

Mental health leaves most costly disability to Canadian employers

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Mental illness is associated with more lost work days than any other chronic condition, costing the Canadian economy \$51 billion annually in lost productivity. In the first study of its kind, researchers from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) have calculated the actual cost of mental health leave and found that on average it's double the cost of a leave for a physical illness.

The study, published in the *Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, looked at data tracking the short-term disability leave of 33,913 full-time employees in Ontario. Results showed that the cost to a company for a single employee on a short-term disability leave due to mental health concerns totals nearly \$18,000.

Dr. Carolyn Dewa, head of CAMH's Work and Well-being Research and Evaluation Program and lead investigator on the study, notes the disproportionate cost to employers when compared to other disabilities. "In an average year, a firm with 1,000 employees might expect about 145 disability cases. Of this, only a fraction are on disability due to mental illness, yet it costs employers the most." Disability leaves due to [physical illness](#) cost nearly half of that for a leave due to [mental illness](#).

Health and wellness interventions may hold the key to maintaining a healthy workforce and reducing costs. "We know that mental health triggers in the workplace can lead to disability - things like stress, casual and part-time work, and uncertain economic conditions can really take a toll on workers - especially if there is a pre-existing mental health

condition," says Dr. Dewa. "And while it is important to support workers that are on disability leave, it is crucial that businesses make [mental health](#) and wellness a priority to prevent disability in the first place."

Dr. Dewa suggests that implementing a continuum of care and support is an effective way of reducing the likelihood that an employee has to take a disability leave. She adds that programs emphasizing a healthy work-life balance, supports to help cope with stress, and access to physical fitness make people better workers and help sustain health.

Provided by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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