

# AS@W: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

## Why the concern with workplace depression?

Mental health disorders, particularly depression, are rapidly becoming the leading cause of workplace disability in Canada, as they are in the rest of the industrialized world. The cost is enormous, much of which is borne by business in the loss of skilled and productive employees and escalating costs. There is a need to provide practical, easily accessible, effective tools for employers and employees to address possible depression in a timely manner. Dealing with depression in the workplace can reduce the burden of disease to the individual, the organization and society.

## How big is the problem of workplace depression?

Mental illnesses such as depression can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender or background. The estimated cost of mental illness in Canadian workplaces is over **\$20 billion per annum**. As a result, it is important to raise the awareness of the impact of depression and other mental illnesses and put supports in place to improve employee and organizational health. It is important that we prevent workplace mental health problems and also assist employees who may be experiencing depression.

## Does this mean that the workplace causes depression?

No, since we don't know the exact cause of depression we can't say this. Depression is a complex disorder with many causes, some of them physical and some of them psychological. Most adults spend a significant amount of their time, and derive much of their identity, from their jobs. Therefore the workplace can play a key role in contributing to, or protecting against, depression. It is in the interests of employers, employees, labour and healthcare providers to work together to address this issue.

## What is *Antidepressant Skills at Work (AS@W)*?

AS@W is a free, on-line program to help working individuals understand and manage the symptoms of depression in order to improve functioning and decrease the likelihood of disability. It is based on cognitive-behavioural techniques that have been demonstrated to be helpful and effective in many research studies. It has a specific focus on the experiences and issues that are likely to be encountered by working adults.



## AS@W Antidepressant Skills at Work Dealing with Mood Problems in the Workplace

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## What is in the AS@W manual?

The AS@W manual consists of an overview of the nature and signs of depression and their relevance to the workplace. This is followed by the presentation of three core skills: effective solving problem-solving, realistic thinking and reactivating your life. The skills are described in a clear step-by-step fashion with useful examples and opportunities for practice. These are followed by some suggestions for improving lifestyle and addressing particular workplaces issues such as taking time off and talking to others about depression.

## What is self-care?

This is an approach to the management of a physical or psychological health condition, such as depression, that is guided by the individual. It is complementary to existing services, care and rehabilitation, whether these are provided by the public health care system or by company programs and services. Self-care has been recognized as a critical ingredient for many physical and psychological conditions as it enhances outcome, reduces impairment and prevents the probability of recurrence.

## What is innovative about this self-care manual?

To the best of our knowledge, this is the only existing self-care manual focused specifically on depression in the workplace. In addition, it uses a self care approach which is an approach to management of a disorder that is guided by the individual, and complementary to existing care and rehabilitation. This approach is: increasingly incorporated into **best practice** guidelines for depression; **timely** (and can be made available to employees exhibiting early behavioral or functional signs of depressions); **cost-effective** (readily reproduced/disseminated); and **practical** (focuses on enhancing function which is directly relevant to workplace function).

## Who is the AS@W Manual intended for?

The manual is primarily intended for working adults who are experiencing low mood or depression. They may or may not have an actual medical diagnosis or be involved in some treatment or intervention. The guide is likely to be particularly helpful for persons who are struggling with early signs of depression while still at work. However, it can still be of benefit for employees with more severe depression, persons who are off work or engaged in a work return plan, or individuals who have had an episode of depression and want to develop skills to prevent a relapse. It is not a psychological or medical treatment, and is not a replacement for treatment where this is needed. If expert assistance or treatment is needed, the services of a competent professional should be sought.



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## How should the AS@W manual be used?

The manual can be used independently and confidentially by any working person concerned about his or her mood. Managers, union representatives, co-workers or human resources personnel who are concerned about possible mood problems in their staff or colleagues may inform them about the guide. These mood problems may have shown up in the workplace as changes in behaviour, performance or relationships with others. It should be stressed that the guide is not intended to diagnose depression or to override relevant employer or labour programs, practices or agreements. The guide can serve to complement other forms of intervention such as Employee and Family Assistance, pharmacological or psychosocial treatments, or disability management.

## How was *Antidepressant Skills at Work* developed?

The guide was developed by British Columbia Mental Health and Addiction Services (BCMHAS), an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. The guide and accompanying materials have been authored by **Dr. Dan Bilsker**, **Dr. Merv Gilbert**, and **Dr. Joti Samra** – registered psychologists and scientist-practitioners with expertise in issues relating to workplace mental health. These psychologists are with the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University. The guide was written on the basis of a review of the scientific literature; consultation with employers, unions, mental health providers and employee groups; and adaptation of existing self-care depression programs.

## How can the manual be accessed?

The manual is available for viewing and free download at [www.carmha.ca/antidepressant-skills/work/](http://www.carmha.ca/antidepressant-skills/work/) or from [www.bcmhas.ca/research](http://www.bcmhas.ca/research). Individuals or organizations are free to print and make multiple copies of the guide, with permission from CARMHA ([publications@carmha.ca](mailto:publications@carmha.ca)). Print copies and audio CDs are available at a low cost from our ordering page at [www.carmha.ca/ordering](http://www.carmha.ca/ordering).

For further information about AS@W and associated resources and materials, please visit [www.carmha.ca/selfcare](http://www.carmha.ca/selfcare). This information will be updated on a regular basis.



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