

**Employers in Manitoba are legally responsible for protecting the health and well-being of their employees, including their psychological health.**

Hazards to workers' mental health during the pandemic may include:

- Increased work demands, especially for essential workers
- Worry over the risk of becoming infected with the COVID-19 virus
- Risk of violence from stressed customers or patients
- Harassment or bullying due to stigma from being suspected of having COVID-19 or being exposed to someone suspected of having COVID-19
- Isolation, especially for those working at home
- Low support without the physical presence of coworkers and supervisors, or due to increased work demands that divert attention away from providing support to workers
- Rapid and poorly planned organizational changes to respond to address the needs and/or effects of COVID-19
- Concern about job security and possible layoffs

### **Guidelines for workplaces**

#### **Safety First**

**Take proactive measures to protect workers and limit their exposure to the COVID-19 virus.** This includes implementing physical barriers between workers and the public, social distancing protocols, increased cleaning in the environment, and supplying adequate hand washing/sanitizing supplies and facilities. Make sure workers feel comfortable to raise concerns about their safety and make every effort to address these concerns.

**Address disrespectful behavior, harassment, bullying, and threats of violence** in accordance with the organization's Respectful Workplace Policy as well as the Violence Prevention and Harassment Prevention policies required by law in all workplaces. Inform all workplace stakeholders that discrimination on account of illness or perceived illness is a violation of the Human Rights Code.

#### **Be Flexible**

**Do not expect the same volume of work from workers as is normally accomplished.** Be prepared to adjust deadlines and workloads. This is not "business as usual". Most workers will be experiencing stress on multiple fronts such as planning for reduced grocery trips to meet basic needs, care for children who are at home from daycare and school, concern for elderly family members, and caring for ill family members when needed.

**Be flexible with working schedules.** Allow workers to change or request certain shifts to accommodate their other obligations. Understand that workers working from home may start earlier or work later than usual and that schedules may fluctuate irregularly.

#### Increase Workers' Control

**Ask and listen to workers' ideas and input** into changes on how work is done due to COVID-19. Workers know their jobs and often have the best ideas on how things can be done more safely or done differently in a new environment. Check in with workers to evaluate the impact of changes implemented. Be prepared to adjust as needed.

#### Provide Support

**Supervisors should regularly check in with workers individually about how they are feeling,** at least once a week. Many people are experiencing anxiety, fear and stress at this time. Employers should recognize that workers are human beings and prioritize their well-being over the work itself.

**Build in regular opportunities for your team to connect,** even virtually by using video or phone conference calls.

**Increase communication** about organizational issues. Send regular email updates to make sure everyone is abreast of developments in a rapidly changing environment. Make sure to respond promptly to any emails or phone calls from workers about their concerns related to safety, workload, expectations, or how they are managing.

**Encourage workers to take regular breaks** and to stop work at their regular end time and on their regular days off

**Provide workers with information about what they are entitled to** if they become ill or need to assume caregiving responsibilities.

**Regularly remind workers about mental health resources** available to them, including an Employee Assistance Program if one is available in your workplace.

**Communicate any information about possible layoffs clearly and promptly.** Share your assessment of the likelihood of layoffs and the organization's hopes for the future, but don't promise what you might not be able to deliver. Create a plan if layoffs are necessary that includes future return to work. Provide information and support to workers to access income benefits if facing unemployment.

### **Additional Resources**

**SAFE Work Manitoba** – resources to help you start or maintain a psychological health and safety program in your workplace.

**Centre for Addiction & Mental Health** – information and FAQs on mental health & COVID-19 including Coping with Stress & Anxiety, Quarantine & Isolation, and Stigma & prejudice.

**Mental Health Virtual Therapy Program** – AbilitiCBT, a new free & confidential digital therapy program available to all Manitobans experiencing low to mid symptoms of anxiety due to the pandemic.

**Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba** – listing of local counselling resources available in Winnipeg and are running a COVID-19 anxiety 'warm line' where you can call 204-925-0040 and leave a message to be returned in a short period of time.