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## CAFII Webinar: Paula Allen, TELUS Health, and Nigel Branker, Securian Canada, on Mental Health Issues in the Workplace

March 30, 2023

March 30 2023 CAFII Webinar: Mental Health Issue...



CAFII held a webinar on mental health issues in the workplace on 30 March, 2023 with Paula Allen, Global Leader, Research & Total Wellbeing, TELUS Health; and Nigel Branker, Chief Executive Officer of Securian Canada, and a CAFII Board member. This is the second webinar on this issue that CAFII has held.

Paula Allen started the webinar off by citing research that indicates that there was a massive negative mental health impact in the beginning of 2020 due to the pandemic, which produced conditions that the human mind does not like; and that since those increases in high risk were noted in 2020, there has not been an improvement. In 2019, 19% of workers were categorized as “high risk”; that number jumped to 35% in February of 2023.

Nigel Branker noted that he was a former colleague of Paula Allen’s at Morneau Sobeco/LifeWorks (predecessor to TELUS Health) and was very pleased to be on a panel with her. He noted that mental health issues were a primary driver of lost hours in the workplace, and that the workplace is a critical space to help people with mental health issues. Paula Allen noted that productivity improvements require attention to mental health issues in the workplace.

Nigel Branker said that organizations need to look at root causes of mental health issues, as opposed to just having programs to help people who have fallen through the cracks. Workloads have to be looked at, as well as workplace flexibility including working from home. Commutes are long in Toronto

and elsewhere in Canada, and that has an impact on people's quality of life. Some people are also not comfortable with returning to the office because of inclusivity issues.

Progress has been made, Mr. Branker said, in removing the stigma around mental health issues, but much more needs to be done, and many employees do not take advantage of existing programs out of a concern it could impact on their career prospects. Paula Allen said that stigmatizing people is harmful, and prevents people from seeking help. Also concerning is that young people have more concerns around mental health issues damaging their careers than older workers. As well, senior leaders disproportionately feel that revealing mental health issues would impact their careers, and that the values of the company around supporting employees do not apply to their level of seniority.

Nigel Branker said that someone in the organization who is a high performer but not aligned with the organization's values can do a lot of damage, and that an organization should not tolerate behaviours that harm other employees. He added that there are a lot of systemic issues in the workplace that can be addressed. Paula Allen said that managers need to be trained in these issues so that they can be better prepared to handle them when they arise. Nigel Branker added that executives give very tangible sales and other targets to employees, and that a similar discipline is required around supporting employees' mental health in the workplace.

Paula Allen noted that women are more likely to want to work from home, and that the commute for younger people and new Canadians may be longer, as they may live further from where the business is located. This could result in a less diverse group being in the office physically; and that, in turn, could have impacts on networking and career prospects for those who work from home.

Paula Allen and Nigel Branker said that financial uncertainty in the economy at this time is also leading to additional stress and mental health issues. Nigel Branker agreed that financial stress is one of a large number of contributors to mental health issues today. Both panelists concluded with a call to action by employers to continue to commit to doing better around addressing mental health issues in the workplace.

There were attendees at the webinar from allied industry associations CLHIA and THIA, and from regulator and policy-maker organizations including:

- The Financial and Consumer Services Commission of New Brunswick, or FCNB;
- The Canadian Council of Insurance Regulators, or CCIR;
- the Insurance Councils of Saskatchewan, or ICS;
- the Alberta Insurance Council, or AIC;
- the Government of Alberta;
- Alberta Treasury Board and Finance, or ATBF; and

- the British Columbia Financial Services Authority, or BCFSA.

The poll results can be found here:

<https://www.cafii.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/CAFII-Webinar-March-30-English-Poll-Results.pdf>  
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