

Building a Meaningful, Sustained Workplace Wellness Culture: Recovering Strong Employee Wellness Strategy

Promising Practices to Enable a Healthy Workforce to Provide Person-Centred Care in Long-Term Care

If you are looking for promising practices used in long-term care to foster healthy work environments to deliver safer, higher quality person-centred care, then this resource is for you.





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peopleCare Communities is a family-owned, values-based organization that provides outstanding care and exceptional experiences for those who live and work in their long-term care (LTC) and retirement homes in Ontario. Their staff are engaged, enthusiastic and strive to exceed expectations. They look to hire talented and caring new people, who want to make a difference and who embrace change with a positive attitude. Investing in staff wellness, recognition, education and leadership development is a priority for peopleCare.

The Recovering Strong Employee Wellness strategy is helping to build a meaningful, sustained workplace wellness culture. This initiative recognizes and responds to the significant challenges that staff encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic response. This promising practice was informed by an interview with the CEO and leadership team members of peopleCare.

Objective and purpose of the initiative

How the initiative improves person-centred care and enables a healthy workforce in long-term care

This promising practice aims to build a meaningful, sustained workplace wellness culture, one in which team members have opportunities to focus on well-being and reconnect to purpose at work.

- It aims to enhance and build a workplace culture that focuses on improving employee mental health and well-being outcomes through connecting staff to the supports they need.
- It provides staff with tailored and leading workplace mental health tools and resources through partnering with mental health teaching experts (such as the Canadian Mental Health Association - Ontario).
- It increases awareness about existing mental health and well-being resources for staff (such as the Employee Assistance Program).
- It increases employee engagement and satisfaction to create better resident care outcomes and bolsters staff recruitment and retention efforts.
- It organically fosters employee well-being throughout the organization through leadership training for interested staff members across all staffing levels.
- It ingrains mental and physical well-being as a key organizational value.



Approach

Main features of the initiative

Recognizing the negative physical and cognitive impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic response created for a large number of its staff, executive leaders identified an opportunity to take greater action and better support affected employees.

- peopleCare's Recovering Strong strategy has addressed employee well-being concerns through several interconnected initiatives:
 - An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) awareness campaign was carried out. (A recent staff survey revealed that only 31 percent of staff respondents were aware of peopleCare's EAP program.)
 - peopleCare has partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association - Ontario by enrolling in their recently created workplace mental health service designed for Ontario healthcare organizations (Your Health Space). This program aims to assist organizations in supporting leaders, healthcare workers and support staff through interactive live workshops and self-directed modules to address chronic workplace stress and promote psychological health and safety

in the workplace. At the time of the interview, approximately 1,200 peopleCare staff members have participated in the *Your Health Space* program, including completing the “Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace” module.¹

- In addition, the ‘wellness champion’ role was created, where each peopleCare LTC home selected an individual – either a point-of-care or senior management staff member – to help lead implementation of the strategy and provide senior leaders with real-time feedback about the well-being needs and concerns of their fellow co-workers. Wellness champions also received leadership training through *Your Health Space*. Recently, 100 staff members, including wellness champions, completed an in-person “Fostering Wellness Through Leadership” education session.

“Our wellness champions worked closely with the leadership team to bring concerns forward, generate innovative ideas and thoughts on employee wellness, and provided the home leadership teams a bit more of a pulse of what’s going on out on the floor, how people are feeling and what are some things that we can do to try to boost employee morale and engagement.”

—Interview Participant

Who was involved?

- peopleCare’s Recovering Strong strategy was created at the senior leadership level and is overseen by various executive directors across the organization.

- peopleCare’s Leadership Support Team (including the chairman and CEO, president, etc.) developed the strategy to align closely with the organization’s core value of “people.”

Implementation

Timeline

peopleCare’s Recovering Strong strategy was formally introduced to staff during the summer of 2021.

Required skills, expertise and resources

- Through the Recovering Strong strategy, peopleCare was the first LTC organization in Ontario to enrol in CMHA Ontario’s Your Health Space program – the program is free to use for healthcare organizations and enables peopleCare to access a team of trainers based across Ontario who facilitate in-person or virtual workshops that can be tailored to the organization’s unique needs.
- peopleCare employees are also able to access an extensive library of self-directed modules focused on promoting psychological health and safety in the workplace.

Key enablers to implementing the initiative

- peopleCare’s Recovering Strong strategy is led by various executive directors across the organization who are responsible for implementing the strategy within specific LTC homes.
- Executive directors work closely with wellness champions across peopleCare’s

1. For more information on *Your Health Space*, see here: <https://ontario.cmha.ca/provincial-programs/your-health-space/>

seven LTC homes and one retirement home to create tailored mental and physical health initiatives to meet the unique needs of different staffing cohorts.

Key factors and risks that hindered the implementation of the initiative

- COVID-19 outbreaks within specific LTC homes delayed training and education initiatives.
- Staff turnover, especially those staff members who held the role of a wellness champion.
- It was noted that implementation of the strategy has been more difficult within larger LTC homes (homes with over 180 residents).

Measuring Success

- peopleCare plans to conduct a formal evaluation of the strategy to measure success factors to-date.
- Prior to developing the strategy in the summer of 2021, an employee wellness survey was carried out to measure different indicators of mental and physical health. For example, 22 percent of survey respondents indicated that they “do not feel good.” The survey also sought to identify common staff wellness concerns and priorities. It was noted that another iteration of the survey will be carried out in the future, where specific questions related to the *Recovering Strong* strategy will be listed.
- A key opportunity identified by peopleCare was to raise awareness of the availability of the Employee Assistance Program so that more employees who needed mental health and wellness supports were able to easily access them. Thanks to a sustained and dedicated effort to raise awareness of the EAP, a second employee wellness survey demonstrated peopleCare raised awareness by 8% - meaning more employees knew they had these benefits and resources available to them. Actions included creating new simple posters, increasing availability of promotional materials in key staff spaces and on digital platforms, bringing our EAP providers onsite for in-services and talking about EAP frequently throughout the year.
- Partnering with CMHA, peopleCare offered mental health education to hundreds of our leaders and staff in a hybrid mix of virtual and in-person sessions. peopleCare’s Wellness Champions took part in an 8-module CMHA mental health eLearning opportunity, evaluating the education’s potential as our next offering to support the organization’s broader teams. peopleCare plans to further analyze employee



Impact of the initiative

Indicators of success

- Staff possess leadership competencies and are interested in playing a key role in leading the implementation of the strategy within their LTC home.
- Staff are eager to participate in continuous learning opportunities.

participation rates in Your Health Space education and training modules to inform future plans and partnerships with experts in the mental health field. peopleCare plans to analyze employee participation rates in *Your Health Space* education and training modules.

- Leadership staff pointed to other methods of indirectly measuring success of the strategy, including peopleCare’s resident and family satisfaction survey as well as engaging resident and family councils.

Sustainability and scalability

Sustainability

- As the challenges of the pandemic recede, peopleCare communities remains committed to sustaining and building on the successes of our *Recovering Strong Strategy*, transitioning the strategy with an ongoing emphasis on wellness, together. A pillar of peopleCare’s new strategic plan is a focus on positively transforming the employee experience by fostering vitality, purpose and fulfilment. Their team is leading a comprehensive review of existing employee programs and initiatives to identify key opportunities to create a positive and inclusive work environment. The resulting action plans will target implementation of wellness programs and resources to support the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of all employees.
- peopleCare identified the need to expand from one wellness champion in each home to a more flexible model with potential for multiple champions at each site (for example to account for staff turnover or transition to new roles, enable more staff with an interest

in wellness to help lead initiatives etc.) In each home, staff who step up to play a lead role are offered training opportunities to enhance their ability to lead employee wellness initiatives, thus transferring more ownership of the strategy from executive directors/ home leadership to team members.

- Wellness initiatives in each home are led through various groups, which can include social committees, Joint Health and Safety Committees, rec teams and the home leaders: separately and in collaboration with one another. Each home’s identified wellness champions – and those who have more organically stepped into the role of a wellness leader/influencer – are well-represented within these groups.
- As peopleCare updates, develops and implements new initiatives, the organization will continue to seek feedback from employees through surveys, focus groups and other means. Leadership will also explore opportunities for partnership and collaboration with a range of additional external organizations and expert stakeholders in the fields of mental health and wellness.

Scalability

- peopleCare has participated in thought leadership initiatives to spread awareness of the strategy within the LTC sector – the organization presented the strategy at the “This is Long-Term Care Provincial Conference 2022” and published a featured

article within the Ontario Long Term Care Association's *Long-Term Care Today Magazine*.²

- While the *Your Health Space* program is only offered in Ontario, CMHA offers several national workplace mental health training programs and resources:
 - CMHA's *Not Myself Today* program provides Canadian organizations with evidence-informed turnkey activities, a members-only online portal and printed materials that focus on building greater awareness about mental health, reducing stigma about mental illness, and fostering safe and supportive work cultures; accessing the program requires the payment of a nominal annual paid subscription.³
 - CMHA National also offers both a Psychological Health and Safety Professional certificate (12 hours of virtual training; \$1,250 per person) and a course, Psychological Health and Safety: The Essentials (three hours of virtual training; \$300 per person). The Essentials training provides an overview of the elements of psychological health and safety, and the Psychological Health and Safety Professional certificate is designed for individuals who are working to improve psychological health and safety in their workplaces or to implement the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.⁴
 - CMHA and the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) collaborated to create the takeaways toolkit. The toolkit was informed by the MHCC's 2018 Case Study Research Project on how 40 workplaces have implemented the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. Offering best practices and activities, the takeaways toolkit is meant to guide other workplaces to help put the standard into practice. Accessing the full toolkit is free of charge.⁵

Additional resources

[Recovering Strong: Supporting employee wellbeing - peopleCare.ca](https://peoplecare.ca/recovering-strong-supporting-employee-wellbeing)

[Fostering Workplace Connections through Mental Health Education](https://peoplecare.ca/fostering-workplace-connections-through-mental-health-education)

[peopleCare Employee Wellness Survey 2022-23](https://peoplecare.ca/peoplecare-employee-wellness-survey-2022-23)

[peopleCare Employee Wellness Survey 2021](https://peoplecare.ca/peoplecare-employee-wellness-survey-2021)

2. The featured article can be accessed at: <https://peoplecare.ca/recovering-strong-supporting-employee-wellbeing/>
3. Information related to Not Myself Today can be accessed at: https://www.notmyselftoday.ca/?utm_source=referral&utm_medium=cmha.ca&utm_campaign=nmt-referral-cmha.ca-web-page-en
4. Information related to both these training offerings can be accessed at: <https://cmha.ca/what-we-do/national-programs/workplace-mental-health/psychological-health-safety-training/>
5. Information related to the Ontario Superhub's training initiatives can be accessed at: <https://cmha.ca/what-we-do/national-programs/workplace-mental-health/takeaways/>

