

## 3rd US/Canada Forum On Mental Health and Productivity

On May 29, 2008 professionals came together at the 3<sup>rd</sup> US/Canada forum on Mental Health and Productivity to discuss the effects of mental health problems on working parents and their families. The take home message was clear—there is a business case to address mental health in the workplace.

This year's theme, "The Mental Health of Working Parents and Their Children," set the stage for important discussions about the need to establish best-practices for managing mental health issues in the workplace; and that business leaders must take a lead role in making this change.

It seems that many workplaces and employees are ill equipped to recognize and address mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression on the job. This year's forum on Mental Health and Productivity discussed the need to address workplace mental health from a broader and more holistic perspective. Specifically, forum participants, which included Honorable Michael Kirby (Chairman of the Mental Health Commission of Canada) and others [link to participant list], advocated that treating children's mental health has an impact on the future of business, social services, the criminal justice system and of course, the health care system. Currently, only one in six children in Canada and 1 in 5 in the United States who need mental health care actually receive this treatment. This information is crucial for workplaces because children are the future workforce; and if childhood mental illnesses are left untreated, it is possible that these illnesses could continue to affect these children in their adult lives. Moreover, the cost of time and energy for working parents who search for effective care for their children is significant. Thus, the need for action is now!

Similarly, there were a number of related issues that the forum attempted to address, including:

- Employees need evidenced-based strategies that address the impacts of fast-paced, ever-changing and high-pressure work environments on their mental health.
- There is a need to address the connection between mental health of employees and the affect on employees when families experience mental health or addiction issues.
- There is knowledge that family is critical to recovery and for this reason, there is a need to change treatment approaches and laws that prevent families from getting or providing the support and access necessary to help their loved ones.
- Blaming and shaming families for the illnesses experienced by loved ones appears to be practiced by some mental health professionals – this needs to change; and



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- Stigma and shame about mental health and addiction continues to prevent families from effectively reaching out for help.

While each of these issues would require well-thought-out approaches to addressing mental health and mental illnesses, participants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> US/Canada Forum on Mental Health and Productivity remain hopeful that this can happen. The point that has been taken from this forum is that the breadth and depth of mental health issues in North America demands that leaders in business and science have an interest in continuing to advocate for advancement in mental health and addictions research, increased awareness and response in the workplace and improved policy and program development.

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