



From the back room
to the top shelf

The evolution of the Employee Assistance Program



Everyone needs support from time to time. Talking to friends and family is often step one. But if an employee is still struggling with a problem or concern, where can they turn for help?

One answer that employees often overlook is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) available through an employer's workplace benefits plan.

EAPs often fly under the radar. Many employees are unaware they have access to this valuable resource. For those who are aware, many view EAPs as "emergency use only." As a result, EAPs have historically been under-used. However, an EAP can be an invaluable support.



The evolution of the Employee Assistance Program



Welcome to the EAP evolution

Times have changed, and EAPs have evolved to offer support for a wide range of employee concerns, including:



Women's health



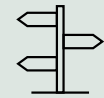
Mental health



Financial and legal



Family/relationships/caregiving



Work and career

The Sun Life EAP* acts as the “front door” to accessing support for many life challenges. And this access has never been easier. It’s an all-in-one digital health solution.

Employees connect immediately and confidentially through the EAP app or website. By answering a few upfront questions, employees can immediately make an appointment with a professional.

This initial appointment happens fast – within 24 hours – at a time that’s convenient to the employee. These consultations take place outside of the work ecosystem and are 100% confidential. Organizations don’t receive any information about EAP access or support provided to individual employees. This is an important point to make when communicating to employees.

EAP consultations range from

one to four sessions depending on the concern. The EAP delivers this support by phone or virtually using video or online chat.

And contrary to some misconceptions, employees don’t have to be in crisis to use an EAP. While an EAP can be invaluable when an employee needs help urgently, it’s also a resource for everyday concerns. It’s available to every employee, no matter their age or career stage.

Manager coaching

Managers wear many hats and at times are dealing with a challenging team and/or team member issues. This can impact their own stress and well-being.

EAP coaching can support managers in resolving issues and help reduce manager burdens and stress. A Sun Life EAP* expert can help them address many issues, with up to four coaching sessions per issue. This gives managers the time and tools they need to develop a strategy, and have that process validated with their EAP expert.

Support for people managers

The Sun Life EAP* can help support people managers to navigate many challenges. These include post-disability returns to work, team member under-performance, and issues related to managing remotely. The EAP can do some of the heavy lifting in supporting managers, reducing the burden on human resources.



Manager coaching



Return-to-work support can be critical

EAP coaching can help with key manager challenges such as reintegrating employees returning to work after a leave. According to a recent research initiative with Sun Life and Ipsos in 2023¹, a majority of employees (83%) say their manager is key to return success. But many returning employees reported not getting the level of support they need.

50%

50% had communications with their manager once a month or less on how their return to work was going. And 25% of returning employees had no communication at all.

50%

50% felt stigmatized at their workplace for having been on disability leave. They also felt isolated and alone during their return to work.

This tells us managers should develop strategies to support the employee and ensure a successful reintegration. But they often need help in doing so. In our research,² 90% of managers say they are looking for additional support on:

How to approach and speak to employees with sensitivity about various disabilities

Gaining a better understanding of employees' physical and cognitive limitations so they can identify suitable, modified work for them

How to provide accommodations to employees returning to work

Processes and guidelines when managing a returning employee.

EAP coaching can support managers in developing return-to-work strategies and ensuring a successful reintegration into the workplace.

Manager coaching

Manager support in action**

Brenda was concerned about Tom's impending return to the team from a mental health-related leave. She knew the accommodations he would need, and that it might place additional work on other team members.

She wanted Tom to feel welcomed back, but worried the team would be frustrated by the extra work. She also wanted to respect Tom's privacy while ensuring people could feel open about the return process.

Brenda met with an EAP coach and expressed her concerns. The coach listened empathetically and reassured her there were ways to make the transition smoother for everyone. They discussed best practices for integrating someone returning from a mental health leave.

The coach suggested Brenda hold a team meeting to address the changes openly. Brenda and her coach discussed the key points to cover.



Tom had been through a difficult time and was taking an important step in returning to work.



She appreciated the team's flexibility and was there to support them all.

She developed a thoughtful communications plan to prepare the team and felt a weight lifted from her shoulders. When Tom returned, the atmosphere was one of warmth and acceptance. The team rallied together, redistributing tasks and offering encouragement to their colleague. In the end, Tom's reintegration went smoothly, thanks to Brenda's proactive approach, the team's empathy and the coaching she received through her Sun Life EAP.*

The coaching had made all the difference. It transformed what could have been a stressful transition into a heartening example of workplace compassion.



Taking time away from work to focus on health is nothing to be ashamed of and that compassion and understanding were critical.



She encouraged open dialogue at every stage.



Women's health



Historically, society has placed very little focus on women's health. Health care has often failed to consider women's physiological differences, societal roles and specific health needs.

This gender health gap refers to the different health-care experiences of women and men, with women often receiving lower quality care. There are several reasons why this health gap exists. They include:

- **A historical and continuing lack of research on women's health.**
- **Low awareness and understanding of how some conditions can manifest differently in women than men.**
- **The stigma in discussing and dealing with women-specific health issues, such as reproductive and gynecological health.**

Women's health



The gender health gap has workplace implications. Women make up half of Canada's workforce, but shoulder a disproportionate share of other life responsibilities. You can add to that the significant impact that menopause symptoms have on so many women mid-career. It's no surprise, then, that this takes a toll, especially on mental health.



Women carry a greater societal burden – at home and as caregivers to others. They are 50% more likely to be a caregiver than men.³



Menopause symptoms are too often not discussed and unmanaged, with 10% of women leaving the workforce because of unmanaged symptoms.⁴



This all affects mental health – women have a rate of depression 1.7 times higher than that of men.⁵ They also have 50% more anti-depressant claims than men, and a higher rate of mental health-related disability leaves.⁶

An EAP can be a great starting point for support. This is especially so if a woman is one of the millions of Canadians without a family doctor. EAPs can provide women with access to mental health support, and provide educational resources for areas of concerns such as:

- **infertility, pregnancy loss, baby blues and postpartum depression**
- **premenstrual and menopausal disorders**
- **parenting and family, children with disabilities**
- **return-to-work issues.**

EAPs can also help women navigate the health-care system for in-person services, clinics and specialists.

Women's health



Support for women's health in action**

Lilly and her partner had been trying to conceive for years. But each negative pregnancy test felt like a gut punch. The disappointment and heartache were overwhelming. Lilly found herself sinking into a deep depression, struggling to get out of bed some days.

Lilly's employer had recently introduced an EAP. Lilly decided to reach out and learn more. She discovered that it offered counselling services and resources on topics like infertility, pregnancy loss, and postpartum depression.

Lilly scheduled an appointment with a therapist, who listened to her story with empathy and understanding. Together, they developed a plan to help Lilly cope with the emotional turmoil she was experiencing. The therapist also provided Lilly with information on local support groups and online communities. These let Lilly connect with others going through similar challenges.

As Lilly delved into the EAP educational resources, she felt relief in learning she wasn't alone in her struggles. The information empowered Lilly to advocate for her own mental health and seek the support she needed. Over time, Lilly's mental health began to improve. She felt better equipped to navigate the challenges of her fertility journey.

The EAP support got Lilly through her darkest times and enabled her to continue the fertility process. When Lilly and her partner finally welcomed their new baby girl, she was able to fully embrace the joys of motherhood.

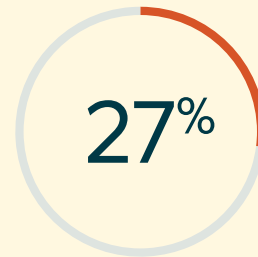




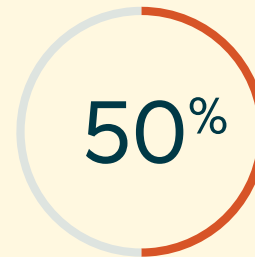
Mental health



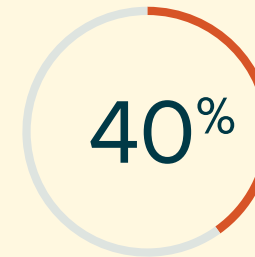
Within the Sun Life EAP*, about 53% of all consultations are related to mental health. That's the single largest EAP care category by far. Why is EAP support so valuable?



27% of employed Canadians said their mental health symptoms impacted their productivity in the past week.⁷



50% of young professionals report needing help for an emotional or mental health problem.⁸



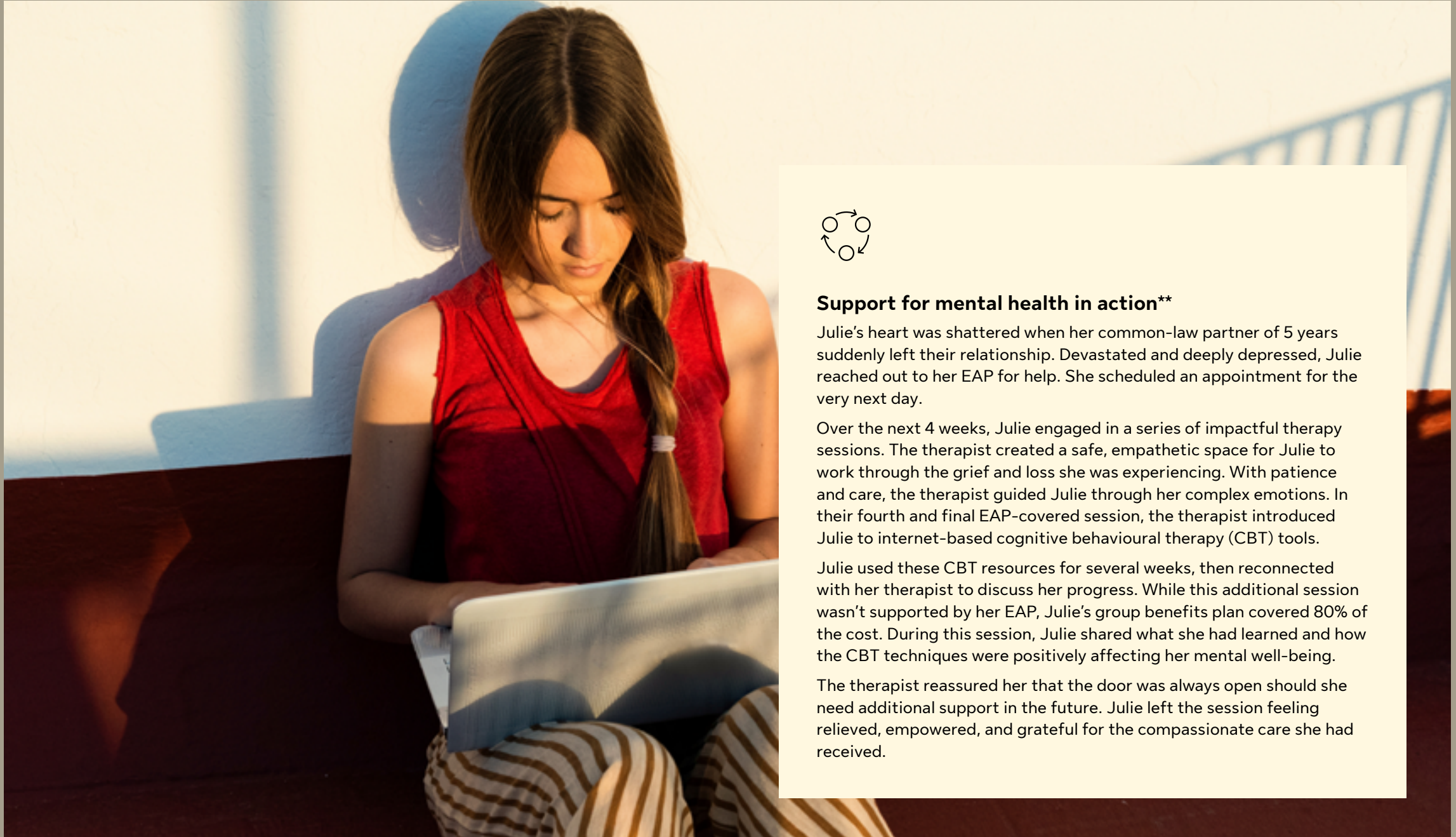
Mental health has been the fastest growing category of disability claim, representing almost 40% of all long-term disability claims.⁹



Only about half of Canadians with a mental disorder receive professional help.¹⁰

Through the Sun Life EAP*, employees get up to four therapy sessions* with mental health providers. These include mental health specialists, mental health therapists, psychotherapists, and psychologists.

Employees can get live virtual coaching and therapy sessions for stress, anxiety, depression, grief and loss, addiction and more. The sessions also include navigational support for external resources and in-patient treatment options.



Support for mental health in action**

Julie's heart was shattered when her common-law partner of 5 years suddenly left their relationship. Devastated and deeply depressed, Julie reached out to her EAP for help. She scheduled an appointment for the very next day.

Over the next 4 weeks, Julie engaged in a series of impactful therapy sessions. The therapist created a safe, empathetic space for Julie to work through the grief and loss she was experiencing. With patience and care, the therapist guided Julie through her complex emotions. In their fourth and final EAP-covered session, the therapist introduced Julie to internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) tools.

Julie used these CBT resources for several weeks, then reconnected with her therapist to discuss her progress. While this additional session wasn't supported by her EAP, Julie's group benefits plan covered 80% of the cost. During this session, Julie shared what she had learned and how the CBT techniques were positively affecting her mental well-being.

The therapist reassured her that the door was always open should she need additional support in the future. Julie left the session feeling relieved, empowered, and grateful for the compassionate care she had received.

Financial and legal – access to professional services



EAPs provide employees with access to a lawyer or financial counsellor for a session or two for short-term support. These professionals can also provide referrals for longer-term help as needed. By providing quick access to experts, EAPs are a go-to solution for legal or financial planning help.

Financial health is declining for many, with credit card balances at the highest level in Canada since 2007.¹¹

54% of Canadians report financial worries cause negative impacts to their mental health, including anxiety and depression.¹²

38% of Canadians say financial worries impact their productivity at work.¹³

Even small legal issues can create uncertainty and stress and disrupt an employee's life and work. Over a 3-year period, 1.4 million Canadians reported extreme stress caused by unresolved legal problems.¹⁴

Some of the most common legal problems include property damage and noise complaints, financial/debt issues, and dissatisfaction with major purchases and services.¹⁵



Financial and legal – access to professional services



Financial counselling support in action**

Rahim had always been a hard worker. But when his employer laid him off the previous year, he found himself in a difficult situation. He needed time to find a new job, but he needed money to cover his everyday expenses. He took on a significant amount of credit card debt, hoping to get by until he could find a new job.

Now, with a new job and even a promotion, Rahim should have been feeling on top of the world. But that debt continued to weigh heavily. The interest rates were crippling, and he found himself borrowing just to make the minimum payments each month.

Rahim knew he needed help, but the thought of tackling his financial troubles was overwhelming. He finally mustered the courage to open the Sun Life EAP* app. He booked an appointment with a financial counsellor, hoping they could provide some guidance.

The counsellor listened empathetically as he shared the details of his situation. Rahim was relieved to learn that he wasn't alone in his struggles. The counsellor explained that there were strategies available to help him consolidate his debt at a lower interest rate. She also referred him to a free credit counselling service that could outline the steps to becoming debt-free.

Rahim left the session feeling a sense of hope – and finally seeing a path forward. While he still had a long road ahead of him, he no longer felt ashamed of his financial troubles. He was ready to tackle his debt head-on, knowing he had the resources and support he needed to succeed.



Family/relationships/caregiving



The Sun Life EAP* provides access to family and relationship specialists for short-term coaching or therapy. It also provides referrals as needed for longer-term support.

EAP support also includes the caregiving side of relationships. Our recent research with CARP¹⁶ revealed that 56% of women and 36% of men had caregiving responsibilities. These responsibilities are mostly for the care of seniors, typically elderly parents.

The caregiving responsibility is a concern for employers, as many people giving care are in their prime working years. Two-thirds of those aged 45-65 reported being caregivers.¹⁷

Women carry the largest responsibility – mostly in care for seniors.¹⁸

There are employer effects – 22% of women and 15% of men left their employment because of caregiving demands.¹⁹

More than 75% of caregivers said their role makes it challenging to care for their physical and mental health. Many caregivers said they experienced financial stress and hardship due to their caregiving responsibilities and related expenses.²⁰

Family/relationships/caregiving



Support for families in action**

Phil rushed to the hospital, his mind racing with worry for his father. At 90 years old, his father had always been independent. But after his recent fall, it was clear he could no longer manage on his own.

Phil had been doing his best to care for his father. He spent hours each week ensuring he had food and checking in on him. But he now needed a better solution.

Feeling overwhelmed and unsure of where to turn, Phil reached out to his EAP counselling service for guidance. The counsellor, with years of experience in elder care, listened empathetically to Phil's concerns. She explained the various support options available. These included provincially run community health services that could provide in-home assistance

for Phil's father. The counsellor also shared information about nearby assisted-living and long-term care facilities. This was great information that could help if his father's needs eventually exceeded what he could manage at home.

With the counsellor's support, Phil was able to navigate the complex system and arrange for his father's in-home care. He also began the process of touring local care facilities.

Phil knew that caring for his aging father wouldn't be easy. But he was committed to ensuring his father received the care and comfort he deserved. The EAP was the right resource at the right time. He was grateful for the compassionate guidance and practical support he received.





Seven ways the Sun Life EAP* provides industry-leading care

- 1. Immediate response by app or phone.** When an employee connects, the app or EAP expert assesses their need and coordinates care with the right specialist.
- 2. Fast, confidential access to a specialist.** Employees receive an appointment within 24 hours, at a time that works best for them. All EAP well-being services are 100% confidential. The program shares no information about contacting the EAP or engaging in therapy with employers.
- 3. Continuity of care.** Employees have from one to four confidential consultations, depending on the area of concern. In many cases, they also have the option to continue with the same specialist if they need additional support. While additional sessions come at a cost, the employee's group benefits plan may cover some of these costs.
- 4. Follow-ups every time.** When EAP sessions end, employees receive a follow-up message to ensure they've received the care and support they need.
- 5. Additional self-led supports for mental health.** The EAP also provides 24/7 access to internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy (iCBT). This can complement therapist-led care.
- 6. 100% acceptance.** Our Sun Life EAP* provider, Dialogue, accepts 100% of employees on the platform, regardless of the presenting issue. This is due to the robust navigational support provided to internal and external resources.
- 7. Award-winning care.** Dialogue is Canada's first virtual care provider to receive the Accreditation Canada Primer award. This award represents a third-party validation of Dialogue's commitment to safety and continuous improvements to the care it delivers.

The Sun Life EAP* – a valuable resource for both employees and employers



Sometimes “getting started” is the hardest thing an employee must do to address challenging life concerns. They can face many barriers – such as lack of knowledge, stigma, time, or procrastination in facing something difficult.

That’s where the Sun Life EAP* comes in. It offers leading technology, fast access to help, therapy continuation options plus self-led care and resources. Our EAP’s complete, dedicated, 24/7/365 support helps keep employees healthy and at work. And as a valued outside resource, it unlocks time employers can use to focus on other priorities.

For more information, visit sunlife.ca/eap

This report provides general information only. It does not provide employment, legal, health, or financial advice. Consult with the appropriate professional advisor to meet your organization's needs.

- ¹ 2023 Sun Life / Ipsos national survey of Canadian employees who had taken a disability leave
 - ² 2023 Sun Life / Ipsos national survey of employers who had managed an employee who had taken a disability leave
 - ³ Supporting the supporters, unpaid caregivers in Canada, Sun Life/CARP, 2021
 - ⁴ Menopause and Work in Canada, Menopause Foundation of Canada, 2023
 - ⁵ Albert PR. Why is depression more prevalent in women? *J Psychiatry Neurosci*. 2015; 40(4):219-21.
 - ⁶ Sun Life data, 2023
 - ⁷ National Poll of Canadian Mental Health, Mental Health Research Canada
 - ⁸ John Dujay. "Young Canadian employees at 'mental-health breaking point'" HR Reporter, May 29, 2023. <https://www.hrreporter.com/focus-areas/wellness-mental-health/young-canadian-employees-at-mental-health-breaking-point/376300>
 - ⁹ Sun Life data, 2023
 - ¹⁰ Statistics Canada, Mental disorders and access to mental health care, 2023
 - ¹¹ Market Pulse Consumer Credit Trends and Insights Report from Equifax® Canada, August 2024
 - ¹² FP Canada 2024 Financial Stress Index
 - ¹³ ibid
 - ¹⁴ The Canadian Legal Problems Survey, Government of Canada, 2021
 - ¹⁵ ibid
 - ¹⁶ Supporting the supporters, unpaid caregivers in Canada, Sun Life/CARP, 2021
 - ¹⁷ ibid
 - ¹⁸ ibid
 - ¹⁹ ibid
 - ²⁰ ibid
- * Also referred to as Lumino Health Virtual Care Employee Assistance Program provided by Dialogue

Life's brighter under the sun

Group Benefits are provided by Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada, a member of the Sun Life group of companies. MC1096-E 09-24 mm-jf



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