

BENEFITS AND PENSIONS
MONITOR
MEETINGS & EVENTS

WEBINAR

AbilitiCBT Addresses Mental Health Crisis



The mental health crisis in Canada was alarming long before the pandemic, but it has since been significantly escalated, says Paula Allen, global leader of research and total wellbeing at Morneau Shepell.

Speaking in the *Benefits and Pensions Monitor* Meetings & Events webinar 'Navigating Canada's mental health crisis: A look at trends in Canadians' wellbeing and the next phase of digital solutions' alongside Nigel Branker, president of health and productivity solutions and executive vice-president at Morneau Shepell, Allen said the pandemic has prompted organizations that didn't prioritize mental health before 2020 to start doing so.

Tremendous Change

The pandemic has introduced "tremendous change in our lives – how we work, how we relate to each other, how we spend our personal time," said Allen. And all these changes came "one on top of the other, all at the same time, all relatively without warning." Because the human mind doesn't like change and struggles to adapt, "there is no possible way that it can't be stressful for us."

The pandemic also resulted in a lot of uncertainty – "what's going to happen next, when is this going to be over and when are we going to get the vaccine? When you consider the immense uncertainty that has surfaced and lingered for so many months, it is very clear that the impacts are going to be felt far and wide,

and remain for years to come."

One of the major challenges that the pandemic introduced is that "we've had to remove some of the familiar in-person methods of self-care that often help us cope," said Branker. "We're not seeing our friends as much, we're not going to the gym and we're not able to go on our usual vacations. We have way more stresses with far fewer resources to build resiliency and coping skills, and more of the population is struggling as a result. We learned in 2020 that mental health does not have a one-size-fits-all solution, and in order to help people, it's important to meet them where they are."

According to Morneau Shepell's monthly Mental Health Index™, individuals struggling with anxiety or depression are less likely to reach out for help, while often being the population that needs it the most. It's not enough for employers to just make help available, barriers have to be removed including costs, access, and stigma. This is what has ultimately fueled the adoption of digital tools and solutions in the workplace, such as AbilitiCBT.

Building Up Resiliency

AbilitiCBT is an internet-based cognitive therapy (iCBT) program providing anyone with mental health concerns the opportunity to work with a professional therapist entirely at their own pace, while using their smartphone, tablet, or computer to give them a structured way to build up resiliency and learn to cope. "We keep our solutions as straight forward and user-friendly as possible because we're very

cognizant of the mindset of someone who is struggling. We want to make it easy to take that first step – click on a link, answer a couple of questions, meet with someone, and so on. This structured approach is how we help people to get back to being their best self," said Branker.

However, the real art of cognitive behavioural therapy is recognizing there's a link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and helping people to have a plan. "If you talk about someone who's saving for retirement, often there is an 'I'll get it tomorrow' mindset. This seems like a very daunting task at first, but if you break it down into saving a small amount every month, it can put you on the path to saving for retirement. It's very much the same with mental health and wellbeing," said Branker.

When individuals first begin their AbilitiCBT journey by completing the first program module, they start to gain a better understanding of their symptoms. "At the same time, we give them the opportunity to have an initial appointment with a therapist. The therapist then starts to help guide the individual through each module by understanding their personal objectives, their unique symptomology, and the pace at which they'd like to proceed.

"AbilitiCBT is a very structured program. It has a beginning, middle, and end, and the technology being guided by a therapist allows us to really harness the value of the program and ultimately, put it in the hands of more people," Branker said.

BPM

TO VIEW THE FULL WEBINAR, VISIT [BPM MAGAZINE.COM/WEBINAR/](https://www.bpmmagazine.com/webinar/)