

Civilian Well-Being in the Workplace

**G. Robert Arrabito, M.Sc., Defence Scientist, Defence Research and Development Canada,
Toronto Research Centre**

The Department of National Defence (DND) developed a [Civilian Employees Well-Being Framework](http://hrciv-rhciv.mil.ca/en/e-wellbeing-dimensions-of-wellbeing.page) (<http://hrciv-rhciv.mil.ca/en/e-wellbeing-dimensions-of-wellbeing.page>). The framework is a simple way to “picture” civilian well-being in DND. There are many existing programs, policies and initiatives that contribute to employee well-being. The aim of the Framework is to promote and link the existing elements together. There are two perspectives within the Framework – an individual one and an organizational one that make up five well-being dimensions, with personal well-being at the core.

The resources below provide information on three key elements of a supportive work environment for civilians in DND. These are: the DND Civilian Employee Return to Work Program, Employee Assistance Program, and fostering mental health. Some of this information is excerpted from various DND websites. This article concludes with indicators of well-being that can help improve your overall wellness in the workplace.

[insert as feature box: This article is a follow-up to “See the Person and Not the Disability” from the July 2013 edition of the *Safety Digest*, which examined the stigma of physical and mental illness in the Canadian Armed Forces.]

DND Civilian Employee Return to Work Program

Work is an important part of human life. The DND Civilian Return to Work (RTW) program (much like its military counterpart, the CAF RTW Program) is designed to facilitate and promote the early return to the workplace of personnel recovering from physical injury or mental illness. Return to work has benefits for both the employer and the employee. Employers retain valued employees and reduce the costs of training replacement workers. For employees, returning to daily work and life activities can help with their recovery and reduce the possibility of long-term disability. In fact, studies have shown that employment is beneficial for promoting health and well-being. Studies indicate that the probability of return to any form of employment decreases rapidly with the passage of time away from work. Returning to a regular routine as soon as safely possible contributes to the overall success of rehabilitation. Experience also indicates that the success of RTW programs is directly related to the support and degree of participation of organizational leaders. For the program to be successful, managers need to know their roles and responsibilities and how to get their staff back to the workplace quickly and safely.

The DND Civilian Employee RTW Program provides a comprehensive process to assist employees who experienced an injury or illness with a safe and timely return to the workplace. Using the RTW Program to its full advantage is crucial for DND operational readiness. Every year, hundreds of civilians are off work due to an injury or illness. The RTW program will help minimize this negative impact on the Defence Team. For more information about the DND

Civilian Employee RTW program, visit www.forces.gc.ca/en/caf-community-support-services/return-to-work.page or <http://vcds.mil.ca/sites/intranet-eng.aspx?page=10369>.

Employee Assistance Program

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in DND helps civilian employees cope with personal or professional issues that might adversely impact their personal well-being and/or work performance. It is a voluntary and confidential service, available for civilian employees and their eligible family members*. EAP's services are delivered through a national network of internal Referral Agents (RAs). RAs are DND employees who offer peer support and are trained in listening techniques. They can refer individuals to appropriate internal or community services such as substance abuse, legal information, social services, support services for seniors, financial planning, etc. RAs do not keep any contact information, files, or records of employees they meet.

In addition to peer support services, DND employees and their eligible family members* can access the Employee Assistance Services (EAS) at Health Canada. This service provides assessment, short-term counselling, referral, and follow-up to the user. It is a means for individuals to identify and solve personal and work-related problems. The following services are available at no cost to the user:

- Confidential 24/7 bilingual assistance from a mental health professional, accessible worldwide by calling 1-800-268-7708 or 1-800-567-5803 for the hearing impaired;
- Short-term counselling with a mental health professional (typically conducted face-to-face or through phone or e-counselling, when required, e.g., employees located in remote locations or outside Canada); and
- Immediate telephone crisis support and counselling.

Even though a manager or colleague may suggest EAP as a potential resource, the choice always remains with the individual whether to use the EAP. For more information about the EAP, visit <http://hrciv-rhciv.mil.ca/en/h-employee-assistance-program.page?>

**Eligible family members are defined as a: Spouse (including a common-law spouse); or unmarried children (including an adopted child, step-child or foster-child) who are under 21 years of age, or over 21 up to, and including, 25 years of age and in full-time attendance at school, or 21 years of age, or over, who are fully dependent because of physical or mental impairment, if such impairment existed prior to the child reaching age 21, or commenced while the child was covered as a student over age 21.*

Fostering Mental Health

Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. Failing to have good mental health could result in a mental illness. Mental illnesses can be as debilitating as physical injuries.

Mental illness can afflict anyone regardless of sex, age, race, culture, wealth, career, ethnic origin, or social status. Research has shown that one in five Canadians will suffer a mental

illness of some kind in their life time. Here is another startling statistic: mental illness is the number one cause of disability in Canada, accounting for nearly 30% of disability claims.

DND is committed to supporting the mental health of employees. One strategy for promoting mental health is the mental health continuum model, which was developed by the Canadian Forces Health Services Group in collaboration with the U.S. Marine Corps Department of Psychiatry. The model, which was slightly adapted by ADM(HR-Civ) to reflect the civilian work environment, describes four mental states ranging from healthy to ill and provides indicators that may be manifested during these states. These stages follow a continuum, with movement in both directions, indicating that there is always the possibility for a return to full mental health and functioning. Steps are also included in the model to provide support to persons experiencing mental health problems. More information on the mental health continuum model can be found at http://hrciv-rhciv.mil.ca/assets/HRCIV_Intranet/docs/en/fact-sheet-mental-health-continuum-model.pdf.

Indicators of Personal Well-Being in the Workplace

The process of gaining and maintaining wellness can require enormous personal insight and effort. Based on my review of numerous scientific articles on well-being, here are five indicators of well-being that can help improve your overall wellness in the workplace (The information in this article has been referenced from various sources. For more details please contact the author at: robert.arrarbitto@forces.gc.ca):

- Happy
 - Happiness leads to success in nearly every domain of our lives, including marriage, health, friendship, community involvement, creativity, and our jobs.
 - Happy employees have higher levels of productivity, perform better in leadership positions, and receive higher performance ratings and higher pay.
 - Happy employees enjoy more job security, and are less likely to take sick days, to quit or to become burned out.
 - Those who are engaged and happy at work on average are better workers.
 - Don't let office negativity get you down.
- Flourishing
 - Flourishing influences community involvement and social relationships.
 - Flourishing individuals are more engaged, more productive at work, and are at peace.
 - Those that flourish have better health and less work absenteeism.
- Gratitude
 - Gratitude enhances well-being as it builds psychological, social, and spiritual resources.
 - Expressions of gratitude at work have been proven to strengthen both personal and professional bonds.
- Social Support
 - Healthy social contact is essential for happiness.
 - Benefits of social support include bouncing back from setbacks faster, accomplishing more, and feeling a greater sense of purpose in life.

- Positive interactions between employees lead to less job stress and increased employee motivation and engagement.
- Social support in the workplace fuels individual innovation, creativity, and productivity.
- People need to have good friends at work, colleagues whose opinions, support, and praise they trust and value.
- Optimism
 - Optimism leads to less depression, more achievement, and better health.
 - Cheerfulness and optimism serve to widen our social circle.
 - People who hold positive beliefs about their ability generally fare better than do those who are pessimistic.
 - Optimists retain a sense of hope for the future and interpret life events in a positive way.