

## Board of Health Briefing Report

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health  
Date: March 1, 2023  
Topic: **Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace**  
**Submitted by:** Dr. Glenn Corneil, Acting Medical Officer of Health/CEO  
**Prepared by:** Krystal Oviatt, Public Health Promoter  
**Reviewed by:** Jocelyn Moreno, Research Planning and Policy Analyst  
Amanda Mongeon, Manager of Community Health  
Randy Winters, Director of Corporate and Health Protection Services

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **THAT** the Timiskaming Board of Health receive the briefing note Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace for consideration;
2. **AND FURTHER THAT** the Timiskaming Board of Health endorse the adoption of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace to promote and protect the psychological health and safety of Timiskaming Health Unit staff.

### Overview

- The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard) is the first of its kind in the world. It is a set of voluntary guidelines, tools and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work.<sup>1</sup>
- The costs of stress incurred to organizations include increased health-care expenses, compensation payments, lost productivity, and turnover.<sup>2</sup>
- When employees feel supported at work, absenteeism and turnover go down and employee well-being and performance go up.<sup>2</sup>
- Implementing the Standard exposes the systemic causes of psychological harm in the workplace and focuses on harm prevention and creating work that is good for employee wellbeing, rather than focusing on the symptoms.
- The mental health and wellbeing of Ontarians is heavily influenced by the social, economic and physical environments where people live, learn, work and play. The Ontario Public Health Standards call for mental health promotion interventions to be applied across a range of settings, including workplaces.<sup>3</sup>
- A Board of Health commitment to the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace signifies the organizational commitment to the Standard and its implementation.

## THU's Strategic Plan 2019-2023

Adopting the Standard aligns with and contributes to meeting the Strategic Directions THU committed to in the [2019-2023 Strategic Plan](#). Through the mission and vision statement as well as the values and strategic directions, wellbeing (or factors thereof) is intertwined:

**Vision:** Healthy communities where everyone can thrive.

**Mission:** Public Health promotes and protects the health and wellbeing of all people. We do this through collaboration, research, services, communication and advocacy.

**Values:** Respect, adaptable and evidence-informed

### **Strategic Directions:**

1. We are a resilient, cohesive and responsive team of skilled professionals. We support the wellbeing of our workforce.
2. We use the best available information, including local lived experience, to inform local programs and services.
3. We nurture positive and effective relationships with community partners to improve public health. We advocate for policy changes that make a difference in local communities.
4. We engage in meaningful relationships that respect and respond to our cultural and linguistic diversity.

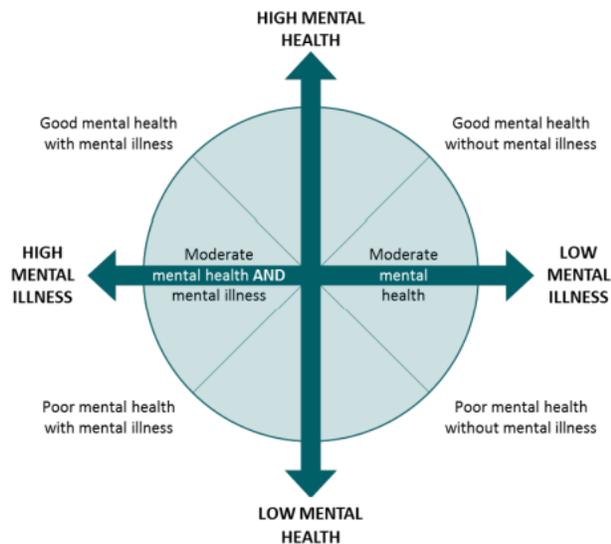
By building organizational capacity to support workplace mental health, this work also contributes to meeting requirements and expected outcomes in the Ontario Public Health Standards (2018).

## **Background**

Ontario's public health units deliver a range of population health programs aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of the community, protecting the health of all, and ensuring everyone has an opportunity to thrive. The release of the 2018 Ontario Public Health Standards included the Mental Health Promotion Guideline. The role of public health, within this guideline, centers on promoting mental health and preventing mental illness. Mental health promotion aims to enhance the well-being of the population, while promoting the protective factors rather than focusing on risk factors and conditions and utilizes strategies that foster supportive environments and individual resilience.<sup>3</sup>

Mental health and mental illness are distinct but related concepts that exist on a dual continuum. Not everyone who has poor mental health will be diagnosed with a mental illness, and conversely, those living with a mental illness can also experience good mental health (see Fig.1).<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: The Two Continua Model of Mental Health and Mental Illness**



With most adults spending more of their time at work than anywhere else, addressing issues of mental health at work is vital. Workplaces can play an essential part in maintaining positive mental health, giving employees an opportunity to feel productive and boost their wellbeing, or being a stressful environment that contributes to the rise of mental health problems and illnesses.<sup>4</sup> The employer and the employee have a joint responsibility to understand the important issue of psychological health and safety at work.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) led and collaborated with the Bureau de normalisation de Québec and the CSA group to launch the [National Standard for Psychological health and safety in the workplace](#) in 2013. The Standard is the first of its kind in the world. It is a set of voluntary guidelines, tools and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work.<sup>1</sup> Centred around 13 psychosocial factors, the comprehensive framework helps organizations create more mentally healthy work environments. Workplaces with a positive approach to psychological health and safety are better able to recruit and retain talent, are more creative and innovative, have improved employee engagement and enhanced productivity.<sup>5</sup> Adopting the Standard not only improves the mental wellbeing of the workforce, but also has been shown to provide a return on investment helping with risk mitigation, cost effectiveness, recruitment and retention and organizational excellence and sustainability.<sup>5</sup>

The psychosocial risk factors that the Standard aims at improving are elements of the work environment, management practices and/or organizational dimensions that increase the risk to health.<sup>5</sup> The MHCC reviews these on a regular basis, the factors currently considered include:

1. Psychological and social support
2. Organizational culture
3. Clear leadership and expectations
4. Civility and Respect
5. Psychological job demands
6. Growth and development
7. Recognition and Reward
8. Involvement and influence
9. Workload management

10. Engagement
11. Balance
12. Psychological protection
13. Protection of physical safety
14. Other chronic stressors as identified by workers

As part of adopting the Standard, THU will establish, document, implement and maintain a psychological health and safety management system (PHSMS). This will be integrated into our current practices and governance, and will include the following to allow us to continually improve our workplace:

- a) Commitment, leadership, and participation
- b) Planning
- c) Implementation
- d) Evaluation and corrective action
- e) Management review and continual improvement

There are several resources available to help workplaces implement the Standard, helping to identify potential hazards that could impact the psychological health and safety of their workforce. This preventative approach assesses a workplace's practices and identifies areas of concern so preventative measures can be taken to address them.<sup>6</sup> Embedding the practices into daily business, aligning our policies with psychological health and safety standards, providing education and resources to management and staff, and nurturing a workplace that is supportive and protective of employee mental health are key to shifting our organizational culture to this higher standard.

As per the Mental Health Promotion Guideline, local public health units are to implement a comprehensive approach to population mental health that includes a wide range of strategies across sectors and the lifespan to foster protective factors and address risks factors. Being leaders of this internal work will help us support and obtain buy-in from others to adopt this higher standard to protect and promote mental health in the working population; THU staff will also support the implementation of the PH&S Standard among other district workplaces.

**Next Steps:**

1. Adoption of the Standard by the Board of Health.
2. Commitment to Psychological Health and Safety with a policy statement, from leadership team.
3. Conduct policy review of internal policies to ensure they align with psychological health and safety standards.
4. Survey staff to determine priority area of focus.
5. Offer training, support and resources to leadership team and staff as relevant.
6. Build an accountability framework for evaluation and successive planning.

## References

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