



## THE \$50B PROBLEM; MENTAL ILLNESS HURTS BUSINESSES

The Toronto Sun

Wednesday, April 13, 2005

Page: 25

Section: News

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Source:

FOR THE FIRST time, Canada's business and scientific communities have joined forces to tackle mental illness in the workplace.

Business and science leaders will gather in Toronto today to discuss a 10-year plan to combat the growing problem, which they estimate may be costing the country \$50 billion annually.

"We've got to reverse the tide or this is going to hurt us for a long time," Bill **Wilkerson**, co-founder and CEO of Global Business and Economic **Roundtable** on **Addiction** and **Mental Health**, said yesterday.

**Wilkerson** said the partnership aims to find out which management practices are most unhealthy for employees, why certain environments create illness and others don't, and which medical practices are most effective.

The coalition plans to study more than 50,000 workers in both the public and private sectors "to nail down the cost benefits, from a productivity and health-care point of view, of effective and early treatment of depression," he said. They also hope to launch a campaign to fight the stigma and discrimination attached to illnesses such as depression.

"Mental illness costs Canadian businesses \$33 billion a year in lost industrial production alone," Wilkerson said, adding the health-care costs run anywhere from \$10 billion to \$20 billion on top of that.

In a rare move, publishers from four newspapers -- the Toronto Sun, National Post, Toronto Star, and Ottawa Citizen -- have released a statement calling on government and businesses to take the issue seriously.

"This is not just a health-care problem, a funding problem or a governmental problem, although it is all of those. This is a societal problem and demands a response from society as a whole -- including employers," said the statement from the group, which calls itself Publishers for Mental Health.

Toronto Sun publisher and CEO Neil Fowler said it's important that the newspapers show a united front on the issue.

"As a newspaper, if we see something that is of a growing concern to more and more people, we have a duty to publicize it," he explained.

Illustration:

- photo of NEIL FOWLER
- "We have a duty"

Idnumber: 200504130127

Edition: Final

Length: 336 words

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