Your guide to organizational resilience
The pandemic has challenged us all

The pandemic has driven changes to work and to life that are testing many of your organization’s people. We need resilience – the ability to adapt, change and bounce back – more than ever.

Organizational resilience involves many factors, but the individual resilience of employees is a critical one. That’s the focus of this guide.

Resilient employees can mean higher productivity, less absence and burnout, and greater retention. It’s worth a close look because resilience isn’t static – there are steps employees can take to increase it. It’s like riding a bike. We’re not born with the ability to ride a two-wheeler. There’s a training-wheel stage first. But we are born with the capacity to learn to ride.

Resilience works the same way: we’re all born with the ability to increase our innate resilience. And there are actions employers can take to support employee resilience-building.

Sun Life Health can help too – with a wide range of resources, many of which are free. Our goal is to simplify health for Canadians and make it easier to live healthier lives. I’m thrilled to be leading this new unit and creating and sharing solutions that can help.

Dave Jones
President, Sun Life Health
Can “resilience” apply to organizations?

We often think of resilience in a personal sense – how individuals bounce back from difficult situations. But what about organizations? Does a broader definition of resilience apply to corporations, not-for-profit organizations and business partnerships?

The short answer is yes. And while business resilience consists of many parts, individual resilience plays a large role.

We’ve focussed this guide on that role – business resilience through the lens of organizational health and resilient employees.

What is resilience?

Resilience, by definition, is the ability to adapt or change when things don’t go as we expected them to. It involves being able to bounce back from difficult situations.

“When you fall, do you get back up, and how quickly?”
In a recent article, McKinsey & Company identified six components of business resilience.

1. **Financial resilience** – balancing short- and longer-term financial goals

2. **Operational resilience** – creating flexible production capacity to meet changing demands, while remaining stable in the face of operational disruption

3. **Technological resilience** – investing in strong, secure and flexible infrastructure

4. **Reputational resilience** – aligning business values with an organization’s actions and words

5. **Business model resilience** – maintaining business models that can adapt to significant shifts in demand, competition, technology and regulations

6. **Organizational resilience** – fostering a diverse workforce in which everyone feels included and can perform at their best

The sixth component – organizational resilience – is focussed solely on an organization’s people. A resilient workforce is diverse, talented, equitably treated and mentally and physically healthy.

We also know the importance of workplace culture. It sets the tone for your organization. Without a supportive culture, your efforts are likely to fall short of making a real impact.

This suggests the importance of leaders “walking the talk” when it comes to factors that support resilience. For example, if an organization wants mentally healthy employees, leaders must create and support a positive mental health culture.

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Employee resilience explained

While there are many types of resilience, two types in particular can impact the workplace:

**Emotional/psychological resilience** is how an employee responds to stress and adversity and adapts mentally to uncertainty and challenges. A resilient employee can leverage optimism while remaining realistic about the situation. This lets them manage stress and emotion in a way that is positive and healthy.

**Physical resilience** is about the body’s ability to adapt to challenges and maintain strength. This type of resilience is relevant when it comes to recovering from physical illness, injury or accidents.

Research has identified three qualities that are necessary for resilience.¹

Psychologists often frame this as the “three Cs” – **challenge**, **commitment**, **control**. In general, resilient people:

1. **Frame difficulty as a challenge.**
   They look at failure as a growth opportunity, not a reflection of their own self-worth.

2. **Feel a commitment to key life areas.**
   They have a sense of purpose, and are committed not just to work, but to other areas of life. This might include relationships or causes they’re passionate about.

3. **Understand the limits on what they can control.**
   They understand what is and what isn’t in their personal control. This lets them focus on what they can control, and not worry about what they can’t.

The core of organizational resilience:

**employee well-being**

While all parts of business resilience are important, it’s easy to overlook the people part when business pressures build. It can be a challenge to focus on employee health when financial, operational and technological concerns loom. And with the pandemic, these business concerns are greater than ever.

That said, organizations that lose their focus on employee well-being risk negative impacts down the road. These include challenges with productivity, absence and retention. And these all impact the bottom line.

The good news is that employers are uniquely positioned to support and build employee resilience. They have the ability and opportunity to put meaningful supports in place. And a culture that focusses on organizational health and resilience starts at the top with leadership support. Leaders need to:

- Understand the foundational attributes needed for building resilience.
- Understand what workplace services and supports are available that can help.
- Put the needed solutions in place – and champion their use.
Foundational attributes for building employee resilience

and how we can help

Here are five attributes that many psychologists view as being foundational for building employee resilience and, as a leader, how you can support them. And we can help. Sun Life offers many solutions that support employee resilience.

1. Social connections

Having strong social connections can help you navigate challenging times. It’s also a crucial part of maintaining good mental health.

What you can do
• Non-work-related social events
• Social platforms
• Community outreach

Solutions from Sun Life
Our Lumino Health library. Employees will find articles such as:
• Why good friends are important
• Seniors and technology: staying connected to prevent isolation
• How to help someone with mental illness
2. Purpose

Having a purpose refers to both big things (like a job) and smaller things (like walking the dog). A strong purpose helps build resilience.

What you can do
- Skills training
- Performance management goal setting
- Career planning

Solutions from Sun Life
Employee Assistance Program: Employee Assistance Programs can be a vital part of an organization’s mental health and disability management strategy. It can be a critical first step for employees in getting the help they need. This includes support for career development, financial planning and navigating through major life events.

Our Lumino Health library. Employees will find articles on goal setting and adapting to change.
3. Health and wellness

Staying healthy and focusing on wellness is fundamental to building resilience. This includes a focus on sleep, exercise and good nutrition.

What you can do
- Wellness initiatives
- Regular promotion of group benefits coverage and resources

Solutions from Sun Life

Personalized mental health coach. We’re currently piloting an innovative mental health coaching program, targeting a wider launch in 2022. It uses predictive analytics to reach out to employees with a high risk of developing a mental health issue. The program offers the employee the opportunity to engage with a personal coach – a trained mental health professional. The coach knows the employee’s available coverage and resources and can guide them on their individual mental health journey.

Lumino Health. Our digital health platform offers free physical and mental health resources. The platform also includes a health provider search tool to help employees connect with local health-care professionals, even virtually.

Lumino Health Virtual Care. Lumino Health Virtual Care is now part of our extended health-care offering. It includes online access for mental health treatments. These treatments take place by phone or video conference. And they are eligible for reimbursement through the employee’s extended health-care benefits.
4. Healthy thoughts

Being able to turn negative thought processes into healthy thoughts is foundational to building resilience. It takes practice, but it works. The human brain is adaptable and can rewire itself to change negative self-talk into more productive thoughts.

What you can do

• Coaching on reframing and problem-solving within the workplace
• On-site meditation or yoga

Solutions from Sun Life

Online CBT. With online cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for anxiety and depression, the employee completes their therapy online. This is done through self-paced modules. A therapist monitors and consults with them online at regular intervals. Research has shown that online CBT is as effective as in-person therapy for mild to moderate anxiety and depression. It can also be less expensive, improve access, and reduce stigma.

Pharmacogenomics. Pharmacogenomic testing uses information about an individual's genetic makeup to determine the drugs and doses that can work best. A cheek swab or saliva sample is all it takes. The lab can provide results to the individual's doctor in days.

This testing can reduce or eliminate the trial-and-error process, especially for mental health treatments. It can provide better health outcomes for employees and cost savings for the employer.
5. Seeking help

Being able to identify when you need help is a sign of resilience (strength) and not a weakness. It may seem counter-intuitive, but a resilient person will seek help sooner rather than later.

What you can do

- Communicating resources and benefits plan solutions
- For mental health, having leadership share their stories, and reinforcing that it’s okay to reach out for help

Solutions from Sun Life

Coverage for psychological treatments. Most benefit plans offer coverage for mental health practitioners at $500 or $1,000 per year. But many employers are viewing higher coverage maximums as an investment, not a cost. The goal is to eliminate the financial barrier to mental health treatment. The Canadian Psychological Association recommends a standalone annual coverage maximum of between $3,500 to $4,000. This amount provides coverage for 15 to 20 sessions. This is the number of sessions required to achieve a therapeutic outcome for people suffering from depression or anxiety.

Mental Health Navigator: We’ve partnered with Teladoc to offer their Mental Health Navigator services to our extended health-care Clients. If an employee has a mental health concern, a Navigator can guide them to the most appropriate care.
Focusing on mental health

We know the pandemic will have lasting effects on the mental health of Canadians. It is one of the health challenges of our time, and one many employers struggle with addressing. If we don’t address mental health in the workplace, we can’t build resilient organizations.

Our Mental Health Strategy Toolkit gives you a starting point for building a workplace mental health strategy. It’s a practical guide to help you develop the fundamentals of a strategy, including how to:

• identify opportunities and set priorities, and
• take action and evaluate outcomes

It also includes online manager training videos. Through self-teaching modules, managers learn to identify potential mental health issues, reduce stigma and create a healthier work environment. We also have a module to educate your people leaders on how to use inclusive language when talking about mental health.
As McKinsey notes, a resilient workforce is both diverse and equitably treated. From a benefits standpoint, we have two recent additions that can expand your diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

**Gender affirmation coverage.**
Our gender affirmation coverage helps gender-diverse employees or dependents through their transition. It supplements provincial or territorial coverage, covering feminization or masculinization surgeries not typically included in government programs. This additional support makes a meaningful difference and helps employees live happier, healthier and more resilient lives.

**Surrogacy benefit.**
Surrogacy arrangements are growing in Canada, due in part to rising infertility rates. In addition, many same-sex couples looking to start or grow their families also use a surrogate. Our Surrogacy benefit provides coverage for eligible fertility expenses incurred by a surrogate on an employee’s behalf.
Take action
on organizational resilience

Many challenges can arise in an employee’s life that will test their resilience. These include workplace stress and adversity, financial difficulties, relationship problems and health issues.

Poor resilience on an individual employee level can weaken overall business resilience. Productivity can decline, absence and associated costs can increase and the retention of valuable employees can suffer.

There are many solutions that can help. Resilience isn’t static – and all employees can learn, train and further develop it. Whether someone is naturally resilient or not, they can build their resilience over time. Resilience truly is a muscle that people can use and grow.

A focus on building employee health and resilience requires patience, but it can yield valuable dividends down the road.

To learn more, talk to your advisor, consultant or Sun Life representative.

sunlife.ca/groupbenefits