

Disability Management

Business And Science Address Disability Costs

By: **Bev Lever**

Through the Workplace Disability Benchmarking (WDB) program, scientists and businesses are working in partnership to address the negative impacts of exploding workplace disability costs and the loss of employee productivity. This program, offered by the Institute for Work & Health (IWH), provides businesses and public sector plans with credible, unbiased data on which to base decisions regarding their disability management programs.

The IWH is an independent, not-for-profit, Canadian research organization affiliated with the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo, York University, and McMaster University. The Institute's mandate is to conduct and share practical research with employers, unions, clinicians, and policy-makers to protect and improve the health of working people. The IWH uses a partnership model when implementing its programs.



Performance Trends

Strategically, the WDB program tracks performance trends over time to assess the impact of changes in disability management practices and lets organizations know how their disability management programs are performing compared to others in the same sector. These findings can help to form strategies to reduce the disability burden and improve return-to-work practices with the potential to improve employee health and the bottom line.

"I was sold on this idea from the onset. This project will enable organizations to benchmark outcomes and measure the program effectiveness to a group of like programs. By establishing a baseline, future decision-making will be supported by scientific evidence. This will advance the approach to disability management," says Charles Bruce, CEO of the Nova Scotia Public Service LTD Trust; Canadian Mental Health Association national board member; and member of the Mental Health Commission of Canada workplace advisory committee.

WDB researchers, experts in data management and analysis of disability management, provide one-on-one training and ongoing support to sector partners and their data providers. This training program, the detailed training manual, and ongoing IWH support ensure that the data providers have the necessary skills to successfully implement this program. Normalizing the data ensures 'apples to apples' benchmarking.

The WDB team provides detailed benchmarking reports to each partner in addition to individualized, follow-up consultations. WDB economists and scientists are available to assist in interpreting the data.

Outcome Metrics

Each organization is tracked and benchmarked with its peers on outcome metrics which may include short-term disability, long-term disability, workers' compensation, casual absence, and emergency and compassionate leave.

Once the individual reviews are completed, a forum to share best practices is hosted by the IWH. Experience has shown that sector partners are prepared to share best practices with one another to improve disability management practices.

“The value in participating with the Workplace Disability Benchmarking Project is that I can gain access to data from peer companies that has been vetted by an objective organization. I’m also pleased with the opportunity to participate in discussion forums to share best practices and better understand common issues related to disability management,” says Jamie Abbott, CMA, CEBS, director, benefit programs, human resources, Sun Life Financial,

The cost of participation is \$9,000 per year and is based strictly on cost-recovery. The potential return on investment from participating in the WDB program is very attractive.

The WDB program has successfully worked with public sector plans, the financial sector, and the pharmaceutical sector. The IWH is looking to expand this value-added program to other Canadian sectors. ■

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