



Ontario Bar Association's
OPENING REMARKS
Starting the Conversation about Mental Health in the Profession

A Summary of Recommendations from *All Rise: A Summit on Mental Health in the Profession*

On May 22, 2015, the [Ontario Bar Association \(OBA\)](#), in partnership with four other professional associations, [held a mental health summit](#) that examined the need to address mental health among the professions.

The full-day event served as a robust brainstorming session for participants, including members of the OBA, [Ontario Dental Association](#), [Ontario Medical Association](#), [Ontario Psychological Association](#) and [Ontario Society of Professional Engineers](#), to identify ways to create more open, supportive workplace environments.

A range of suggestions for improving mental health supports for professionals were discussed, providing opportunities for both immediate action-steps and other long-term considerations specific to the legal community and beyond, as outlined below.

The OBA also appreciates the feedback and participation from all of the professions involved in the mental health summit and will continue to seek out opportunities to work together to pursue an ongoing conversation about advancing mental health supports for professionals.

Ideas for the Legal Profession:

- Recognize that articling students and new associates may benefit from additional information on how to set boundaries and maintain mental health
- Require articling students and first-year lawyers to undertake mandatory psychological counselling twice annually at no cost
- Provide mental health seminars or presentations on common mental health issues
- Create a roster of mental health service providers who work specifically with lawyers
- Engage in regular, thoughtful discussions about expectations (e.g., billable hours) and fairly determine ways to mutually meet objectives.

- Encourage managing partners to lead by example to foster a healthy work environment
- Encourage self-benefitting opportunities for lawyers to take breaks, such as walks or classes
- Build health and wellness into the activities of OBA Sections
- Help build and promote support groups for lawyers
- Promote mentoring
- Encourage articling students to access the range of supports available to them (including the OBA's [Mental Health Briefs](#))

Considerations for All Professions:

- Adopt guidelines on creating a healthy and accepting workplace that firms can adopt at will
- Incorporate mental health educational training and coping strategies into more workshops and professional development opportunities, and include anonymous chat sessions to engage with material
- Have schools or regulatory body facilitate mental health training
- Encourage regulatory bodies to provide mental health information and demonstrate its importance
- Make wellness education mandatory
- Negotiate with insurance companies that may be denying clients with mental illness coverage for disability benefits
- Create an anonymous chat room for the profession where professionals can discuss mental health
- Ask colleagues to consciously check-in with each other, possibly using a buddy system
- Offer discounts for pilates, yoga and other classes that help reduce stress, or make free classes available at convenient locations (e.g., the Law Society, or at other regulatory organizations)
- Offer work-life balance programs or exercise programs at workplaces
- Encourage activities, such as:
 - Alcohol-free social events
 - Walking work meetings
 - Managing partners to get involved in corporately sponsored healthy activities