

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

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HEALTH AT WORK 4 ALL! 2013

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Report No. 124-13 re Health at Work 4 All! 2013 be received for information.

Key Points

- Evidence has shown that workplace wellness programs positively impact healthy employee behaviours.
- Middlesex-London Health Unit, Elgin-St. Thomas Public Health and Oxford County Public Health collaborate to deliver workplace health through the Health at Work 4 All! program.
- In 2013, the *Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* standard was released by the Canadian Standards Association to support mental and physical health in the workplace.

Background

There is evidence that a comprehensive workplace health program can provide numerous positive results including improved productivity, decreased absenteeism, reduced costs of health benefit, improved retention and recruitment, improved health and wellness, and many others. The cost of unhealthy workplaces in Canada is estimated at \$6 to \$10 billion per year in direct costs associated with absenteeism due to conflict between work and personal life and stress-related absences. Employers and society pay a heavy price in the form of healthcare costs and lost productivity due to four key lifestyle risk factors associated with workplace stress: obesity, smoking, alcohol abuse and sedentary lifestyle or lack of physical activity.

Healthy employees are assets that can be developed through a healthy work-life balance. Healthy work-life balance means that neither the demands of work nor the demands of personal/family life overwhelm the other. Healthy work-life balance is essential to improving workplace morale and productivity as well as employees' job satisfaction and physical/mental health and wellness. Public health plays an important role in assisting workplaces in achieving a healthier workplace and thus healthier employees.

In 2011, this Health Unit together with Elgin-St. Thomas Public Health, developed the Health at Work 4 All! program. In June 2013, Oxford County Public Health also adopted the program.

Health at Work 4 All! 2013 Highlights

In 2013, a new voluntary safety standard entitled *Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* was released by the Canadian Standards Association. It was developed in response to the emerging realization in Canada and around the world that workplace psychological health and safety is as important as physical health and safety. This Standard is significant to the work of public health because:

- Safe and secure employment is a key social determinant of health which in turn impacts income, food security, quality of housing, and the other basic prerequisites of health;

- There is a direct link between dissatisfaction and stress at work, and heart disease, accidents and some types of cancer; and
- The 2008 *Canadian Community Health Survey* noted that thirty percent of the working population report experiencing work as 'quite a bit stressful' or 'extremely stressful' most days.

To introduce the new Standard to local employers, Chatham-Kent, Elgin-St Thomas, Middlesex-London, Oxford and Perth health units partnered to host a full day workshop on June 13, 2013. The Chair of the Technical Committee that created the Standard, Mary Ann Baynton (Consultant to the Mental Health Commission of Canada), and committee member Andrew Harkness (Consultant from Workplace Safety and Prevention Services), presented an overview of the standard to 160 workplace representatives. Following the workshop, a partnership was formed between the above-mentioned health units, the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, and three other Workforce Planning and Development Boards in southwestern Ontario. It was agreed that this partnership could provide mutual benefit of funding and program expertise.

A workshop will be held on April 10th 2014 with Dr. Linda Duxbury. Dr. Duxbury will be presenting "A Changing Workforce, Engaging, Building, and Managing" based on her recent research findings (2012) regarding the aging workforce and the changes, challenges and rewards this is posing for workplaces. This workshop is one of the outcomes of the partnership process.

The Health at Work for All! Program has been recognized by the lead staff person being invited to:

- Sit on an advisory committee for Excellence Canada to redesign and refocus the online resources for the annual Healthy Workplace Month initiative
- Attend the launch to the Prince's Seeing is Believing program at the London Chamber of Commerce
- Participate on a committee to advise the United Way's Mental Health Impact Council how to best promote the use of the new CSA Standard
- Present the new Standard and "what a healthy workplace is" to the United Way Advisory Committee
- Plan a workshop in partnership with CTV London and the London and District Distress Centre to highlight mental health in the workplace
- Present to the Human Resource Professionals of London and District, The London Health Providers Network and the London and District Occupational Health Nursing Network

Conclusion

2013 has been a year of changing directions for the workplace program that has led to the creation of new partnerships and connections. Through these opportunities the Health at Work 4 All! Program is being recognized as a resource that can lead employers who are interested in health and wellness, as well as leaders and managers, to make positive changes in their workplaces.

This report was prepared by Ms. Marylou Albanese, Manager, and Ms. Sandy Richardson, Public Health Nurse, Healthy Communities and Injury Prevention Team



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<p>This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Chronic Diseases and Injuries Program Standards of Chronic Disease Prevention and Injury Program Standards Health Promotion and Policy Development requirements.</p>
