Information resources for health at work: the Canadian experience

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Background

Finding reliable and timely health information is critical to all workplace parties.

Since 1978, the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) has provided unbiased, relevant information and advice that supports responsible decision-making and promotes safe and healthy working environments.

CCOHS is governed by a tripartite council of governors representing three key stakeholder groups: government (federal, provincial and territorial), employers and workers – a structure that mandates the CCOHS’ impartial approach to information dissemination.
CCOHS serves workers, employers, and governments across Canada

- shop-floor workers with concerns about their safety at work
- members of health and safety committees
- worker safety representatives supervisors and managers
- health intermediaries
- regulatory and technical specialists in OH&S
- government labour inspectors
- faculty and students at Canadian colleges and universities.

New and young workers are a particular focus.
CCOHS fulfills its mandate through a wide range of products and services designed in cooperation with national and international workplace health and safety organizations with an emphasis on preventing illnesses, injuries and fatalities.

CCOHS provides a variety of both public service initiatives at no charge to the user, such as the web-based OSH Answers, the person-to-person Inquiries Service, electronic newsletters, and public presentations.

Services for specialty resources provided on a cost recovery basis include database subscriptions, manuals and training programs. Information is available in paper copy, Internet, Intranet, CD-ROM and DVD formats.
OSH Answers

OSH Answers is a free, trilingual (English, French, Spanish) service. Information based on questions asked of the CCOHS Inquiries Service is prepared for the web and written in a practical question and answer format. Users can browse almost 1200 web documents by topic or use a keyword search engine. In 2003-2004 more than a million individuals accessed question and answer documents over 3.7 million times via OSH Answers.

These documents are very popular, non-technical tools to assist in improving the workplace environment.
Health Promotion / Wellness / Psychosocial

Work/Life Balance

Have you heard people say this before?

"I like my job, I have wonderful kids and a supportive spouse, but I feel that I am stretched to the limit. I never seem to have enough hours in the day to get my work done and still have time for family let alone friends or the things I really want to do."

They are not alone. Several studies have found high levels of stress are often associated with conflicting demands of work and home. One survey showed that even though job satisfaction may be high, a majority of workers rate balancing work and family as more important than any other employment factor. Health Canada publication Juggling Home and Work (Workplace Institute, Nov. 2, 1998) states that one of the greatest challenges
The CCOHS “Wellness in the Workplace” guide provides practical steps and program suggestions for workplace health and wellness programs.
CCOHS defines “workplace health” as a comprehensive and integrated approach to health focusing on both the general population at a workplace and the organization as a whole. Workplace health addresses a broad range of health issues (including physical and psychosocial), environment, health practices and personal resources.

CCOHS bridges the gap between traditional occupational health and safety practitioners and those who see the workplace as a public health setting. There is a place for both, integrated, in the workplace as each has the mandate to help improve and protect the health of people.

In short, the workplace is not only a determinant of health but also a place to practice health promotion.
CCOHS EXPANDS
ITS REACH

CCOHS supports this growing synergy through its involvement in the Canadian Health Network (CHN), a national, non-commercial, bilingual web-based service providing health promotion and prevention information to Canadians on a wide variety of health topics through a single portal.

CHN is a collaboration among major health organizations across Canada, including the Public Health Agency of Canada, providing access to quality-assured e-health information through the CHN web site: www.canadian-health-network.ca
Underlying values respect diversity, inclusiveness, and a desire for high standards of ethics and integrity. A basic operating premise holds that CHN maintains quality, credible, and practical health information for the public good.

This unique collaboration has become one of the most dynamic and comprehensive information networks anywhere in the world.
CCOHS and CHN are able to provide users with easy access to the best workplace health information available anywhere – information that everyone can use to help stay healthy at work.

CHN includes over 17,000 resources from over 1000 Canadian information providers. It covers 7 population groups and 20 health topics. Information includes:

- Healthy eating
- Preventing injuries
- Physical activity
- Substance abuse
- Heart health
- Workplace health
  
  and much more …..
CCOHS is responsible for the Workplace Health Centre
The workplace health collection aims to:

• Be comprehensive and well-balanced to serve the wide-ranging information needs of our various audience groups

• Improve access to quality-assured, reliable and practical workplace health information from organizations across Canada

• Be effectively managed throughout its life cycle, ensuring that it is timely, relevant and responsive to users’ needs.
The main target audience groups for the Workplace Health collection are:

**Canadian consumers:**

- Canadian workers and their families:

**Health promotion intermediaries:**

- Workplace health and safety practitioners (e.g. occupational health nurses)
- Workplace health promotion practitioners (e.g. health promotion specialists working in public health departments)
- Health and safety committees
- Human resources professionals
- Librarians
This general category of users typically needs:

- Health and wellness information and advice to support healthy living and lifestyle choices, e.g. health promotion and disease prevention information, tips, and tools such as guide books

- Workplace health and safety information which will allow them to improve prevention of illness and injury, increase their understanding of workplace hazards and psychosocial concerns, assist them in knowing their rights, etc.
Audience Information Needs (2)

**Health promotion intermediaries**

Workplace intermediaries pass information on to workers and their families. These users often are in search of:

- Guidance related to developing, implementing, managing, maintaining, and evaluating healthy workplace initiatives including information about developing the business case. Also covered are such topics as workplace health promotion models, needs assessment tools, surveys, program development templates, sample programs, guidelines for policy development, sample policies, activities, and case studies.
Audience Information Needs (3)

• Research supporting or evaluating health workplace initiatives. Relevant types of information include program evaluation studies, effectiveness reviews, surveys, and trend data. Also important are social policies related to workplaces that help intermediaries understand the importance of workplace health promotion in the broader context.

• Health and wellness information that can be used or distributed in employee programs. This includes materials in a variety of formats and include items written in plain language or relying heavily on graphics to convey messages.

• Occupational health and safety information, including governing legislation.
Another goal is the need to provide the right type of information to address the needs of different users. Workplace health information may be delivered directly to workers or made available through health intermediaries. To help Canadians make healthy decisions for themselves, CCOHS collects materials at a variety of reading comprehension levels and languages. For individuals who may be marginalized because of literacy challenges, CCOHS includes information useful to health promoters working with these individuals and groups.
The CHN links workplaces and health promotion

Through the CHN, workplace health is put in the context of many different topics including everything from “Active Living” to “Healthy Eating” to “Violence Prevention” and groups such as “Youth”, “Women” and “People Living with Disabilities”.

CHN gives CCOHS another way to reach Canadian workers, particularly those in small and medium workplaces.

The collaboration with the CHN is truly an example of how to promote healthy working and healthy living, by providing information and tools.
Canada’s Healthy Workplace Week

CCOHS also promotes comprehensive workplace health through its involvement in Healthy Workplace Week which promotes fostering a workplace culture of trust and respect where people are happy and healthy at work.

The web site for Canada’s Healthy Workplace Week provides short-term practical tools and ideas for organizations to participate in the Week, as well as long-term strategies and case studies to encourage companies to embrace a comprehensive and integrated approach to organizational health.

www.healthyworkplaceweek.ca
The “Resource Well” features web-based resources for on-going information on healthy workplaces.
Selected References/Resources

http://www.conferenceboard.ca/Health/reports.htm


Health Canada Workplace Health Strategies Bureau

National Quality Institute http://www.nqi.ca. “Canadian Healthy Workplace Criteria”

The Health Communication Unit, Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto. Workplace Health Promotion Resources (Bibliographic database).
http://ccinfoweb.ccohs.ca/workplacehealth/search.html