

NEWS RELEASE

*GLOBAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC ROUNDTABLE  
ON ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH*

**Ground-Breaking Survey on Mental Health in the Workforce**

One Quarter (26%) of Canadian Employees Diagnosed With (18%) or Believing They Have (8%) Depression

Managers, Co-workers and Workplace Atmosphere Supportive, Stigma Fading... But Managers Say Workplace Lacks Guidelines on How to Deal With Circumstance

**TORONTO, Ontario (Nov.19, 2007)** – A major public opinion survey points to higher rates of depression in the Canadian workforce than previously known. At the same time, managers appear more supportive of employees in distress.

The survey of more than 4,000 managers and employees was commissioned by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace as a public service and was carried out by Ipsos-Reid in association with the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health.

Great-West Life Centre Executive Director Michael Schwartz says the survey and its results will be made available in their entirety to the Mental Health Commission of Canada which has established knowledge exchange as a priority.

Mr. Schwartz said the Centre was created earlier this year to support development of new knowledge and to help employers and employees use that knowledge to deal effectively with mental health issues in the workplace.

Bill Wilkerson, Co-Founder and CEO of the Roundtable, says the results of the survey were “surprising and ground-breaking.”

He says that “in 10 years of working on mental health in the workplace, this is the first concrete evidence I have yet seen that the stigma of mental illness in the workplace may be receding.”

Wilkerson was also encouraged by signs that “neither co-workers nor managers lose confidence in employees who are depressed in their ability to do their jobs once they are well.” The “damaged goods syndrome” may also be waning.

The survey finds that:

- 16% of managers and 18% of non-managers say they have been diagnosed by a doctor for depression. Wilkerson says previous population health studies put the prevalence rate of depression much lower than that. Another 8% of employees are undiagnosed but believe they suffer from depression for a total of 26% in the workforce dealing with depression.
- Of those Canadian workers who cope with bouts of depression and may require time off work, most of these employees are off for over a week - 20% are off for one month or more.
- More and more employees are willing to tell their bosses about their depression and, in response, seven out of ten managers are willing to accommodate time off.
- Only 18% of managers say they have received training to help them identify and deal with employees who exhibit signs of depression

The survey also finds that earlier estimates of the cost of depression in the workforce are considerably lower than the actual experience reported by managers.

For example, earlier studies estimate that the average per-employee cost of depression is about \$2,000 a year. This survey is strikingly different. Managers say the total number of depressed employees who report directly to them cost their company, on average:

- \$14,500 a year in lost productivity while still on the job and \$20,000 for being off work altogether. This equates the per depressed employee cost to \$7,100 due to lost productivity on the job and \$10,000 due to absence from work – or, 300% to 500% higher than the annual per employee costs estimated by researchers in other studies.

In large numbers, employees suffering from depression believe it is brought on by a single life event such as divorce or death in the family and not workplace stress. In large numbers, employees and managers register fulfillment in their jobs and are working 40 hours a week, plus or minus.

This finding combined with higher stress rates suggests, Wilkerson says, that “*workplace stress* is not really workplace stress in a narrow sense, but a complex of social pressures gathering like storm clouds across the work and family lives of Canadians.”