

The Health Work & Wellness™ Group  
P.O. Box 905, Stn. A, Nanaimo, BC, Canada V9R 5N2  
TF: 1 888 591 2611 T: 250 591 2611 F: 250 591 2417

THE WESTIN HARBOUR CASTLE  
TORONTO, ON  
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*Canada's Leading Conference  
on Building Healthy Workplaces*



## TAKING AIM AT ANNUAL \$35 BILLION LOST THROUGH “TOXIC” CANADIAN WORKPLACES

### Health Work & Wellness™ Conference founder on a mission to promote a healthy workplace culture across the country

Deborah Connors is on a mission to help the private and public sectors across the country change toxic cultures that the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health estimated cost Canada \$35 billion in lost productivity annually because of unhealthy workplaces.

“More and more employers are beginning to realize the huge drain on profits and productivity resulting from workplace stress, depression and mental illness”, says Connors, who is President and Managing Director of the Health Work & Wellness™ Group, based in B.C., and founder of the 15th annual Health Work & Wellness™ Conference being held in Toronto from October 4 to 6.

The Roundtable had also estimated that unhealthy workplaces cost the Canadian economy a staggering 35 million lost workdays annually. For the past 15 years Connors has been working with an increasing cross section of governments, companies and institutions to reverse this trend and foster the benefits of creating healthy workplaces to her clients.

“We launched the first Health Work & Wellness™ Conference 15 years ago to provide a unique forum in Canada for sharing big ideas on the importance of culture change to achieve high performance organizations,” Connors says. “I expect more than 500 delegates to attend this year, including senior decision-makers, strategic planners, specialists and consultants who want to create healthy change for better performance in their workplaces.”

Connors says the conference also brings together representatives from the fields of organizational development, healthcare and government policy planning, insurance and benefits industry, education, employee benefits, human resources and organizational health and wellness. However, no one profession ‘owns’ organizational health – it’s something we can all contribute to,” she adds.

Connors says that in today’s climate of economic recovery, a healthy organization is critical for recruitment, retention and success. “As companies go through reorganization and downsizing, work intensifies and loyalty is impacted, therefore a healthy workplace that emphasizes wellness is a business imperative.” She defines organizational health as one that supports employees’ need for mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and social well-being – a workplace that is regarded by employees as ‘great’ or ‘exceptional’.

Many factors can contribute to unhealthy workplaces. “It can be as simple as employees being stressed out by the overwhelming number of emails they have to deal with each day; management not understanding problems experienced by employees; a lack of goals agreed upon by both employees and managers; and lack of recognition. “

However, Connors is encouraged by the increasing number of senior executives who want to address these workplace issues. “It really is a business imperative that both private and public sectors recognize the huge gains possible through

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creating healthy workplaces. This is no longer an issue only residing at the human resources or occupation health levels in organizations. The positive impact on the bottom line and improved employee retention and productivity are driving the concerns for healthy workplaces that go right to the top.”

She has worked with large companies, government ministries and private organizations on her mission to promote healthy workplaces. She has also been successful in attracting some of the largest companies with a strong interest in workplace health as sponsors of the 2011 Conference being held at Toronto’s Westin Harbour Castle Hotel.

Great-West Life, Morneau Shepell, Sun Life Financial, Homewood Human Solutions, Desjardins Financial Security and Ceridian are key long-time supporters. “All of these companies have a strong commitment to increasing healthy workplaces in Canada,” says Connors.

In fact, the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace was launched in 2007 to help turn knowledge of mental health issues into action for employers across Canada. The Centre provides freely available resources for all employers, including evidence-based strategies and tools aimed at improving workplace mental health for all Canadians.

The conference focuses on participation and results. For example, last year at a session hosted by the Centre, participants identified the need for a tool to assess and improve the emotional intelligence of managers who are on the front lines in recognizing and responding to the emotional distress of employees. The Centre is currently developing such a tool and it will be added to the existing Managing Mental Health Matters™ resource. This new tool will be launched at the Conference 2011 pre-conference workshop called You Asked For It – You Got It: Managing Mental Health Matters™.

“This year’s conference is a call to action to senior management to make workplace health a business imperative. It’s about shifting to strategic thinking, which leads to better results in tackling issues that create unhealthy workplaces.”

The conference has always featured guest speakers on the program to provide a perspective on the latest ideas related to healthy workplaces. “Author and CEO of GSD&M Idea City, Roy Spence, and John DeHart, co-founder of Nurse Next Door are two of our keynote speakers,” says Connors. “We will also explore Mars Canada’s story of how they created a healthy workplace strategy and hear about Quebec’s Group for Prevention and Promotion Strategies innovation, a world first called Healthy Enterprise Standard.”

Connors says her mission is far from over. “However, there is no question that the climate for adopting healthy workplaces has never been stronger. It really is a business imperative that is being addressed by more and more organizations, including strong brands like Xerox, Google and Microsoft Canada.”