

What is Mental Health First Aid?

One in three Canadians will experience a mental health problem at some point in their life. The earlier a problem is detected and treated, the better the outcome. Mental Health First Aid Canada gives people the skills to provide that early help that is so important in recovery.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. Just as physical first aid is administered to an injured person before medical treatment can be obtained, MHFA is given until appropriate treatment is found or until the crisis is resolved.

The MHFA Canada program aims to improve mental health literacy, and provide the skills and knowledge to help people better manage potential or developing mental health problems in themselves, a family member, a friend or a colleague.

The program does not teach people how to be therapists. It does teach people how to:

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health problems.
- Provide initial help.
- Guide a person towards appropriate professional help.

MHFA aims to:

- Preserve life where a person may be a danger to themselves or others.
- Provide help to prevent the mental health problem from developing into a more serious state.
- Promote the recovery of good mental health.
- Provide comfort to a person experiencing a mental health problem.

Why take MHFA Canada?

- **Mental health problems are common**, especially depression, anxiety and misuse of alcohol and other drugs. One person in three will experience some form of problem with their mental health at some point in their life.
- **There is a stigma associated with mental health problems.** This may hinder people from seeking help. People are often ashamed to discuss mental health problems with family, friends and work colleagues. They may also be reluctant to



seek professional help for such problems because of their concerns about what others will think of them.

- **Many people are not well informed.** Understanding how to recognize mental health problems and what effective treatments are available is not widespread. With greater community awareness, people will be able to recognize their own or others' problems and feel more comfortable about seeking professional assistance.
- **Professional help is not always on hand.** Family doctors, counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists can all assist people with mental health problems. However just as with accidents and other medical emergencies, such assistance is not always available when a problem first arises. This is when members of the public can offer immediate aid and support the person until they get appropriate professional help.
- **People may lack the insight to realize they need help or that help is available.** Some mental health problems cloud clear thinking and good decision-making. A person experiencing such problems may not realize that they need help or that effective help is available for them. They may be in such a state of distress and not able to think clearly about what they should do.

Members of the general public often do not know how to respond. In a mental health crisis situation, the helper's actions may determine how quickly the person with the problem gets help and/or recovers. In Mental Health First Aid, they learn an approach to help them to be calm and confident to respond in an appropriate way.

In the Workplace

In a recent major Canadian study, **82%** of responding organizations ranked mental health conditions in their top three causes of short term disability (**72% for long-term**). **30%** of all short and long term disability claims are due to mental health problems and illnesses. In 2011, lost productivity due to absenteeism and presenteeism (present but less than fully productive at work) due to mental health problems and illnesses was approximately **\$6 Billion**.

Workplace First Aid Includes Mental Health

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Colleagues and managers are best placed to be the first to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health issues in their co-workers, provided they are properly trained in Mental Health First Aid.

MHFA trained employees will help equip your organization to:

- **Recognize and understand the symptoms** of mental health problems, including those related to substance abuse.
- **Provide help** to prevent the mental health problem from developing into a more serious state.
- **Promote the recovery** of good mental health by accommodating employees in distress or recovering from a crisis.
- **Increase productivity** and reduce absenteeism and overall pressure on benefits.

Evidence has shown that individuals who complete the 12-hour basic course have:

- Significantly **greater recognition** of the most common mental health **illnesses** and problems.
- **Decreased social distance** from people with mental health illnesses or problems.
- **Increased confidence** in providing help to others.
- **Demonstrated increase** in helpful actions.

MHFA Improves All Aspects of the Organization

Employers who set a strategic direction for improving mental health are rewarded with **dramatic cost and effectiveness benefits**, enjoying significant and sustainable enhancements in:



Productivity: happy and psychologically healthy employees work harder and more efficiently.

Recruitment and Retention: today's top-quality employees expect a workplace that supports their personal and professional growth.

Cost Savings due to Disability and Absenteeism: there is a strong link between mental health, physical well-being and injury prevention.

Conflict Reduction: better mental health among employees means fewer grievances and complaints and a stronger corporate reputation.

Operational Success: mentally healthy workplaces are characterized by higher levels of employee motivation, commitment, innovation and creativity, as well as fewer errors, better decision making and improved planning.

If you would like to learn more about MHFA or to schedule a course for your workplace, please contact CMHA-NL's Workplace Mental Health Coordinator, John Dinn at jdinn@cmhanl.ca or 753-8550 ext. 102. We can arrange a 2 day Mental Health First Aid Canada in-house course tailored to your workplace reality and schedule.

“There is no health without mental health”