

# Mental health at work:



## tips for employers



15% of working-age adults live with a mental disorder. Without the right support in place, the impact of poor mental health can affect a person's capacity to enjoy their work and to do it well: 12 billion workdays are lost every year to depression and anxiety alone at a cost of US\$ 1 trillion per year in lost productivity. Lack of understanding about mental health conditions can leave those experiencing them vulnerable to stigma, discrimination, and exclusion in the workplace, or even stop them from gaining work in the first place.

### **Work can protect mental health**

Work can be a protective factor for mental health, if safe and healthy working conditions are in place. Decent work provides an income, and also offers a platform for structured routines, positive relationships, and for gaining a sense of purpose and achievement. For people with severe mental health conditions, employment can promote recovery and is associated with improved self-esteem and better social functioning. For all workers, safe and healthy working environments are a fundamental right and are more likely to enhance work performance and productivity and improve staff retention.

### **How workplaces can undermine mental health**

Poor working environments can be a source of stress and pose a risk to mental health. Factors such as high job demands, discrimination, under-pay, job insecurity, lack of opportunities for career development, and harassment or bullying can all generate work-related stress. These factors can also compound the impact of existing mental health conditions.

## What you can do as an employer

All action should be achieved through meaningful consultation with workers and their representatives.



### **01** Prevent workers from experiencing mental health conditions by preventing the risks to their mental health at work.

- ◇ Identify the risks to mental health for your workforce and introduce organizational interventions to modify, mitigate or remove them.
- ◇ For example, offer flexible working arrangements and modify workloads or work schedules to enable work-life prioritization, involve workers in decisions about their job, and protect workers from discrimination and bullying, making sure that your workers understand what unacceptable behaviour is and how it will be handled.



### **02** Protect and promote mental health at work, by building up the capacity of managers to support their workers.

- ◇ Introduce manager training for mental health, covering what job stressors are and how they can be managed, how to recognize and appropriately respond to emotional distress, how to facilitate help-seeking, and how to improve interpersonal management skills.
- ◇ Additionally, consider training workers in mental health literacy and awareness, which can reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions.
- ◇ Introduce individual interventions, such as stress-management training or opportunities for physical leisure activities.
- ◇ Ensure that any intervention you introduce has been tested for effectiveness, quality and safety.



### **03** Support workers with mental health conditions to access, participate and thrive at work.

- ◇ Allow for reasonable accommodations that adapt working environments to match the worker's capacities, needs and preferences, for example extra time to complete tasks and time off for mental health care.
- ◇ Support workers to meaningfully return to work after an absence associated with mental health conditions by providing work-directed care (including reasonable accommodations or phased return to work) and access to ongoing clinical care.
- ◇ Participate in supported employment initiatives and coordinate with relevant stakeholders (including health, social and employment services) to support people with severe mental health conditions to gain and maintain work.



## 04

### Create an enabling environment for change, through:



**Leadership:** commit to mental health at work with a dedicated leadership, policy and plan.



**Investment:** secure sufficient funds and resources to deliver your plan.



**Rights:** uphold people's rights to participate in work fully and fairly.



**Integration:** embed mental health into your existing occupational safety and health systems.



**Participation:** engage workers, their representatives and people with lived experience in any decision-making about mental health at work.



**Evidence:** ensure interventions you implement are based on the latest evidence.



**Compliance:** establish performance indicators for monitoring and evaluating actions for mental health.

More information

- ▶ Guidelines
- ▶ Policy Brief
- ▶ ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work
- ▶ Burnout
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Mental disorders (who.int)
- ▶ Preventing suicide: a resource at work