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2016-2019 MENTAL HEALTH PROGRESS REPORT:

# THE CANADIAN PUBLIC SERVICE EXPERIENCE

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# 2016-2019 MENTAL HEALTH PROGRESS REPORT: THE CANADIAN PUBLIC SERVICE EXPERIENCE

As the head of the Public Service of Canada, over the course of the past three years, I have had the privilege to work alongside many committed individuals seeking to change the culture, destigmatize mental health, prevent psychological injury and promote well-being in the workplace. While there remains a long way to go—and much more to learn—this report seeks to share the early efforts of the Canadian Public Service in the hopes it may be instructive for other leaders following a similar path.

## 1. PRIORITIZE MENTAL HEALTH – THE STARTING POINT

We initiated a long overdue dialogue across the whole of the Public Service. Recognizing the importance of the issue, the Government of Canada and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (the biggest union in the Canadian federal public sector) established a Joint Task Force to address mental health in the workplace and seek input and feedback from a range of stakeholders.



*Members of the Joint Task Force, May 30, 2016*

Building on the [Joint Task Force's findings and recommendations](#), a first-ever [Federal Public Service Workplace Mental Health Strategy](#) was created in 2016. The strategy advanced three key pillars: 1) change culture; 2) build capacity (tools and resources) and 3) measure and report. All Deputy Ministers were then asked to develop a mental health action plan tailored to their own workplace realities and imperatives consistent with the overarching principles of the Federal Strategy.

Following the launch of this strategy, more than ninety Deputy Ministers signed a pledge to support mental health in the workplace with the goal of creating a culture that enshrines psychological health, safety and well-being in all aspects of the workplace through collaboration, inclusivity and respect. And every single one of my [Annual Reports to the Prime Minister](#) included mental health as a key priority for the Public Service of Canada.



THE THREE PILLARS OF THE  
**FEDERAL PUBLIC  
SERVICE WORKPLACE  
MENTAL HEALTH  
STRATEGY**

## 2. FORMALIZE STRUCTURES TO ADVANCE OUR FEDERAL STRATEGY

Building on an established foundation already in place...



# STRONG FOUNDATION WE BUILT FROM:

- **Existing legislation** that ensures Canadians with mental health issues receive equal treatment under the law (e.g. Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms [s. 15] and Canadian Human Rights Act [s. 25]), as well as our Labour and Employment legislation (e.g. Canada Labour Code);
- **Employee Assistance Program:** a free, confidential hotline for employees and their families;
- **Benefits** coverage for visits to psychologist (up to \$2,000), medication and long-term disability.

... we grew the footprint of our tools and resources available to public servants.

We integrated mental health and well-being into the core curriculum of the Canada School of Public Service with more than 22 mental health and wellness learning days for employees and supervisors to date. We also created an online GCcampus web landing page called [Respectful and Inclusive Workplace](#) (accessible only on the Government of Canada network) to host all mental health learning solutions for employees.

In 2017, we established a [Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace](#) to help organizations and employees address psychological health and safety in Canada's Federal Public Service. The Centre helped organizations align with the [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) and created new networks to share best practices and raise awareness to drive uptake of the Centre's resources.

### 2017 WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH CHECKLIST OF FEDERAL ORGANIZATIONS REVEALED THAT:

93%

APPOINTED A MENTAL HEALTH  
CHAMPION (OR CHAMPIONS)

96%

OFFERED MENTAL HEALTH  
AWARENESS SESSIONS

85%

OFFERED MENTAL HEALTH  
IN THE WORKPLACE TRAINING

In 2018, we dedicated additional resources to create healthy, safe and inclusive workplaces by establishing a Centre for Wellness, Inclusion and Diversity that will officially launch in spring 2019. The Centre's activities and online platform will engage public service leaders at all levels, facilitate the exchange of leading practices and offer approaches to further change the culture. The Center will also advance new ways to think and talk about wellness, inclusion and diversity in Canada's Public Service.

### 3. ENCOURAGE GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT AND INNOVATION

We recognized there was no way we could address such a personal, human and intimate issue through standard, organized responses alone. Public servants with first-hand experience with mental health issues can open a personal dialogue unlike any other. This is why we celebrated and encouraged grassroots employee and department-led innovations.

# 1

#### **CANADIAN INNOVATION CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE**

(accessible only on the Government of Canada network)

- In 2018, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada creates an accessible, high-tech physical space for interactive discussions dedicated to mental health



# 2

#### **FEDERAL SPEAKERS' BUREAU**

(accessible only on the Government of Canada network)

- Roster of public servants that share their lived experiences
- Contributes to open, stigma-free dialogue
- Delivered 300+ testimonials to over 60 departments

#### **Meet one of our speakers**

Unfamiliar with mental illness, Neida Santini didn't expect that being a 'perfectionist' and going through significant trauma and losses in the past would sabotage her life.

Neida speaks about turning the darkest days of her life into a life changing opportunity filled with love, courage and humour.



## EMPLOYEE AND DEPARTMENTAL INNOVATIONS

# 3

#### **FEDERAL INFORMAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS NETWORK**

(accessible only on the Government of Canada network)

- Offers alternative dispute resolution services
- Supports employees to build and maintain healthy, respectful and supportive workplace relationships
- 29,740+ clients have received services since 2016
- 91% mediation resolution rate across 55+ departments and agencies

# 4

#### **TODD LYONS PODCAST**

- A public servant explores the human side of federal public service
- Podcast explores mental health issues
- 40+ podcasts available for free on iTunes



## 4. INTRODUCE SOUND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

In 2015-16, deputy heads and executives were asked to develop performance objectives intended to demonstrate leadership in building healthy, respectful and supportive work environments. Performance management agreements incited leadership accountability for employee mental health and well-being through annual performance assessments. This has continued in every performance agreement since 2015. Deputy heads are also held accountable through an annual assessment of their departmental management practices and performance.

We introduced new mental health and well-being questions in the [2017 Public Service Employee Survey \(PSES\)](#) to assess employee stress levels, determine if employees felt emotionally drained, identify stress factors and measure their overall sense of workplace psychological health. Importantly, we decided to conduct this survey annually to more regularly gauge the mental health of our employees and workplaces.

For the first time, the annual results from our [2018 Survey](#) offer us the ability to assess how we have changed year-over-year. Key points of progress since last year include the number of employees who describe their workplace as:



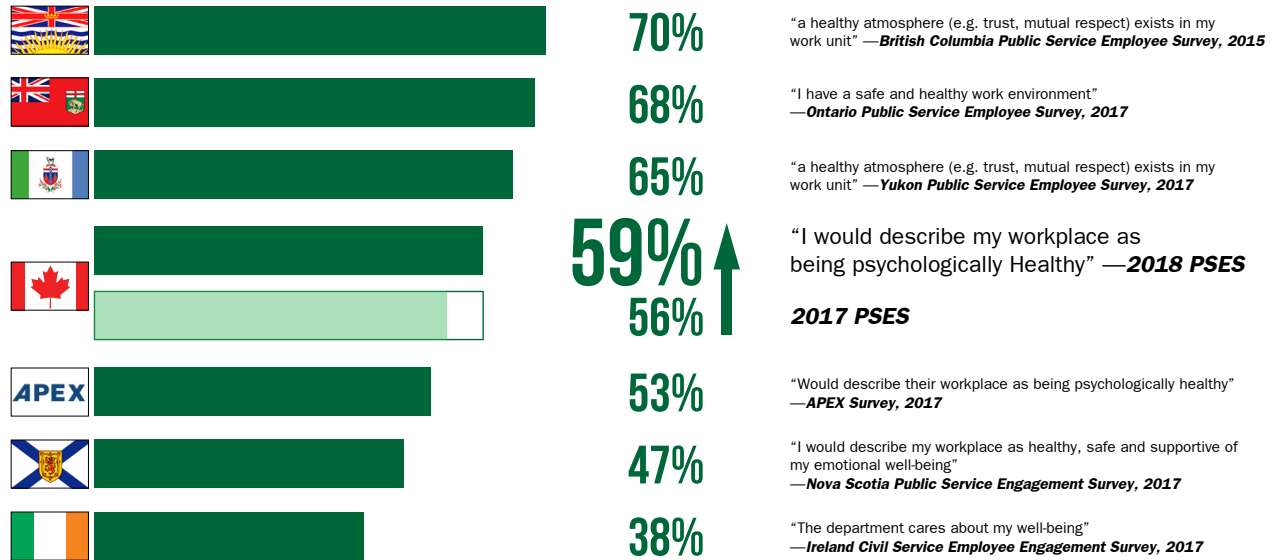
Also worth noting—while not an increase—is the stable 80% response rate of public servants who believe their immediate supervisor: “seems to care about them as a person” consistent in 2017 and 2018. Another important statistic is the number of employees (80% in 2017 and 81% in 2018) who said their department or agency “treats them with respect”.

**IN 2018, 81% SAID THEIR DEPARTMENT OR AGENCY  
“TREATS THEM WITH RESPECT”.**

**IN 2018, 80% SAID THEIR IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR  
“SEEMS TO CARE ABOUT THEM AS A PERSON”.**

## MENTAL HEALTH

### SURVEY COMPARISON OF WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH



Leadership accountability for issues affecting employee mental health also required us to consider the intersection points (e.g. diversity, inclusion and harassment) that can affect well-being in the workplace. In 2018, we launched a targeted review of the structures and supports in place to tackle harassment in the Public Service.

## HARASSMENT

### HAVE YOU BEEN THE VICTIM OF HARASSMENT ON THE JOB ?



The resulting [Safe Workspaces Report](#) proposed targeted actions to strengthen our approach to preventing harassment, and enhance supports to all employees when harassment arises. This included the recommendation to put in place an Ombuds-type function to provide all employees with a trusted, safe space to discuss harassment without fear of reprisal and to help navigate existing systems.

And finally, the passing of legislation to address harassment (Bill C-65) in 2018 was another watershed moment that further opened a dialogue to address mental health and wellness in the workplace by tackling harassment and discrimination.

## 5. DEVELOP INCLUSIVE, NON-HIERARCHICAL GOVERNANCE

There are risks to over-bureaucratizing a fundamentally human matter. That is why we introduced a unique governance model through the [Clerk's Contact Group on Mental Health](#) in 2016. We built a team of subject matter experts from across the Public Service across different levels of the organization to provide unfiltered feedback direct from the frontlines.

This Contact Group offers a unique opportunity to explore mental health realities from various vantage points on a regular basis. Guest speakers (from across and outside the Public Service) further contribute to this fluid and interactive governance structure.



*Members of the Clerk's Contact Group seek to bring front-line realities to the table*

Embracing these non-hierarchical governance structures has been essential for strong stewardship with a goal of feeding the outcomes and conversations from these meetings back into the Public Service to accelerate change. The Clerk's Contact Group online 'Resources' section shares relevant information from meetings to encourage further grassroots discussions on the topics raised by the Contact Group.

In 2017, a Workplace Mental Health Performance Measurement Inter-Departmental Committee was first established to support Pillar Three of the Federal Mental Health Strategy (focused on measurement and reporting). The Steering Committee—co-chaired by Statistics Canada and Public Services and Procurement Canada—regularly engages departments from across the Public Service to co-develop a measurement approach on psychological health and safety (including a mental health scorecard) for all federal Public Service organizations.



### PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE IS EVERY EMPLOYEE'S RIGHT.

To learn more about Canada's Federal Public Service commitment and resources available, please visit:

- [Federal Public Service Workplace Mental Health Strategy](#);
- [The Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace](#);
- [Canada School Mental Health Portal: Respectful and Inclusive Workplace](#) (accessible only on the Government of Canada network);
- [Employee Assistance Program](#);
- [Clerk's Contact Group on Mental Health](#);
- [Centre for Wellness, Inclusion and Diversity](#) (upcoming).



## Way forward: Mental health essential part of public service renewal

We have just started to put ourselves on the map. Part of the work ahead is to get at the mindsets and behaviours that we model, encourage, and reward. This lies at the heart of our broader public service renewal agenda, under the umbrella of the [Beyond2020](#) initiative.

The outcomes we are driving towards will be to create greater agility, deeper inclusion and a fundamentally better equipped public service. And renewal cannot be achieved without the health of its workforce. Going forward, the Public Service must be:



There is no going back to mental health being a closed door, shameful or taboo topic.

It is our hope this report contributes to a broader, collective conversation that encourages others to share their own approaches and innovations so that together we may continue to grow and evolve. We are grateful to, and eager to learn from, all leaders equally committed to help usher in this new era together.