



Mental health: The importance of early recognition and treatment

Mental health issues affect all workplaces, regardless of industry. Employees in diverse roles face increased demands to solve problems, interact with others, analyze data and negotiate positive outcomes. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, on any given week, more than 500,000 Canadians¹ will not go to work because of mental illness. In fact, over 40% of OTIP's long term disability (LTD) claims are attributed to mental/nervous disorders.

What is mental illness?

Mental illness² is an umbrella term that refers to a wide variety of health challenges that affect the way we think about ourselves, relate to others, and interact with the world around us. They affect our thoughts, feelings, abilities and behaviours. Depression and anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses.

It's important to acknowledge that mental illness is just as real as physical illness. Like other illnesses, such as diabetes or asthma, most mental illnesses are episodic. That means people have periods when they are well and productive, as well as periods when they are unwell and overall functioning is low.

What can I do about it?

The good news is that mental illness is treatable. Helping our members identify mental health challenges early, through access to the right resources, such as OTIP's Early Intervention Program and FeelingBetterNow®, and assisting them in finding the appropriate treatment can get them on the path to recovery and help prevent long term disability.

There are many different treatments available, depending on the type of mental illness a member is diagnosed with. For example, a common form of therapy to help treat depression and anxiety is called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy³ (CBT).

What is CBT?

CBT is a type of mental health counselling offered to our members through the Early Intervention Program. This treatment helps members understand the thoughts and feelings that influence their behaviours, and teaches them that while they cannot control every aspect of the world around them, they can take control of how they interpret and deal with aspects of their environment. One of the greatest benefits of cognitive behavioural therapy is that it helps members develop coping skills that can be useful both now and in the future.

Since CBT is a short-term treatment option that does not necessarily involve medication, members should consider it as their first option in getting treatment and can ask their family physician about it.

Helping members get the right diagnosis and treatment sooner leads to better outcomes for everyone. Employers see reduced absenteeism and replacement costs, fewer sick leave days and disability claims, and increased member retention and productivity. Members and their families suffer less, get the help they need earlier, and return to a productive and better quality of life sooner.

To support plan members on leave with mental health conditions, OTIP provides two value-added services that advocate early intervention and treatment, at no cost through their long term disability (LTD) insurance plan:

- The **Early Intervention Program** focuses on evaluating a member's needs in the early stages of a medically related absence from work. Once their situation has been assessed, individualized assistance and support is provided as needed to help facilitate the member's recovery and a successful return-to-work. Find out how OTIP's Early Intervention Program can help you at **www.otip.com**
- **FeelingBetterNow®** is a web-based mental health care program that guides members and their care provider (whether it be a counsellor, psychologist, or family physician) to identify emotional and mental health issues as early as possible. Getting the right diagnosis and treatment helps members feel better sooner. To learn more about FeelingBetterNow®, go to **www.feelingbetternow.com/otip**

Sources:

¹Mental Health Commission of Canada. (n.d.) Workplace. Retrieved from <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/issues/workplace>

²Canadian Mental Health Association, (n.d.) Understanding mental illness. Retrieved from <http://www.cmha.ca/mental-health/understanding-mental-illness/>

³What Is Cognitive Behavior Therapy? (n.d.), Kendra Cherry, Retrieved from <http://psychology.about.com/od/psychotherapy/a/cbt.htm>