

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Health charter to get nod

KATHERINE HARDING
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Dozens of leaders from Canada's business community are expected to endorse today a charter dealing with mental health and addiction.

The document, commissioned by the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, calls the twin problems of addiction and mental health a "clear and present danger" because they are on course to become the leading causes of work years lost in the global economy by 2020.

To tackle the issue, the charter sets out four objectives for Canada's business community, including reducing "the production losses recorded through absenteeism and downtime costs by eliminating the known top 10 sources of workplace stress" and promoting "organizational, mental and cardiovascular health" in the workplace.

It's signed by nine business leaders and mental health experts, including former finance minister Michael Wilson, Brascan Financial Corp. chairman Tim Price, and marketing expert and author Don Tapscott.

Both private and public sector executives, including Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce chairman and president John Hunkin and TVOntario president Isabel Bassett, are expected to attend.

The roundtable estimates that the Canadian economy loses \$11-billion a year in productivity due to mental illnesses.

THE NATIONAL POST

Depression costs firms \$33B: study

Powerful panel unveils charter to fight mental illness

Wojtek Dabrowski

Financial Post

Wednesday, May 14, 2003

Productivity losses due to depression, anxiety, substance abuse and burnout run at about \$33-billion a year in Canada, according to findings to be released today by a high-powered panel of corporate leaders and health-care experts.

A report by Bill Wilkerson, co-founder and chief executive of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, will also reveal that those who suffer from a mental illness are 300% to 400% more likely to take time off work.

The panel will also today unveil a charter to combat mental illness in a ceremony at the downtown headquarters of the Bank of Nova Scotia.

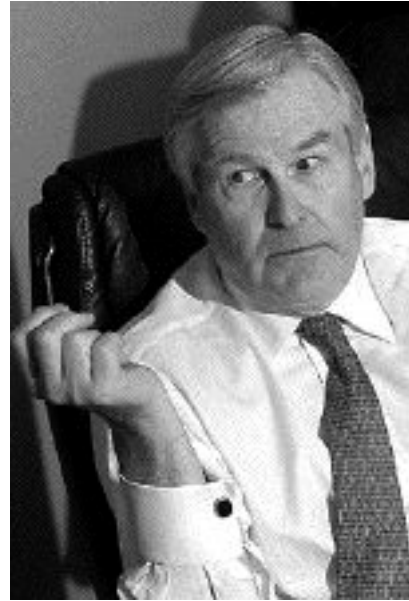
The group's members on hand will include former federal finance minister Michael Wilson, as well as Colum Bastable, president and chief executive of Royal LePage Ltd., and Scotia Capital chairman and chief executive David Wilson.

"The whole idea is to take this issue and put in the bank towers and the board rooms of the nation," Mr. Wilkerson said in an interview.

Top officials from dozens of companies such as Nortel Networks Corp., Noranda Inc., the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, as well as health experts including David Goldbloom, the physician-in-chief of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health -- with which the roundtable is formally affiliated -- are also participating.

The group's charter states that depression and heart disease are set to become the leading causes of work years lost in the global economy by 2020 through disability and premature death.

It will declare the next 12 months as the Business Year for Addiction and Mental Health.



**CREDIT: Peter Redman,
National Post**

**Michael Wilson, former
federal finance minister, is
a member of a panel on
mental health.**

During the year, the group plans to allocate resources to reduce workplace stress, depression and anxiety and to promote mental and cardiovascular health and get as many as 1,000 companies involved.

"We're going to produce a global international strategy," he said, adding that the panel hopes to get companies in Europe and the United States involved as well in an "all-out frontal attack on the effects of depression."

Mr. Wilkerson has a personal connection to depression: His brother died suddenly at his home after apparently not taking his blood-clot and anti-depression medication.

"The medical examiner told me that while a blood clot zapped his heart, effectively he was killed by his 'depressed mood,' " Mr. Wilkerson said at the time.

Michael Wilson has also been vocal on the subject of depression since his son's suicide in 1995.

Mr. Wilkerson said that while Canada loses a huge amount of money in productivity because of poor mental health, the United States suffers even more, with annual productivity losses of US\$275-billion.

Richard Garlick, a spokesman for the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse in Ottawa, said that the productivity losses projected in Mr. Wilkerson's report are reasonable.

He pointed to a 1996 study by his organization which studied the direct and indirect costs of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use. The total was \$18.45-billion.

"I think the figures that they're talking about are certainly within the same magnitude," he said.

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Business leaders tackle work stress

Declare Year for Mental Health Depression hurts economy, too

ROBIN HARVEY
STAFF REPORTER

A blue-chip gathering of corporate and medical heavyweights will meet today to try to limit the toll mental illness and depression take in the labour force.

The group plans to launch Canada's first Business Year for Mental Health and endorse an action plan titled A Charter for Mental Health and the Global Economy, with the aim of helping the "working wounded."

Attacking the top 10 sources of workplace stress that lead to depression and mental illness — which together cost \$11 billion a year in lost productivity — requires solid investment by business leaders, said Bill Wilkerson, CEO of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, which he co-founded in 1998.

"We will mobilize business resources and power to protect the mental health of the labour force," he said of the group.

Major stresses in the workplace include vicious office politics and bullying, a pattern of random interruptions, too much or too little work, and a feeling of lack of control.

Other factors that may lead to depression or mental illness include a lack of communication, inconsistent performance management (where, for example, employees may get raises but no positive feedback), job ambiguity and unclear directions.

Wilkerson says the group will be asked to declare a formal end to downsizing, which he said has been a major societal contributor to depression.

The roundtable has conducted a three-year review of studies on mental illness and its effect on the workplace. Wilkerson said the group will work to integrate disability insurance, group health and employee assistance plans, and seek ways to deal with the link between work stress, depression and heart disease.