



## MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

### PHSA pioneers efforts to reduce stigma of mental health issues in the workplace

Programs support employees in high-stress sector, influence other organizations

Anyone who has suffered from a mental health issue knows it poses a tough enough challenge, but imagine having to deal with it in an unsupportive workplace where stigma reigns supreme?

In light of Healthy Workplace Week, the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) stands out as one of the first Canadian health care sector employers to take the lead in de-stigmatizing mental health issues in the workplace through a comprehensive corporate commitment and series of proactive initiatives designed to support employees in their struggle and recovery from mental health issues.

“Our government recognizes the importance of healthy workplaces across B.C. and we support this by recognizing Healthy Workplace Week,” said Mary Polak, Minister of Healthy Living and Sport. “Public and private organizations around the province, such as PHSA, are leaders in terms of following through on their organizational commitments to cultivating work environments where employee mental health issues aren’t stigmatized, but instead are addressed candidly from a perspective of respect and compassion.”

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One of those initiatives, “Responding with Respect,” is a new workshop for managers and supervisors -- facilitated in collaboration with Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Vancouver/Burnaby branch -- designed to help them recognize and respond appropriately to signs of depression and low mood in staff.

PHSA has also introduced a web-based self-assessment tool, “Feeling Better Now,” to assist with early diagnosis of mild mental health problems, including depression.

In partnership with the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), faculty of health sciences, Simon Fraser University, PHSA developed and made available to employees the Antidepressant Skills at Work workbook to assist them with low mood or depression. PHSA also has an active Mental Health Working Group that is a partnership between its unions and management.

Recently recognized as one of BC’s top 50 employers by Mediacorp Canada Inc., PHSA’s leadership in the area of employee mental health issues has also influenced or connected with other organizations. London Drugs and Coast Capital Savings have distributed PHSA’s Antidepressant Skills at Work workbook to employees and undertaken employee mental health initiatives of their own.

“Stigmatization of people with mental health problems occurs systemically within society so it’s no surprise that these negative attitudes impact workplaces. PHSA’s system-wide improvements in the area of workplace mental health and addictions support employees who are already facing the tremendous pressures and demands associated with working in the health sector,” said Lynda Cranston, President and CEO of PHSA.

## Mental Health in the Workplace Facts

-In Canada, the estimated cost of mental illness in the workplace is more than \$20 Billion.

-Mental illness accounts for 13 per cent of long-term benefit claims for health care workers.

-According to a Harvard University study, approximately five per cent of employees are working with depression.

-According to a July 2008 Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) survey, approximately 35 million workdays are lost every year in Canada through mental illness, although senior executives have little awareness of the problem.

-The Canadian Medical Association's eighth annual National Report Card on Health Care suggested that almost half of Canadians think people use the term mental illness as an excuse for bad behavior. It also found that only half of Canadians would tell friends or coworkers they have a family member with a mental illness, compared to 72 per cent for a diagnosis of cancer or 68 per cent for diabetes.

PHSA operates eight agencies that provide province-wide health care services, including the BC Cancer Agency, BC Centre for Disease Control, BC Children's Hospital and Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children, BC Provincial Renal Agency, BC Transplant Society, BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, the Forensic Psychiatric Services Commission and Riverview Hospital.

PHSA plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians.

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