



Mental health claims on the rise in Canada

Canada News-wire

Thursday, April 14, 2005

Byline:

Dateline: TORONTO, April 14

Source:

Time: 12:37 (Eastern Time)

- Preliminary results of Watson Wyatt's 'Staying at Work' survey

presented at **Roundtable on Addiction** and Mental Health -

TORONTO, April 14 /CNW/ - Watson Wyatt Worldwide today released preliminary results of the firm's fourth Staying at Work survey. According to the study findings, more than half (56%) of respondents considered the continuous rise in employees' mental health claims a top concern, while over three-quarters indicated that mental health issues continue to be the leading cause of short- and long-term disability claims in their organizations (75% and 79% respectively). This follows a similar pattern as the previous survey where over 70 per cent of respondents made the same claim.

These and other findings were revealed at a meeting of the Global Economic and Business **Roundtable on Addiction** and Mental Health in Toronto yesterday. Watson Wyatt's Staying at Work survey explores disability management practices in Canadian organizations and this year expanded to include further examination of mental health-related issues.

With mental health continuing to be the top disability management issue for organizations, companies have been slow to adopt innovative mental health management practices in the workplace. Only about one-third of organizations said they have enacted return to work processes specific to mental health claims (35%), as well as functional mental health capacity assessments (27%).

"What's fascinating is those progressive organizations that are dealing with the issues overwhelmingly indicate that mental health management practices help reduce costs, improve employee health and satisfaction, and increase productivity," said Joseph Ricciuti, National Director, Group and Health Care Practice, Watson Wyatt Canada. "This is good news for those employers who are trying to find ways to manage mental health concerns in their work environment."

According to the survey findings, only 31 per cent of respondents said they have plans to undertake new initiatives to manage mental health claims over the next one-to-two years. And only five per cent said they plan to address the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

Additionally, measurement of disability-related costs continues to be informal and sporadic at best. Many organizations indicated they do not track or capture their disability-related costs, particularly casual absences and indirect costs.

"This lack of decisive action by organizations to address what they acknowledge is a growing issue, coupled with an ongoing failure to accurately measure its impact, is alarming," said Ricciuti. "It means that mental health will continue to negatively affect many companies' business operations going forward."

The complete Watson Wyatt Staying at Work survey exploring broad disability management issues in more detail will be available in summer, 2005.

About Watson Wyatt Worldwide

Watson Wyatt is a global consulting firm specializing in human capital and financial management. The firm offers services in three areas: employee benefits, technology solutions, and human capital strategies. Watson Wyatt has more than 5,900 associates in 88 offices in 30 countries. In Western Canada, the firm serves clients from Vancouver and Calgary; in Central Canada from Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo; and in Eastern Canada from Montreal. For more information, visit www.watsonwyatt.com/canada.

Idnumber: 200504140213

Length: 496 words

Subject: Surveys

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Language: ENGLISH
