

Revised July 2014

# HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE

## A Guide for Employers



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Four  County  
Labour Market Planning Board

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*Serving Bruce Grey Huron Perth*



## What is the purpose of this guide?

The purpose of this guide is to:

- ▶ Provide employers information about healthy work-life balance and its importance.
- ▶ Increase employers' knowledge of common health issues impacting their bottom line.
- ▶ Provide employers with strategies to address issues that may arise in their workplace.
- ▶ Provide employers information to support employees and a healthy workplace environment.
- ▶ Provide employers information about what local resources are available to help them.

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# Introduction

## What is Healthy Work-Life Balance?

You hear a lot of talk about healthy work-life balance, but what does it mean? Having a healthy balance means that neither the demands of work nor the demands of personal/family life overwhelm the other.

In many ways it's easier to define unhealthy work-life balance than a healthy one. People know when something is wrong. Employers may notice something is wrong in their workplace when they see increased health claims and costs, more sick days, poor morale and lower productivity.

## Healthier Employees are Assets

Healthy work-life balance is essential to improving workplace morale and productivity, as well as employees' job satisfaction and physical/mental health and wellness.

### Healthy Workplaces

- Higher staff morale & job satisfaction
- Higher productivity
- Good staff retention
- Lower benefit costs & claims
- Lower absenteeism
- Fewer conflicts

### Unhealthy Workplaces

- Lower staff morale
- Lower productivity
- Poor staff retention
- Higher benefit costs & claims
- Higher absenteeism
- More conflicts

**What side of the scale do you want to be on?**

# The Business Case for a Healthy Workplace

## The Costs of Unhealthy Workplaces

Facts about the financial costs of unhealthy work-life balance and its impact on workplaces:

- **\$6 billion to \$10 billion a year:** Estimated direct cost of absenteeism to Canadian companies due to high work-life conflict.<sup>1</sup>
- **\$10 billion a year:** Estimated cost of stress-related absences to Canadian employers.<sup>2</sup>

Employers pay a heavy price - in the form of increased health insurance claims, lost workdays and workers' compensation claims - for employees who have any of these four key lifestyle risk factors:

- Overweight
- Smoker
- Heavy drinker
- Sedentary lifestyle (lack of physical activity)

It can cost employers hundreds - if not thousands - of dollars per employee in added costs depending on the type and number of risk factors. More risk factors mean more cost to an employer.

**Obesity costs:** Obesity costs the Canadian economy between \$4.6-billion and \$7.1-billion a year, according to a 2011 study.<sup>3</sup> Half of the total is attributed to lost productivity, as people are unable to work either because of disability or because they can't find jobs due to discrimination.

**Smoking costs:** Smoking cost the Canadian economy \$12.5 billion in lost productivity due to illness and premature death in 2002, according to a study.<sup>4</sup>

**Alcohol abuse costs:** Alcohol abuse costs the Canadian economy \$7.1 billion in lost productivity due to illness and death, according to the same study.<sup>5</sup> Illegal drug use costs the economy an additional \$4.7 billion in lost productivity.

**Lack of physical activity:** A 2004 study estimated physical inactivity by Canadians cost the Canadian economy \$3.7 billion in lost productivity due to illness, injury-related work disability and premature death.<sup>6</sup>





The number of workdays lost due to personal reasons (illness or disability, and personal and/or family responsibilities) is rising in Canada. In 2009, the average work time lost for personal reasons was 9.8 days for Canadian workers, up from 8.1 days a decade earlier.<sup>7</sup> Factors contributing to the increase included an aging workforce and higher worker stress.



### The Return on Investment of a Healthy Workplace

There is growing evidence that investing money in a healthy workplace and the work-life balance of employees pays off. Companies who invested \$1 per employee in workplace wellness programs of various kinds saw returns ranging from \$1.50 to \$6 per employee.<sup>8</sup>

Return on investment (ROI) was shown in:

- Lower sick day usage
- Lower staff turnover
- Lower health benefit claims
- Lower short-term disability costs
- Lower long-term disability costs

There are important links between employee job satisfaction, employee health and productivity, customer/client satisfaction and ultimately, the bottom line.

Think of supporting healthy work-life balance as an investment, not a cost - an investment in your employees and their families.

### A Two-Way Street

Unhealthy work-life balance can be a two-way street:

- Employees take home the stress that arises from issues at work, impacting their personal lives and the lives of their families and friends.
- Employees have issues at home that they bring to work, affecting their work performance, and their relationships with co-workers and managers. Sometimes issues at home are severe enough that an employee will miss work.

# Impacts on Employers

## Work-Life Balance Issues Impact Employers

Employers face many challenging issues that can be traced to unhealthy work-life balance among employees – although employers may not always see the link. These issues, when not addressed, will hurt a company's success – and its bottom line.

Here's a list of common issues linked to unhealthy workplaces and poor work-life balance:

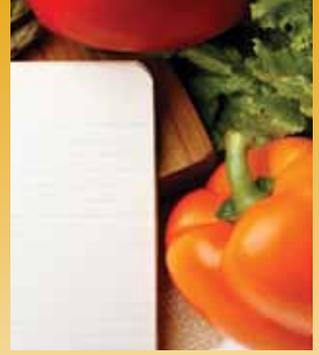
- Increased drug costs
- Increased disability claims
- Lower workplace morale
- Higher absenteeism due to an unhealthy workforce
- Higher absenteeism due to employees dealing with family, personal, or addiction issues
- Increased workplace conflict (between co-workers and between employees and supervisors)
- Higher grievance costs
- Presenteeism, where workers are present but under productive
- Lost productivity due to smoking
- Health and safety risk management issues related to drug and alcohol use, workplace violence, fatigue, dealing with difficult employees
- Traumatic workplace incidents

## Help is Available

If your company/organization is facing any of these issues, the good news is that there are plenty of resources available in our community to help. Many of these resources are free to employers, while others may have a modest cost.

### In the following pages, you'll find:

- Issues faced by employers grouped by theme
- Examples of how the issue may show up in workplaces
- A list of community resources available in Bruce Grey Huron Perth to help
- Strategies to promote a healthy workplace culture





# Issue #1: Rising Benefit Costs

## May Include:

- Increased drug costs
- Increased use of extended benefits
- Increased counselling costs
- Increased use of physiotherapy & massage therapy
- Increased rehabilitation costs

## Suggested Strategies:

- Make a commitment at the management level to be a healthy workplace - lead by example
- Communicate to staff that this is a company priority – and why
- Communicate that a healthy workplace is more than just about occupational health and safety
- Establish a healthy workplace committee or designate a healthy workplace champion
- Assess policies and procedures to determine if they can be revised to proactively address common sources of rising benefit costs

## How to Get Help:

### Local organizations offer these services for employers:

- Workplace consultations for employers
- Workshops for employers
- Workshops for employees to address specific stress-related issues
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) tailored to the needs of employers

*For more details on local services, visit the **Local Resources** section of this booklet.*

# Issue #2: Rising Disability Costs

## May Include:

- Issues related to aging workforce
- More claims related to mental health
- More claims related to stress
- More claims related to obesity
- More claims related to smoking
- More claims related to drinking

## Suggested Strategies:

- Promote a healthy workplace culture focused on promoting health and preventing illness
- Promote a healthy workplace culture by establishing a health workplace committee and/or nominating a healthy workplace champion
- Connect employees to community resources and programs to address common health issues leading to health claims
- Organize in house presentations or programs to address common causes of disability costs

## How to Get Help:

### Local organizations offer these services for employers:

- Workplace consultations
- Customized workshops
- Information sessions on nutrition, tobacco-free living, cancer prevention, physical activity
- Quit smoking programs, including individual counselling and free nicotine replacement therapy
- Resources are available on benefits of and strategies for quitting smoking, cancer prevention, physical activity and healthy eating, including grocery store tours to educate people about healthy food choices
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

*For more details on local services, visit the **Local Resources** section of this booklet.*



# Issue #3: Workplace Conflict

## May Include:

- Worker-worker conflict
- Worker-supervisor conflict
- Intergenerational conflict
- Issues related to diversity
- Dysfunctional teams
- High grievance costs



## Suggested Strategies:

- Team building exercises
- Ensure employees receive clear job expectations
- Improve communications in the workplace
- Encourage workers to voice concerns and make suggestions
- Bring in an external mediator to help resolve conflict and suggest strategies to reduce future conflict



## How to Get Help:

**Local organizations offer these services for employers:**

- Workplace consultations
- Mediation/facilitation to help resolve workplace conflict
- Conflict resolution services
- Team building sessions
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

*For more details on local services, visit the **Local Resources** section of this booklet.*



# Issue #4: Lost Productivity

## May Include:

- Increased lateness at work
- Increased number of stress leaves
- Absenteeism due to family & personal problems (including marital problems, custody issues, money problems)
- Absenteeism due to addiction issues
- Absenteeism due to unhealthy behaviours (smoking, drinking, poor nutrition, obesity)
- Presenteeism, where workers are present but not productive

## Suggested Strategies:

- Connect employees to community resources that can help address personal and family issues impacting productivity
- Connect employees to resources in community that can help address unhealthy behaviours
- Assess policies and procedures to determine if they support proactive solutions to common issues

## How to Get Help:

### Local organizations offer these services for employers:

- Services of a registered dietician
- Chronic disease prevention and management programs
- Stress coping programs
- Counselling programs
- Workplace consultations
- Customized workshops for supervisors and/or employees
- Employee surveys and/or focus groups
- Addiction counselling services

*For more details on local services, visit the **Local Resources** section of this booklet.*



# Issue #5: Health & Safety Risks

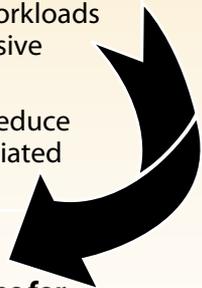
## May Include:

- Under the influence of alcohol and other drugs at work
- Smoking at work
- Increased lost-time injuries (lack of employee focus at work, worker fatigue)
- Increased workplace accidents
- Workplace violence



## Suggested Strategies:

- Refer employees to community resources to help address addiction issues
- Develop policies to protect health and safety of all workers
- Management support reasonable workloads and discourage continuous or excessive overtime
- Modify work shifts or schedules to reduce high levels of lost time injuries associated with worker fatigue



## How to Get Help:

### Local organizations offer these services for employers:

- Quit smoking programs, including individual counselling and free nicotine replacement therapy
- Services of a social worker
- Counselling services
- Workplace consultations
- Customized workshops
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).

*For more details on local services, visit the **Local Resources** section of this booklet.*

# Issue #6: Low Morale

## May Include:

- Higher absenteeism
- Higher workplace conflict
- Higher staff turnover
- Workers feeling overworked
- Staff fearing job loss or job change
- Coping with difficult employees

## Suggested Strategies:

- Team building exercises
- Keep communications channels open
- Establish a healthy workplace committee
- Utilize survey tools to assess employee job satisfaction
- Workload monitoring
- Employee recognition
- Flexible working arrangements

## How to Get Help:

### Local organizations offer these services for employers:

- Workplace consultation
- Employee surveys and/or focus groups
- Workshops for supervisors and/or employees
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

*For more details on local services, visit the **Local Resources** section of this booklet.*

# Bruce Grey Huron Perth's Health Profile

Statistics Canada publishes health profiles of communities, which compares residents in Bruce Grey Huron Perth to the Ontario average in key health categories.

Health Factor (% of population)	Grey-Bruce	Huron	Perth	Ontario
Overweight or obese (% of population)	57.5	58.6	60.3	52
Current smoker	17.9	17.9	23.3	18.9
Heavy drinking	18.7	17.8	18.7	15.9
Fruit and vegetable consumption, 5 times or more per day	42.6	42.4	39.4	43.2
Functional health, good to full	78.6	82.6	79.4	79.9
Physically Active	52.8	50.0	46.4	50.5

Source: Statistics Canada Health Profile, June 2012

# Suggestions to Support Healthy Workplaces

- Create a culture in your organization that values a healthy workplace.
- Establish a healthy workplace committee to promote health information and events
- Use bulletin boards and internal communications channels (emails, Intranet, newsletters) to feature stress management and time-management strategies
- Host presentations or hold seminars on stress and related subjects, such as balancing work/family life.
- Examine if more flexible work policies and schedules are possible. Ideas include compressed work weeks, job sharing, working from home.
- Improve communication, keeping employees informed of goals, plans and decisions.
- Allow employees to participate in decisions that affect their jobs.
- Connect employees to community resources, including those listed later in this booklet.



## Employee Health Strategies

- Encourage employees to take their breaks, including lunch, instead of eating at their desks
- Encourage staff to take their vacation time. A 2009 Harris/Decima study found that 25% of Canadians do not take their full vacation time earned from work.
- Discourage after-hours emailing
- Educate employees about the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity
- Educate employees about the health impacts of smoking, drinking and drug use

## Family Friendly Strategies

- Being flexible around shifts
- Encourage employees to work regular hours to balance their work and personal lives
- Discourage people from taking work home

Overall, surveys show that flexible workplaces enjoy better employee-employer relationships, high job satisfaction, better job retention, high productivity and fewer absences, while such workplaces are attractive to new employees.

# Strategies to Address Common Health Issues

## Four Themes

Study after study has shown that 4 health themes are priorities for building healthy workplaces and a healthy workforce.

1. **Encouraging employees to eat well**
2. **Encouraging employees to be physically active**
3. **Promoting tobacco-free living**
4. **Addressing stress and mental health**

Smoking, physical inactivity, improper nutrition and stress are risk factors for chronic health conditions. Such chronic conditions cost the Canadian economy billions of dollars each year in lost productivity.<sup>9</sup>



## **THEME #1: Encourage Employees to Eat Well**

- Ensure healthy food choices are available in your workplace (e.g. in meetings, vending machines and cafeterias)
- Make it convenient for employees to bring their lunches and snacks from home. This means having kitchen facilities available with a refrigerator, microwave, toaster, kettle, and sink.
- Ensure work schedules permit adequate time for eating.
- Host nutrition education programs and skill building opportunities, such as cooking classes. This can both build morale and increase employees' ability to eat well.

## **THEME #2: Encourage Employees to Be Physically Active**

- Allow flexible work/break time to support employees engaging in physical activity.
- Encourage breaks from prolonged sitting for meetings longer than one hour.
- Promote walking, bicycling and taking transit to work.
- Provide facilities or assist in accessing facilities that support physical activities.
- Offer incentives or partial reimbursement to employees for recreation passes or gym memberships.

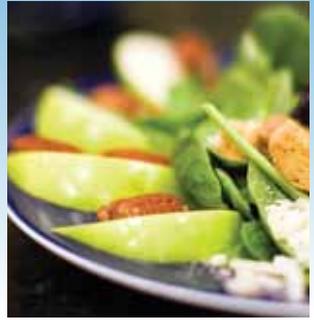
## **THEME #3: Promote Tobacco-Free Living**

- Promote tobacco-free living in the workplace by helping employees quit and protecting them from second-hand smoke.
- Offer smoking cessation supports. Consider offering individual counselling, self-help resources, group programs, and ensuring pharmaceutical cessation products are covered under benefits package or reimbursing for the cost of a quitting program.
- Ensure that you are complying with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act (SFOA). As of May 31 2006, all enclosed workplaces in Ontario are required to be smoke-free.

## **THEME #4: Address Stress and Mental Health**

- Develop a plan to assess and address mental health problems and work stress.
- Train managers and supervisors on how to recognize and address mental health problems.
- Provide educational opportunities for employees to learn about mental health.
- Provide information and support regarding positive stress coping mechanisms such as exercise, yoga, relaxation techniques, etc.

# 15 Winning Work-Life Balance Ideas



- 1** Casual dress Fridays
- 2** Lunchrooms, to encourage people to meet and eat together
- 3** Scheduled breaks during the work day
- 4** Social events to strengthen at-work friendships
- 5** Family events to strengthen family-work connections
- 6** Tours of your workplace for family members
- 7** Subsidized gym memberships
- 8** Bring wellness into the workplace (e.g. massage therapists)
- 9** Dinner brought in for unplanned overtime
- 10** Company picnics, dinners, parties, golf tournaments
- 11** Volunteer together as a work team
- 12** Time off work for grieving employees
- 13** “Good work” awards for employees
- 14** Paid day off occasionally for volunteer work
- 15** Provide day care or after-school care at the workplace

Source: Adapted from Better Balance, Better Business: Options for Work-Life Issues, 2004, Government of Alberta.

# Employee Assistance Programs

## What is an EAP program?

Employee Assistance Programs are designed to offer employees help to cope with issues or problems, such as:

- Pressures at home and at work
- Stress
- Conflicts with co-workers
- Personal relationship conflicts

Unresolved problems can spread to affect other areas of an employee's life. Problems at work create tensions at home. Family problems often show up in job performance, while emotional problems can affect physical health.

## Benefits of an EAP program?

EAPs provide employees with access to professional counselors, who can help resolve personal and work-related problems before they affect someone's health, family, or ability to work.

EAPs are offered by non-profit and private companies, and can be tailored to the individual needs of employers, no matter what the size of the organization. Services range from web-based services to telephone counseling and face-to-face counseling.

## How can I find out more about EAP programs?

Visit the National website at:  
[www.fseap.ca](http://www.fseap.ca)

Ontario contact:  
Joyce Zuk  
519-256-1831  
1-888-933-1831



# Local Resources

## Help is Close At Hand

There are organizations in your own backyard glad to help local companies and organizations build healthy workplaces and healthy work-life balance among employees. In most cases, such help is free. Some services – such as workplace conflict resolution or an EAP – do cost money.

### Bruce Grey Huron Perth Health Units

#### Grey-Bruce Health Unit

**Address:** 101 17th St. E., Owen Sound, ON N4K 0A5

**Phone:** 519-376-9420

**Website:** [www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca](http://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca)

#### Perth District Health Unit

**Address:** 10 Downie St., 2nd Floor, Festival Square, Stratford, ON N5A 7K4

**Phone:** 519-271-7600 ext. 776

**Website:** [www.pdhu.on.ca](http://www.pdhu.on.ca)

#### Huron County Health Unit

**Address:** 77722B London Rd., RR5, Clinton, ON N0M 1L0

**Phone:** 519-482-3416

**Website:** [www.huronhealthunit.com](http://www.huronhealthunit.com)

### Canadian Mental Health Association

Staff with the CMHA will conduct workplace workshops on:

- Work-life balance, including coping strategies to effectively manage workloads
- Stress management
- Workplace wellness
- Maintaining good mental health
- Mental illness sensitivity
- Suicide awareness and prevention

#### Grey-Bruce Branch

**Address:** 1024 2nd Ave., E., Owen Sound, ON N4K 2H7

**Phone:** 519-371-3642

**Email:** [admin@cmhagb.org](mailto:admin@cmhagb.org)

**Website:** [www.cmhagb.org](http://www.cmhagb.org)

#### Huron Perth Branch

**Address:** 92 Goderich St. W., Seaforth, ON NOK 1W0 **OR** **Address:** 540 Huron St., Stratford, ON N5A 5T9

**Phone:** 1-888-875-2944

**Phone:** 519-273-1391

**Email:** [geninfo@cmha-hp.on.ca](mailto:geninfo@cmha-hp.on.ca)

or 1-888-875-2944

**Website:** [www.cmha-hp.on.ca](http://www.cmha-hp.on.ca)

## Problem Gambling Services

This is a designated Ministry of Health and Long Term Care outpatient treatment program for problem gamblers and their families. Services are free and confidential; anyone can self-refer.

### **New Directions for Alcohol, Drug & Gambling Problems (Bruce Grey)**

**Address:** 1101 2nd Ave. E., Suite 207, Owen Sound, ON N4K 2J1

**Phone:** 519-371-1232 or 1-800-265-3133

**Sponsoring Agency - HopeGreyBruce Mental Health & Addiction Services**

### **Choices for Change**

#### **Alcohol, Drug & Gambling Counseling Services (Huron Perth)**

Statford location:

**Address:** 10 Downie St., 3rd Floor, Statford, ON N5A 7K4

**Phone:** 519-271-6730 or 1-877-218-0077

Seaforth location:

**Address:** 28 Centennial St., Seaforth, ON N0K 1W0

**Phone:** 519-271-6730 or 1-877-218-0077



## Online Resources

1. **Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.** This Hamilton-based centre has a wide range of services, programs and information – much of it free – for employers interested in healthy workplaces. There's extensive information about work-life balance and other issues.

[www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial)

2. **Canada's Healthy Workplace Month** promotes healthy workplaces each October with a public awareness campaign. Makes available tools, resources and best practices to build and sustain healthy workplaces.

[www.healthyworkplacemonth.ca](http://www.healthyworkplacemonth.ca)

3. **Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario** has a website called Mental Health Works. Mental Health Works is a nationally available program of the CMHA that builds capacity within Canadian workplaces to effectively address the many issues related to mental health in the workplace.

[www.mentalhealthworks.ca](http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca)

4. **Centre for Families, Work and Well-being** at University of Guelph conducts research and provides information, including an E-Newsletter, on building healthy individuals, families, workplaces and communities.

[www.worklifecanada.ca](http://www.worklifecanada.ca)

5. **Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace**

[www.ccohs.ca](http://www.ccohs.ca) (Webinar)

[www.mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca)

[www.guardingmindsatwork.ca](http://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca) (Assessment Tools, surveys, audits)



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Reprinted with the permission of the Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board.

## Endnotes

1. Linda Duxbury Presentation Building Healthier Workplaces, delivered Dec. 2, 2010, at “The Bottom-Line Benefits of a Healthy Workplace” event sponsored by the Hamilton Training Advisory Board.
2. Globe and Mail story, Part 1: Stress: public health enemy No. 1? published Oct. 29, 2010.
3. Study by the Canadian Institute for Health Information and the Public Health Agency of Canada, cited in Globe and Mail story, June 20, 2011.
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9. Chronic conditions account for 42% of direct medical costs in Canada (or \$39 billion) and 65% of indirect medical costs (or \$54.4 billion) due to productivity losses (Mirolla 2004), The Cost of Chronic Disease in Canada. Prepared for the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/pdf/health/chroniccanada.pdf>

# Four County Labour Market Planning Board

Four County Labour Market Planning Board is a community-directed, not-for-profit corporation leading Bruce Grey Huron Perth in its approach to workforce development and labour market planning.

We function as a neutral broker of research, disseminator of information, and facilitator of collaborative partnership development. Our mission is to plan and promote local labour market strategies to meet the challenges of a changing economy.

Operating as part of Workforce Planning Ontario, we are one of 25 local planning board areas mandated through the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to conduct and disseminate local labour market research and engage community stakeholders in a planning process that supports local solutions to local issues.



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*The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of Employment Ontario.*

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