

## Insights from CivicAction's Emerging Leaders Network on inclusion & mental health in the workplace

CivicAction's [MindsMatter](#) program highlights the workplace as an untapped resource to support the mental health of its people. Yet the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area's (GTHA) diverse workforce comes with different mental health realities, experiences and perceptions that need to be reflected in workplace strategies and approaches.

About 52% of the GTHA's 7 million people are racialized and is expected to double over the next 10 years.<sup>1</sup> These members of the GTHA's workforce experience various factors that contribute adversely to their mental health, including identity-based discrimination and distinct cultural attitudes toward mental health in their communities. In this context, there is an opportunity to promote and support mental health in the workplace with more user-centric approach that meets the diverse needs of employees.

In Spring 2017, CivicAction's [Emerging Leaders Network](#) members came together from across the GTHA at IBM Canada's Head Offices in Markham, Ont., to share their ideas on mental health in the workplace through a lens of diversity and inclusion. See the four key recommendations they have for employers below:

### Four ideas on building inclusion into workplace mental health

1

**Consider culturally relevant language and practices** when promoting workplace mental health and organizational supports

The discussion revealed that there are significant differences in attitudes toward mental illness, use of services, and language used to describe mental health among the different ethno-cultural communities that make up the GTHA workforce.

**Recommendation:** Employers should embed inclusive and culturally-relevant practices into how they promote workplace mental health and organizational supports for it. They should become aware of how the diverse communities within their organizations talk about and engage with mental health. Employers should also work with employees to critically examine the inclusiveness of workplace mental health efforts, and seek input from them on how to adapt the language used to promote workplace mental health and the resources provided.

2

**Build on existing employee resource groups<sup>2</sup>** as touch points for community-relevant conversations about workplace mental health

Employees bring diverse identities into the workplace that impact their lived experiences with mental health. The discussion uncovered the need to have safer spaces in the workplace for employees to have conversations about mental health with other members of their communities.

**Recommendation:** Employers can make use of existing employee communities and resource groups to provide space for specific communities to discuss their mental health and to share community-relevant resources and supports. Organizations should identify champions or ambassadors within these communities to encourage and start these conversations.

2. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are employee-led groups formed around common interests, issues and/or a common bond or background. (HR at MIT - <http://hrweb.mit.edu/diversity/ergs>)

3

**Create a peer support network or ambassador program** that reflects the diversity of your organization

Participants shared that employees may feel more comfortable opening up to their employers about mental health issues if they see visible employee ambassadors or have access to an organizational peer support network that represents and reflects their diverse identities and roles in the organization.

**Recommendation:** Organizations should establish a peer support network or a mental health ambassador program, and build it to reflect their diverse workforce ensuring representation and inclusion of diverse identities, functional roles, and organizational levels.

4

**Use technology** to unlock new ways to communicate between employers and coworkers about mental health concerns

Participants expressed concerns about confidentiality and trust when sharing mental health issues with employers in person. This was identified to be a more significant concern for specific ethno-cultural communities.

**Recommendation:** Leverage new tools and technologies to open up new ways for employees to communicate their mental health concerns and needs. Internal organizational forums and new digital communication platforms can make it easier and less daunting for employees to discuss workplace mental health with their employer and co-workers.

## Additional Resources & Information

[Multicultural Mental Health Resource Centre](#) provides resources to support culturally safe and competent mental health care for Canada's diverse population. [Join their Listserv to stay up to date on resources.](#)

[Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace - Workplace Strategies for Mental Health Discrimination and Diversity resources](#) provides a summary of information on how to integrate diversity and mental health in the workplace.

### [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)

- [Report on The Case for Diversity](#) Building the Case to Improve Mental Health Services for Immigrant, Refugee, Ethno-cultural and Racialized Populations
- [A list of Ontario organizations and programs supporting mental health of diverse populations](#)

[Hong Fook Mental Health Association](#) works with Asian communities in the Greater Toronto Area to keep people mentally healthy and to manage mental illness from recovery to wellness, through promotion and prevention, treatment, capacity building and advocacy. [Take a look at their training programs for workplace wellness](#)

Take CivicAction's free, confidential, easy to use **MindsMatter** assessment at [mindsmatter.civicaction.ca](https://mindsmatter.civicaction.ca). See where your organization stands on workplace mental health and how you can do more.