
4. How can leaders demonstrate authentic support for workplace wellness initiatives?



## Critical Thinking

1. Some employees argue that wellness programs are primarily designed to improve productivity rather than support employee well-being. How should HR professionals respond to this perception?
2. Should organizations provide incentives for wellness participation? What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing so?
3. How might implementation strategies differ between a fully remote workforce and a traditional on-site workforce?
4. What steps can organizations take to ensure wellness initiatives remain inclusive and accessible to diverse employee populations?



## Future HR Professional Reflection

1. As a future HR professional, what role do you see yourself playing during the implementation of a workplace wellness program?
2. Which implementation strategy discussed in this chapter do you believe is most critical to long-term success? Explain your reasoning.
3. How would you measure whether employees genuinely support a wellness initiative beyond simple participation numbers?

## 9.12 SUMMARY

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### Implementation Strategies

Designing a workplace wellness program is only one step in creating healthier organizations. Successful implementation requires leadership commitment, employee engagement, effective communication, and thoughtful change management. HR professionals play a central role in coordinating implementation efforts and fostering organizational support.

Communication strategies help build awareness and participation, while employee involvement increases program relevance and acceptance. Organizations must also anticipate and address resistance to change through transparency, engagement, and trust-building practices.

Technology and wellness platforms offer new opportunities to support employee well-being, particularly in increasingly digital and hybrid work environments. However, organizations must balance technological innovation with privacy protection and ethical considerations.

By applying effective implementation strategies, HR professionals can help transform wellness plans into meaningful workplace practices that support employee health, organizational performance, and long-term sustainability.

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Microsoft. (2026). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

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Prompt

Provide a summary for the above chapter from a university-level course on employee health and wellness.

# CHAPTER 10: EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

## Chapter Overview

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Understanding Program Evaluation
- 10.2 The Evaluation Cycle
- 10.3 Data Collection Methods
- 10.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation
- 10.5 Continuous Improvement in Workplace Wellness
- 10.6 The Role of HR in Evaluation and Improvement
- 10.7 Challenges in Wellness Program Evaluation
- 10.8 Case Study: Evaluating a Workplace Wellness Program
- 10.9 Reflective Questions
- 10.10 Summary



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# 10.0 INTRODUCTION



## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Identify key performance indicators (KPIs) used to measure workplace wellness program effectiveness.
- Describe the concepts of Return on Investment (ROI) and Value on Investment (VOI) in workplace wellness programs.
- Recognize common methods of collecting wellness program data.
- Identify basic approaches used to analyze workplace wellness data.
- Describe the role of employee feedback in evaluating wellness initiatives.
- Explain how organizations use evaluation results to improve wellness programs over time.

## Overview

Workplace wellness programs represent a significant investment of organizational resources, including time, funding, personnel, and leadership commitment. While designing and implementing a wellness initiative are important steps, organizations must also determine whether their efforts are producing meaningful results. Evaluation is the process of systematically assessing a program's effectiveness, efficiency, and impact. Without evaluation, organizations cannot determine whether wellness initiatives are achieving their intended outcomes or whether modifications are required.



Image by Tima Miroshnichenko, Pexels License.

Human resource professionals play a critical role in evaluating workplace wellness programs. HR practitioners are often responsible for collecting data, analyzing results, communicating findings to leadership, and recommending improvements. Effective evaluation allows organizations to demonstrate accountability, justify investments, and continuously enhance employee well-being initiatives.

This chapter explores the foundations of evaluation and continuous improvement in workplace wellness programs. Students will learn how organizations measure success through key performance indicators (KPIs), assess return on investment (ROI) and value on investment (VOI), collect and analyze data, establish feedback mechanisms, and create cultures of continuous improvement.

Microsoft. (2026, June 2). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

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Prompt

Create chapter 10 “Evaluation and Continuous Improvement” within the Canadian college textbook “employee health and wellness for HR professionals”. Previous chapters include: Introduction to Workplace Wellness & Organizational Health, Legal and Ethical Foundations, Organizational Culture and the Role of HR & Organizational Health and Safety (OHS), Physical Wellness in the Workplace, Mental and Emotional Wellness, Mental Health Supports and Work-Life Balance, Social and Financial Wellness, Designing a Comprehensive Wellness Program, and Implementation Strategies. 1 future chapter will be (so don’t cover these): Risk Management and Safety Integration. Ensure you cite and reference using APA and use OER resources. Also, turn the following into 5-6 chapter learning objectives that are at the first level bloom taxonomy: ● Key performance indicators (KPIs) and ROI/VOI ● Data collection and analysis ● Feedback loops and program adaptation

## 10.1 UNDERSTANDING PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Program evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of information used to determine whether a wellness initiative is achieving its goals (iResearchNet, 2024). Evaluation helps organizations answer important questions:

Are employees participating in wellness initiatives?

Are health outcomes improving?

Are workplace risks decreasing?

Are employees satisfied with the available supports?

Is the organization receiving value from its investment?

Evaluation serves two primary purposes. First, it provides evidence regarding program effectiveness. Second, it identifies opportunities for improvement. According to the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada (FCAC) (2025), evaluation should focus not only on measuring outcomes but also on gathering feedback that supports ongoing program refinement and improvement.

Evaluation should not be viewed as a one-time activity conducted at the end of a program. Instead, it should occur throughout the program lifecycle. Continuous evaluation allows organizations to identify challenges early and make adjustments before problems become significant.



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## 10.2 THE EVALUATION CYCLE

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Most workplace wellness programs follow a cyclical evaluation process:



This cycle reflects principles of continuous quality improvement, which emphasize ongoing learning and adaptation rather than one-time assessment.

## The Workplace Wellness Evaluation Cycle

Planning → Measurement → Analysis → Reporting → Improvement → Reassessment



Figure 10.2.1 "The Workplace Wellness Evaluation Cycle". Image by Koen Liddard, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The cyclical nature of evaluation recognizes that employee needs, organizational priorities, and workplace conditions change over time.

## Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are measurable metrics used to assess whether a wellness program is achieving its objectives. Tracking KPIs over time enables HR professionals to assess trends, identify gaps, and benchmark performance against organizational goals or industry standards (Maven Clinic, 2024).

Effective KPIs are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) – see Chapter 8 for more details on SMART goals.

KPIs generally fall into four categories:

### 1. Participation Indicators

Participation metrics measure employee engagement with wellness initiatives.

Examples include:

- Program enrollment rates
- Attendance at wellness events
- Completion rates for wellness challenges
- Utilization of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Participation in health screenings

High participation often indicates that employees perceive value in available programs.

### 2. Health Outcome Indicators

Health indicators assess changes in employee health status.

Examples include:

- Physical activity levels
- Smoking cessation rates
- Stress levels
- Mental health self-assessments
- Health risk assessment scores

Health outcomes help determine whether wellness initiatives are influencing employee behaviours and well-being.

### 3. Organizational Indicators

Organizations often seek evidence that wellness initiatives contribute to broader workplace outcomes.

Examples include:

- Absenteeism rates
- Presenteeism levels
- Employee turnover
- Workplace injury rates
- Disability claims
- Workers' compensation costs

These indicators help connect wellness activities to organizational performance.

### 4. Employee Experience Indicators

Employee perceptions provide valuable insight into program effectiveness.

Examples include:

- Job satisfaction
- Employee engagement
- Psychological safety

- Organizational commitment
- Workplace culture perceptions

Research increasingly recognizes employee well-being as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond physical health and includes psychological, social, and workplace experiences.

## Return on Investment (ROI)

Organizational leaders often want evidence that wellness initiatives generate financial benefits. Return on Investment (ROI) is a commonly used evaluation measure that compares program costs with financial outcomes.

ROI asks a straightforward question: *“For every dollar invested, how much financial benefit is generated?”*

Common financial benefits include:

- Reduced healthcare expenditures
- Lower disability costs
- Reduced absenteeism
- Lower turnover costs
- Improved productivity

Studies examining workplace wellness programs have found that positive ROI is possible, although results vary considerably depending on program design, measurement methods, and organizational context. Researchers have also noted that evaluation quality significantly affects reported ROI outcomes. There is evidence that suggests that effective wellness programs can lead to measurable financial benefits, including reductions in healthcare costs and absenteeism (SFM Mutual Insurance, 2024).

Many organizations track ROI because it provides an objective business case for continued investment. However, relying solely on financial measures can overlook important benefits that are more difficult to quantify.

## Value on Investment (VOI)

Value on Investment (VOI) expands evaluation beyond financial outcomes by considering broader organizational and employee benefits.

VOI recognizes that wellness programs may create value through:

- Improved employee morale
- Increased engagement
- Stronger workplace culture
- Enhanced employer reputation
- Greater psychological safety
- Improved teamwork
- Increased employee retention

These outcomes may not immediately translate into measurable financial returns but can significantly influence long-term organizational success. VOI is increasingly recognized as essential because many benefits of wellness programs are intangible but strategically significant (SFM Mutual Insurance, 2024). Many experts recommend evaluating both ROI and VOI because wellness programs are intended to support human outcomes as well as financial performance. A balanced evaluation approach recognizes that employee well-being is valuable in its own right while also contributing to organizational effectiveness.

## 10.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

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Accurate evaluation depends on reliable data collection. HR professionals must select methods that provide meaningful information while respecting employee privacy and confidentiality.



### Surveys

Employee surveys are among the most common evaluation tools.

Surveys can measure:

- Program satisfaction
- Employee well-being
- Engagement
- Stress levels
- Awareness of wellness resources

Surveys may be administered electronically or in person and can be conducted before, during, and after program implementation.



## Focus Groups

Focus groups allow employees to discuss their experiences and provide detailed feedback.

Benefits include:

- Rich qualitative information
- Identification of emerging issues
- Understanding employee perceptions
- Exploration of barriers to participation

Focus groups often uncover issues that may not appear in quantitative data.



## Interviews

Individual interviews provide deeper insight into employee experiences and perceptions. Interviews are particularly useful when evaluating specialized programs or leadership initiatives.





## Organizational Records

Organizations can analyze existing workplace data, including:

- Absenteeism records
- Turnover statistics
- Injury reports
- Disability claims
- EAP utilization rates
- Benefits usage data

These records often provide objective indicators of organizational outcomes.



## Health Assessments

Some organizations collect aggregate health information through:

- Health risk assessments
- Biometric screenings
- Fitness evaluations

Any collection of health-related information must comply with privacy legislation and ethical guidelines.

## 10.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

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### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Collecting data is only the first step. HR professionals must also analyze and interpret findings accurately. Data analysis involves identifying trends, patterns, and relationships that help explain program outcomes.

For example, organizations may compare:

- Pre-program and post-program results
- Different employee groups
- Participation levels and outcomes
- Organizational metrics over time
- Both quantitative and qualitative data contribute valuable information.

Quantitative data provide numerical evidence of change, while qualitative data explain why changes occurred. Effective evaluation often combines both approaches to create a more complete understanding of program performance.

### Benchmarking and Comparison

Benchmarking involves comparing organizational performance against internal or external standards.

Organizations may compare:

- Current results to previous years
- Different departments within the organization
- Industry averages
- National workforce trends

Benchmarking helps organizations determine whether observed outcomes represent meaningful progress. For example, if employee absenteeism decreases by 5%, benchmarking may help determine whether that change exceeds industry norms.

## Feedback Loops and Program Adaptation

One of the most important aspects of evaluation is using findings to improve future practice. Feedback loops are systems that allow organizations to collect information, analyze results, and make informed changes.

Effective feedback loops involve:

- Collecting employee input regularly
- Sharing results with stakeholders
- Identifying strengths and weaknesses
- Implementing improvements
- Monitoring the effects of changes

The Financial Consumer Agency of Canada (2025) emphasizes that ongoing feedback is essential for program improvement and long-term success. For example, if evaluation data reveal low participation among shift workers, an organization might adapt programming by offering additional scheduling options or digital wellness resources. Continuous adaptation helps ensure programs remain relevant to employee needs.

## 10.5 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN WORKPLACE WELLNESS

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Continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to enhance workplace wellness programs through systematic evaluation and refinement.

Many organizations adopt continuous improvement models, such as:

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Lean Improvement Processes (including “kaizen,” the Japanese word for “improvement,” which originated in production environments, though has been adopted in many different organizations since)

Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA).



Figure 10.5.1: “The Plan Do Check Act Cycle” by Koen Liddiard, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, based on an image by karn-b, CC BY 4.0.

**The PDCA offers several benefits when applied in a business situation:**

Continuous improvement: PDCA encourages an ongoing pursuit of process enhancement and a culture of continuous improvement.

Risk management: By testing changes on a small scale, organizations can identify and mitigate potential risks.

Increased efficiency: The systematic approach helps to identify inefficiencies, reduce waste, and optimize work processes.

Better decision-making: The data-driven decisions provide insights based on actual results rather than assumptions.

Competitive advantage: The continuous improvement of products, services, and processes helps businesses stand out from their competitors.

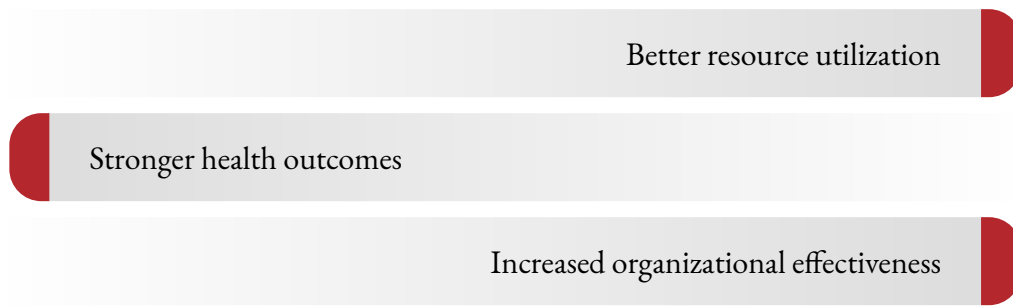
Versatility: A versatile tool for improvement, PDCA can be applied to various business environments and scenarios.

(BDC, 2024) Reproduced under fair dealing for purposes of education.

Although the specific framework may differ, all emphasize learning from data and making incremental improvements over time.

Continuous improvement supports:

Greater employee engagement



Research on workplace health promotion demonstrates that program quality can improve over time when organizations consistently evaluate outcomes and apply evidence-based quality criteria.

## 10.6 THE ROLE OF HR IN EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

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Human resource professionals serve as key facilitators of evaluation and continuous improvement efforts.

HR responsibilities include:



HR professionals must balance organizational goals with employee well-being objectives while ensuring confidentiality and trust throughout the evaluation process. When employees trust that data will be used responsibly, they are more likely to participate honestly and provide meaningful feedback.

## 10.7 CHALLENGES IN WELLNESS PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Despite its importance, evaluating wellness programs presents several challenges.

### Attribution

It can be difficult to determine whether observed changes result directly from wellness initiatives or from other factors. For example, reduced absenteeism may be influenced by economic conditions, organizational restructuring, or changes in leadership.

### Time Delays

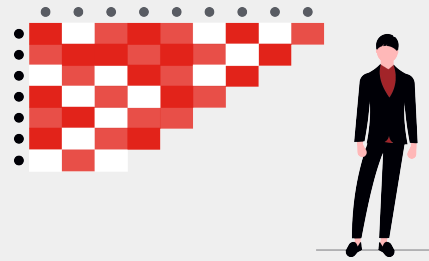
Many wellness outcomes emerge gradually. Improvements in chronic disease risk, mental health, or organizational culture may take years to become evident.



## Data Limitations

Organizations may face challenges related to:

- Incomplete data
- Low survey response rates
- Privacy restrictions
- Measurement inconsistencies
- Measuring Intangible Benefits



Outcomes such as morale, engagement, and culture are often difficult to quantify. This challenge reinforces the importance of incorporating VOI measures alongside traditional ROI calculations.

## **10.8 EXAMPLE CASE STUDY: EVALUATING A WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAM**

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## Case Study: Evaluating a Workplace Wellness Program at MapleTech Solutions

MapleTech Solutions, a Canadian technology company with 500 employees, implemented a comprehensive wellness program that included mental health resources, fitness incentives, financial wellness workshops, and flexible work arrangements.

Prior to implementation, HR collected baseline data on absenteeism, turnover, employee engagement, and EAP utilization.

After one year, the evaluation results indicated:

- Participation rate: 72%
- Absenteeism reduction: 9%
- Employee engagement increase: 14%
- EAP utilization increase: 18%
- Turnover reduction: 6%

Employee surveys revealed strong appreciation for mental health supports and flexible scheduling options. However, shift workers reported difficulty accessing wellness workshops. Based on this feedback, HR introduced virtual wellness sessions and on-demand resources. One year later, participation among shift workers increased substantially, demonstrating how feedback-driven adaptation contributed to continuous improvement.

This example illustrates how evaluation supports evidence-based decision-making and program refinement.

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OpenAI. (2026, June 3). ChatGPT. [Generative AI chat]. <https://chatgpt.com>

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## 10.9 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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### Reflective Questions

1. Why is evaluation an important component of workplace wellness programs?
2. What is the difference between ROI and VOI?
3. Which KPIs would be most useful for evaluating employee mental health initiatives?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using employee surveys as an evaluation tool?
5. How can feedback loops contribute to continuous improvement?
6. What challenges might organizations encounter when evaluating wellness initiatives?
7. Why should organizations collect both quantitative and qualitative data?
8. How can HR professionals ensure ethical data collection and confidentiality?
9. What indicators would you use to evaluate a wellness program at a post-secondary institution?
10. How does continuous improvement support long-term organizational health?

## 10.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

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### Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Evaluation and continuous improvement are essential components of successful workplace wellness programs. Through the use of KPIs, ROI, and VOI measures, data collection methods, and employee feedback systems, organizations can assess program effectiveness and identify opportunities for growth. HR professionals play a central role in managing evaluation processes and translating findings into meaningful action. By embracing continuous improvement, organizations can ensure wellness initiatives remain responsive, effective, and aligned with employee needs and organizational objectives.

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# CHAPTER 11: RISK MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY INTEGRATION

## Chapter Overview

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Understanding Risk Management in Workplace Wellness
- 11.2 Hazard Identification and Prevention
- 11.3 Integrating Wellness with Occupational Health and Safety Systems
- 11.4 Emergency Preparedness and Response
- 11.5 Future Trends in Workplace Wellness
- 11.6 Case Study: Integrating Safety and Wellness
- 11.7 Reflective Questions
- 11.8 Summary



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## 11.0 INTRODUCTION

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### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- Identify common workplace hazards that affect employee health, safety, and wellness.
- Recognize strategies used to prevent workplace injuries, illnesses, and psychosocial harm.
- Describe the relationship between workplace wellness and occupational health and safety systems.
- List components of emergency preparedness and response planning.
- Recognize supports that promote physical, mental, social, and psychological well-being during workplace emergencies.
- Explain the role of HR professionals in risk management and safety integration.
- Define future trends influencing workplace wellness and organizational health.
- Identify the importance of continuous monitoring and improvement in workplace risk management.

## Overview

Throughout this textbook, workplace wellness has been explored as a multidimensional concept that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, social, and financial well-being. Effective wellness programs, however, cannot exist independently from workplace safety. Employee health and wellness are directly influenced by the risks employees encounter in their work environments and by the systems organizations implement to manage those risks.



Image by Anna Tarazevich, Pexels License.

Historically, occupational health and safety (OHS) programs focused primarily on preventing injuries and illnesses through hazard control and regulatory compliance. While these remain essential functions, modern organizations increasingly recognize that employee wellness and workplace safety are interconnected. Risks to employee well-being can arise from physical hazards such as unsafe equipment and hazardous materials, as well as psychosocial hazards such as excessive workloads, workplace conflict, harassment, and organizational stressors.

For human resource professionals, risk management has become a strategic responsibility that extends beyond compliance. HR professionals play a critical role in creating environments where employees can work safely while maintaining positive physical, psychological, and social well-being. This chapter explores the relationship between risk management and workplace wellness, emphasizing hazard identification and prevention, integration of wellness and safety systems, emergency preparedness and response, and future directions in workplace wellness.

Effective integration ensures that organizations move beyond reactive responses to workplace incidents and toward proactive, preventive strategies. This approach aligns with contemporary human resource management practices that prioritize both legal compliance and organizational sustainability (Mehta, 2024 and Shields, 2025).

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Microsoft. (2026, June 3). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

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Prompt

Create chapter 11 “Risk Management and Safety Integration” within the Canadian college textbook

“employee health and wellness for HR professionals”. Previous chapters include: Introduction to Workplace Wellness & Organizational Health, Legal and Ethical Foundations, Organizational Culture and the Role of HR & Organizational Health and Safety (OHS), Physical Wellness in the Workplace, Mental and Emotional Wellness, Mental Health Supports and Work-Life Balance, Social and Financial Wellness, Designing a Comprehensive Wellness Program, Implementation Strategies, and Evaluation and Continuous Improvement. Ensure you cite and reference using APA and use OER resources. Also, turn the following into 5-8 chapter learning objectives that are at first-level Bloom taxonomy: Hazard identification and prevention, Integrating wellness with safety systems, Emergency preparedness and response (more from a physical, mental, social, psychological standpoint), Future trends in workplace wellness.

## 11.1 UNDERSTANDING RISK MANAGEMENT IN WORKPLACE WELLNESS

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Risk management refers to the systematic process of identifying, assessing, controlling, and monitoring workplace hazards and risks. Effective risk management reduces the likelihood of injuries, illnesses, operational disruptions, and organizational losses while promoting employee well-being. In the workplace, risk can be defined as the possibility that a hazard may cause harm. A hazard is any source, situation, or condition that has the potential to cause injury, illness, psychological distress, property damage, or environmental harm (Palmer, 2022a).

Risk management involves four key activities:

- Hazard identification
- Risk assessment
- Risk control
- Monitoring and evaluation

These activities support both organizational safety objectives and employee wellness goals.

Modern risk management recognizes that workplace health extends beyond physical safety. Organizations increasingly address psychosocial hazards, workplace culture, mental health concerns, and employee well-being as integral components of risk management strategies.

## 11.2 HAZARD IDENTIFICATION AND PREVENTION

Hazard identification is the foundation of workplace risk management. Before organizations can prevent harm, they must first recognize potential sources of danger. According to Palmer (2022b), hazard recognition involves identifying workplace conditions, tasks, processes, and behaviours that may create risk for employees. Effective hazard identification requires ongoing observation, employee participation, workplace inspections, and incident reporting.



Image by fauxels, Pexels License.

Importantly, modern wellness approaches extend hazard identification beyond physical risks to include psychological hazards such as stress, burnout, and workplace harassment. These factors significantly influence employee well-being and organizational outcomes (Leka et al., 2018). Therefore, HR professionals must adopt a holistic lens that integrates both traditional safety risks and emerging psychosocial concerns.

### Categories of Workplace Hazards

Workplace hazards can generally be grouped into several categories.

#### Physical Hazards

Physical hazards are often the most visible workplace risks.

These hazards include:

- Excessive noise
- Poor lighting
- Extreme temperatures
- Slippery surfaces
- Unsafe machinery

- Falls and ergonomic injuries

Physical hazards can directly affect employee health and productivity if not properly controlled.

## Biological Hazards

Biological hazards arise from exposure to living organisms or biological materials.

Examples include:

- Viruses and bacteria
- Mold
- Bloodborne pathogens
- Contaminated materials

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of managing biological risks and protecting employee health through organizational preparedness and public health measures.

## Chemical Hazards

Chemical hazards involve exposure to substances that may harm employees through inhalation, ingestion, or skin contact.

Examples include:

- Cleaning products
- Industrial chemicals
- Solvents
- Dust and fumes

Organizations must provide training, protective equipment, and safe handling procedures to minimize exposure risks.

## Ergonomic Hazards

Ergonomic hazards result from poorly designed work environments or tasks.

Common examples include:

- Repetitive motions
- Improper workstation design
- Awkward postures
- Heavy lifting

Ergonomic injuries often develop gradually and can significantly affect employee health and attendance.

## Psychosocial Hazards

Psychosocial hazards have received increasing attention in recent years because of their impact on mental health and organizational performance.

Examples include:

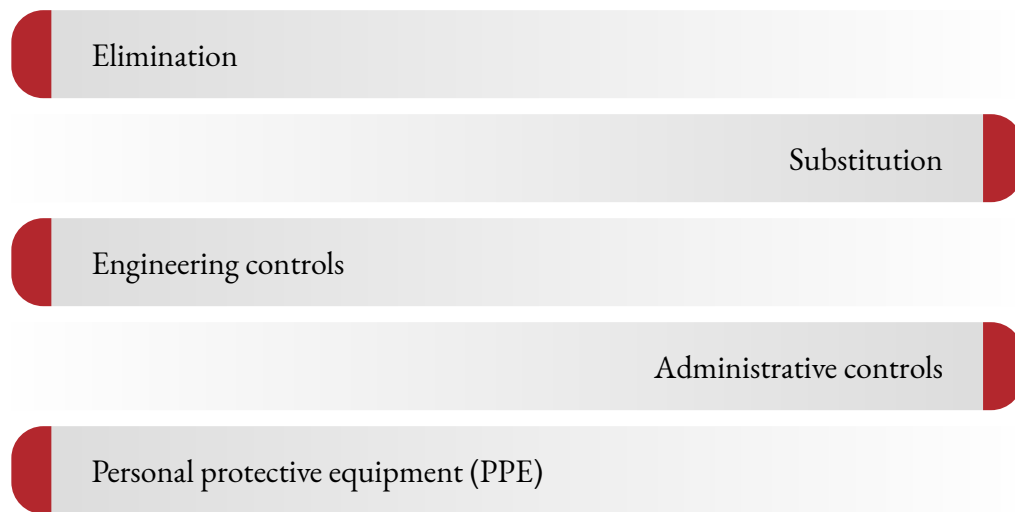
- Workplace bullying
- Harassment
- Excessive workload
- Lack of support
- Poor communication
- Role ambiguity
- Low job control

Research demonstrates that psychosocial workplace factors can significantly influence employee mental health, stress levels, burnout, absenteeism, and productivity (Oakman et al., 2018).

## Hazard Prevention and Control

Once hazards have been identified, organizations must implement strategies to control or eliminate risks.

The hierarchy of controls provides a framework for selecting interventions based on effectiveness:



Elimination and substitution are generally considered the most effective because they remove hazards from the workplace rather than relying on employee behaviour. HR professionals support hazard prevention by facilitating training, participating in investigations, monitoring workplace trends, and promoting employee awareness.

## 11.3 INTEGRATING WELLNESS WITH OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY SYSTEMS

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Traditionally, wellness programs and safety programs operated independently within many organizations. Safety departments focused on regulatory compliance and injury prevention, while wellness initiatives focused on promoting healthy behaviours. Contemporary organizations increasingly recognize that employee wellness and safety are interconnected components of organizational health.

An integrated approach acknowledges that physical safety, psychological health, organizational culture, and employee well-being influence one another. For example, an employee experiencing chronic stress may be more likely to experience fatigue, reduced concentration, and workplace accidents. Similarly, unsafe working conditions can negatively affect morale, engagement, and mental health.



Image by Mikhail Nilov, Pexels License.

## Benefits of Integration

Integrating wellness and safety systems can lead to:

- Improved employee health outcomes
- Reduced absenteeism
- Lower workers' compensation costs
- Increased productivity
- Enhanced employee engagement
- Stronger organizational culture
- Improved risk management

Organizations that align wellness and safety objectives often achieve greater long-term sustainability and organizational effectiveness.

## The Role of HR Professionals

Human resource professionals serve as key contributors to integrated workplace health systems.

HR responsibilities include:

- Developing policies that support health and safety
- Coordinating wellness initiatives
- Supporting employee training
- Monitoring workplace culture
- Facilitating employee participation
- Evaluating program effectiveness
- Ensuring legal compliance

HR professionals also support collaboration among managers, employees, health and safety committees, and senior leadership.



## Compliance Auditing and Continuous Improvement

Compliance auditing helps organizations evaluate whether policies, procedures, and practices meet legal and organizational requirements.

Human resource audits can assess areas such as:

- Workplace safety practices
- Training programs
- Wellness initiatives
- Policy implementation
- Legislative compliance



According to Mehta (2024), auditing supports accountability, identifies gaps, and promotes continuous organizational improvement. Regular reviews ensure that wellness and safety programs remain effective and responsive to changing workplace needs.

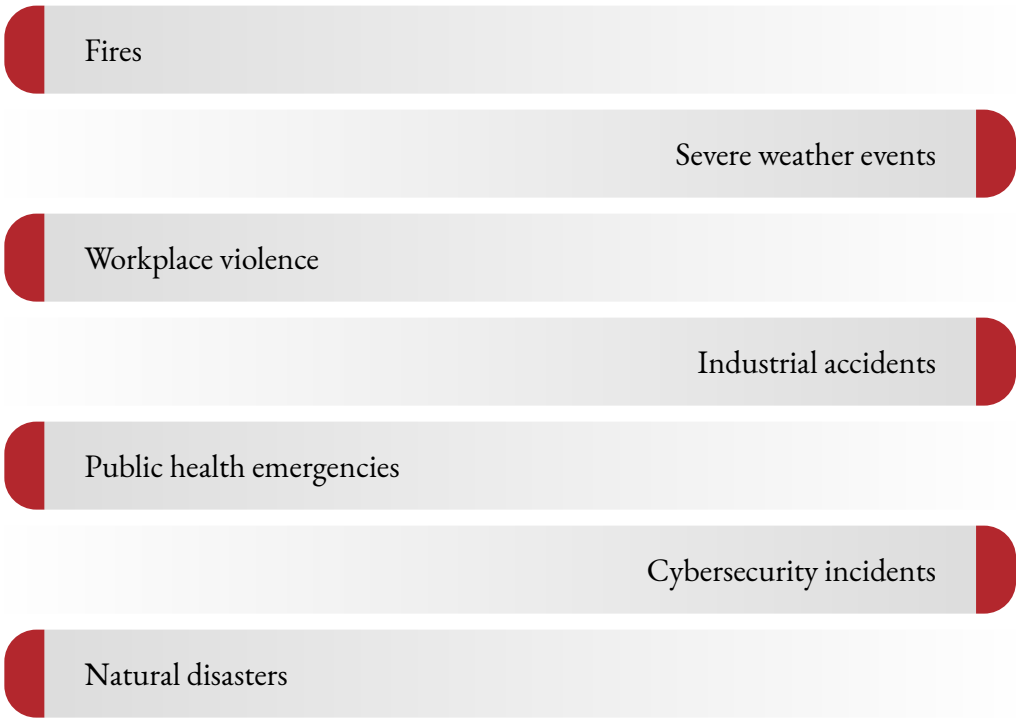
## 11.4 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

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Organizations must prepare for emergencies that may threaten employee safety, health, or organizational operations. Research indicates that exposure to workplace emergencies can result in stress, anxiety, and trauma-related symptoms, highlighting the need for psychological support mechanisms (Leka et al., 2018).

Emergency preparedness involves planning, training, communication, and resource allocation to ensure effective responses to unexpected events.

Examples of workplace emergencies include:



Fires

Severe weather events

Workplace violence

Industrial accidents

Public health emergencies

Cybersecurity incidents

Natural disasters



“Natural Disasters” from Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Effective emergency preparedness extends beyond physical safety and incorporates psychological and social support systems.

## Physical Well-Being During Emergencies

Protecting employee physical safety remains the primary objective during emergency situations.

Organizations typically establish:

- Emergency response plans
- Evacuation procedures
- Emergency communication systems
- First-aid programs
- Incident command structures

Regular training and emergency drills help employees respond effectively during critical situations.

## Psychological Well-Being During Emergencies

Emergencies often generate uncertainty, fear, and stress. Employees may experience anxiety, grief, trauma, or emotional exhaustion.

Organizations can support psychological well-being through:

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Crisis counselling services
- Trauma-informed leadership
- Mental health resources
- Psychological first aid

Providing timely communication and visible leadership support can reduce employee anxiety during periods of uncertainty.

## Social Well-Being During Emergencies

Social support is a significant protective factor during crises.

Organizations can foster social well-being by:

- Encouraging team communication
- Providing peer support opportunities
- Maintaining regular updates
- Promoting workplace connection

Employees who feel connected and supported are often better equipped to cope with stressful situations.



## Organizational Resilience

Emergency preparedness contributes to organizational resilience, which refers to an organization's ability to anticipate, adapt to, and recover from disruptions.

Resilient organizations invest in:

- Risk assessment
- Employee support systems
- Leadership development
- Crisis communication planning
- Continuous learning

The ability to respond effectively to emergencies supports both organizational continuity and employee well-being.



## 11.5 FUTURE TRENDS IN WORKPLACE WELLNESS

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Workplace wellness continues to evolve as organizations respond to changing workforce expectations, technological advancements, and emerging health challenges. Several trends are likely to shape the future of employee wellness.

### Psychological Health and Safety

Organizations increasingly recognize psychological health and safety as a critical component of workplace wellness.

Future initiatives are likely to focus on:

- Psychological safety
- Mental health literacy
- Burnout prevention
- Respectful workplace practices
- Trauma-informed leadership

Psychological health will continue to become more integrated into organizational strategy and risk management processes.

## Technology and Digital Wellness

Technology is transforming workplace wellness through:

- Virtual health services
- Wearable health technologies
- Wellness applications
- Artificial intelligence-supported coaching
- Online learning platforms

While these innovations create opportunities, organizations must also address concerns related to privacy, digital fatigue, and work-life boundaries.



## Data-Informed Decision Making

Organizations increasingly use employee data to evaluate wellness initiatives and identify emerging risks.

Data sources may include:

- Employee surveys
- Absenteeism reports
- Turnover statistics
- Health claims data
- Engagement assessments



HR professionals must balance the benefits of data analytics with ethical and privacy considerations.

## Inclusive Wellness Programs

Future wellness initiatives will place greater emphasis on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Organizations are recognizing that employee wellness needs vary across different populations and life circumstances. Inclusive wellness programs seek to ensure that resources and supports are accessible and relevant to all employees.

## Sustainability and Employee Well-Being

Many organizations are connecting employee wellness with broader environmental and social sustainability goals. Healthy workplaces increasingly recognize the relationship between employee well-being, organizational responsibility, and sustainable business practices.

## 11.6 EXAMPLE CASE STUDY: INTEGRATING SAFETY AND WELLNESS

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### Case Study: Integrating Safety and Wellness at Maple Leaf Distribution

Maple Leaf Distribution employs approximately 750 workers across multiple warehouse locations in Canada. Although the organization maintained strong safety records regarding physical injuries, employee surveys revealed increasing concerns related to stress, fatigue, workload pressures, and burnout.

The HR department partnered with the health and safety committee to conduct a workplace risk assessment. The assessment identified several psychosocial hazards, including role ambiguity, inconsistent communication, and excessive overtime.

In response, the organization implemented a comprehensive strategy that integrated wellness and safety objectives. Initiatives included leadership training, mental health awareness programs, enhanced employee assistance services, workload reviews, and updated emergency preparedness procedures.

Within 18 months, employee engagement scores improved, absenteeism decreased, and employees reported greater confidence in organizational support systems.



## Discussion Questions

1. What psychosocial hazards were identified at Maple Leaf Distribution?
2. How did the organization integrate wellness and safety initiatives?
3. Why was employee feedback important during the risk assessment process?
4. How might emergency preparedness contribute to employee well-being?
5. What additional strategies could strengthen organizational resilience?

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OpenAI. (2026, June 3). ChatGPT. [Generative AI chat]. <https://chatgpt.com>

*Content has been reviewed.*

Prompt

Using the OER: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/employeehealthwellness/>, please create a case study for chapter 11 similar to the case studies in the other chapters

## 11.7 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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### Reflective Questions

1. Why is hazard identification considered the foundation of workplace risk management?
2. How do psychosocial hazards affect employee wellness and organizational performance?
3. What are the benefits of integrating wellness initiatives with occupational health and safety systems?
4. How can organizations support employees psychologically during emergencies?
5. What role does organizational resilience play in workplace wellness?
6. How might technology influence future workplace wellness programs?
7. Why are compliance audits important for workplace health and wellness initiatives?
8. What future wellness trend do you believe will have the greatest impact on HR practice?

## 11.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

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### Risk Management and Safety Integration

Risk management and workplace wellness are closely connected elements of organizational success. Effective organizations recognize that employee well-being depends on both the promotion of health and the prevention of harm. Hazard identification and prevention provide the foundation for workplace safety, while integrated wellness and safety systems create comprehensive approaches to organizational health.

HR professionals play a critical role in supporting risk management through policy development, training, compliance monitoring, employee support, and continuous improvement initiatives. Emergency preparedness further contributes to organizational resilience by protecting employees physically, psychologically, and socially during times of crisis.

As workplaces continue to evolve, future wellness initiatives will increasingly emphasize psychological health and safety, technological innovation, data-informed decision-making, inclusivity, and sustainability. HR professionals who understand these trends will be well-positioned to support healthy, safe, and resilient workplaces.

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Microsoft. (2026). Copilot. [Generative AI chat]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

*Content has been edited – words have been replaced/removed/added, phrases have been changed, etc.*

Prompt

Provide a summary for the above chapter from a university-level course on employee health and wellness.

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# VIDEO TRANSCRIPTS

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## 4.5 Nutrition Education and Healthy Eating

### Erin's Testimonial

Thanks to the State Health Plan, I was able to participate in the Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less program for almost nothing. The strategies are things that even I can do as a busy mom, having a full-time job, as a busy wife. That's what motivates me to know that if I can do it, anybody can do it.

I love my job. I love the people that I work with, and they have truly supported me on this journey. Every day, we have a healthy lunch together. And it's funny, because we're at the point now that if someone does not have a healthy lunch, they're criticized. We laugh and joke, but that's part of the support system and holding each other accountable.

One of the components of the program is to track your weight. So, on a weekly basis, I, along with a few other coworkers, go in and weigh ourselves. We have journals. Some of us use our smart devices to track our weight. So I'm very, very proud of that. And again, a lot of that I owe to the Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less program.

So, I am president of the local chapter of my sorority here in the area, and one of our initiatives this year has been to live healthier lifestyles. We get out. We walk together. We have fun. We laugh, as well as work out and get fit.

My eating habits have definitely changed. We've changed what we have access to in terms of in the home. We shop for what we need. We prepackage our snacks, which has been huge because we all know that when we're hungry, and we go to the fridge, we open it up, we're going to eat what's there, so we've stocked the refrigerator with healthy foods. Every morning, we get up, we pack lunches for the day, and we do take the time the night before to prep the meals, wash the vegetables, cut them up, and bag them up. And I have to say, that's a strategy that was learned in one of my sessions with the program.

Another is that we eat out less. We, as a family, hold ourselves accountable. We talk about what we eat. We encourage each other to do better. Having that support system can make all the difference. My husband is eating celery. That's a big deal in my house.

I have to say, we move more. We walk as a family. We play catch. We hula-hoop. So we have grown closer as a

family as a result of the program. We are definitely well on our way. We are taking small steps, and we can clearly see progress, but we have come to realize that this is a lifelong journey.

It feels good to be able to take control of your life when you look at all the health risks that are out there. We plan to live a long time and to be around for each other. No excuses for this family. We are results-oriented, and we are proud of that.

# VERSION HISTORY

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This page provides a record of edits and changes made to this book since its initial publication. Whenever edits or updates are made in the text, we provide a record and description of those changes here. If the change is minor, the version number increases by 0.1. If the edits involve a number of changes, the version number increases to the next full number.

The files posted alongside this book always reflect the most recent version.

| Version | Date         | Change            | Affected Web Page |
|---------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1.0     | July 6, 2026 | First publication | N/A               |