



Great-West Life  
Centre for  
Mental Health  
in the Workplace

## ***Guarding Minds @ Work:*** **Breakthrough resource gives Canadian employers tools to address mental health issues in the workplace**

***Three in ten Canadian employees may be experiencing a work environment  
that is not psychologically safe and healthy\*, new research finds***

Toronto, April 20, 2009...The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace (the Centre) today announced the launch of *Guarding Minds @ Work* – a breakthrough evidence-based tool developed by leading Canadian mental health researchers. The new tool provides Canadian employers with proactive, comprehensive ways to assess the psychological safety and health of their specific workplace, combined with information on appropriate solutions and a method of measuring the effectiveness of those solutions.

“Mental health issues pose a direct impact to the bottom line of Canadian businesses,” said Mike Schwartz, Executive Director of the Centre and Senior Vice-President, Group Benefits at Great-West Life. “Most employers have access to materials and resources on physical safety and health issues, but there are very few resources for employers to assess the psychological safety and health of their own workplace.”

*Guarding Minds @ Work* provides employers with practical, user-friendly tools to help assess their organization’s psychological safety and health, and recommends pro-active action steps. It includes:

- An explanation of the concept of psychological safety and health
- The business and some legal and health considerations on why mental health in the workplace is important
- Practical, user-friendly assessment tools, including an organizational audit and an online survey to measure psychological safety and health in the workplace through 12 risk factors such as levels of psychological support and protection, workload management, work/life balance and more
- A risk “Report Card” with actions to help reduce psychological risks in the workplace
- Evaluation tools to measure progress and outcomes

Research undertaken from March 19 to April 7, 2009 for the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (COMH), and conducted by Ipsos Reid supports the growing need for such tools. The survey of 6,800 employed Canadians is the largest and most significant Canadian study to evaluate risk levels of psychological safety and health in the workplace, by sector.

*\* A psychologically safe and healthy workplace is one that promotes employees’ psychological well-being and does not harm employee mental health in negligent, reckless or intentional ways.*

The research reveals that:

- One in five (19%) Canadian employees feel their work environment is not psychologically safe or mentally healthy;
- While 19% of employees perceive an issue, when research-based criteria are applied, the number climbs to 3 in 10, or 29% of employees may actually be experiencing a work environment with significant or serious psychological risk concerns;
- Employees most at risk are involved in shift work; hold more junior level positions; are more likely to be union members; are male; work more than 50 hours per week; are middle aged; have a high school or less education; and/or work for medium-sized or larger companies.
- Industries with employees most at risk include transportation and warehousing, manufacturing, health care and social services, and public administration.

A summary of the Ipsos Reid survey results is available at <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/>

*Guarding Minds @ Work – A Workplace Guide to Psychological Safety & Health* was developed by the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare, a leading national research centre in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University, B.C. COMH consulted with researchers and experts in Canada and internationally. Funded by Great-West Life through its corporate citizenship program as a uniquely Canadian endeavour, *Guarding Minds @ Work* is publicly available online to interested parties at no charge at [www.guardingmindsatwork.ca](http://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca) and through the Centre's website at [www.gwlcentreformentalhealth.com](http://www.gwlcentreformentalhealth.com).

"*Guarding Minds @ Work* has been developed by researchers who understand the realities of Canadian business, and who can turn knowledge gained through research into practical tools for a Canadian business environment," added Dr. Joti Samra, Adjunct Professor and Scientist with COMH.

Empirical research as well as emerging case law and legislation informed the design of *Guarding Minds @ Work*, noted Dr. Martin Shain, Adjunct Professor with COMH. "Mental health is gaining recognition as an integral part of workplace safety and health, partially as a result of the accommodation laws established under human rights legislation and evolving employment standards legislation," Dr. Shain said. "The duty to provide a psychologically safe workplace is emerging as an ethical and legal obligation for Canadian employers."

"As a leading provider of group benefit plans, Great-West Life sees the effects of mental health issues on people and businesses every day," said Schwartz. "Through the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, we are committed to increasing knowledge and awareness related to mental health issues and their impacts in the workplace, and to turning this knowledge into action. *Guarding Minds @ Work* is a great example of this at work."

**About the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare**

The Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (COMH) is a collective of mental health researchers, consultants and practitioners with experience working with a range of public and private sector organizations. COMH's goal is to further the creation and translation of mental health knowledge and practice into real-world settings. To achieve this objective, COMH forms collaborative relationships with committed organizations, leaders and experts to achieve specific outcomes.

**About the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace**

Established in June 2007, the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace brings a unique focus to an important issue for Canadian employers, managers and employees. Focused specifically on the workplace, the Centre is working to increase awareness and understanding and to help employers take concrete steps to prevent and reduce employee mental health issues. The Centre is a long-term, public service commitment by Great-West Life to this very important social and economic issue.

**About Great-West Life**

Founded in Winnipeg in 1891, The Great-West Life Assurance Company has long been a leader in the group benefits marketplace. Great-West Life's national corporate citizenship program is the Key to Giving™. Great-West Life is a subsidiary of Great-West Lifeco Inc. and a member of the Power Financial Corporation group of companies.

**The Ipsos Reid Survey**

The survey was conducted on behalf of the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (COMH), and funded by Great-West Life's national corporate citizenship program. This online survey of some 6,800 employed Canadian adults was conducted from March 19 to April 7, 2009 via the Ipsos I-Say Online Panel, Ipsos Reid's national online panel. The results of this poll ensure that the sample's composition reflects the actual employed Canadian population according to Census data. Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls, however an unweighted probability sample of this size, with a 100% response rate, would have an estimated margin of error of +/- 1.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had the entire population of employed adults in Canada been polled.

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**For more information or to reach a spokesperson for *Guarding Minds @ Work*, the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace or the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare contact:**

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