

Ontario Consensus Statement on the Health Benefits of Work and Preventing Needless Work Disability by Helping People Stay Employed

The purpose of this consensus statement is to promote the health benefit of work and the importance of a collaborative approach to preventing prolonged absence from work so as to realize our shared desire to improve the health and lives of individuals, families and communities.

Work which is appropriate to an individual's knowledge, skills and circumstances and undertaken in a safe, healthy and supportive working environment, promotes physical and mental health. A safe and timely return to work enhances recovery and reduces disability by providing routine, social contact, activity and a sense of identity.

Realising the health benefits of work for all Ontarians requires a paradigm shift in thinking and practice. It requires cooperation between many stakeholders, including government, employers, unions, insurance companies, legal practitioners, advocacy groups, disability management community, as well as the medical, nursing and allied health professions.

We, the undersigned, commit to working together to encourage and enable Ontarians to achieve the health benefits of work. We acknowledge the following fundamental principles about the relationship between health and work.

- Work is one of the primary social determinants of health and wellbeing.
- Long term work absence is detrimental to a person's health and wellbeing.
- Work conditions must be safe.
- Work is an effective means of reducing poverty and promoting individual and societal health, productivity and economic viability.
- Most people with a work disability have potential to access the benefits of work with timely and appropriate stay at work/return to work support.
- Good outcomes are more likely when individuals understand the health benefits of work, and are empowered to take responsibility for their own situation.
- Health professionals exert a significant influence on work absence and work disability, particularly in relation to medical sickness certification practices. This influence provides health professionals with many opportunities for patient advocacy, which includes the recognition of the health benefits of work.
- A critical measure of proper treatment and support of people with a work disability must be successful and appropriate stay at work/return to work outcomes.
- Stay at work/return to work efforts should recognize the normal human reactions associated with work disability. The stay at work/return to work process should include appropriate measures to help those suffering from a work disability handle the emotional reactions that accompany absence from work.

We agree to take appropriate actions according to our various areas of responsibility to:

- Promote awareness of the health benefits of work to prevent needless work disability.
- Offer support and encouragement to those attempting to stay at work or return to work.
- Facilitate a timely return to work through the use of creative and collaborative accommodations, such as; amended duties, flexible working options or rehabilitation services according to best practices.
- Address all forms of stigma - especially the stigma too often associated with mental health conditions, invisible disability and need for modified work.
- Advocate for continuous improvement in public policy around work and health, in line with the principles articulated above.
- Demonstrate respect by collaborating with stakeholders towards a shared vision of stay at work/return to work best practices.
- Build trust by working in a fair, open and person centered manner.
- Execute our responsibilities being mindful of the bigger picture for the person.

Signatories: