

Project Insights Report

Mind Your Health



PARTNERS

Not 9 to 5



LOCATIONS

Across Canada



INVESTMENT

\$239,960



PUBLISHED

October 2024



CONTRIBUTORS

Christian Noumi,
*Research and
Evaluation Associate*

Laura McDonough,
*Associate Director of
Knowledge Mobilization
& Insights*

Executive Summary

The “Mind Your Health” project, initiated by Not 9 to 5 in Canada, addressed the acute mental health crisis in the hospitality sector. This sector, known for its high-pressure environments and irregular hours, saw a significant rise in anxiety, depression and substance use among its workers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This project aimed to develop and implement mental health resources tailored specifically for this workforce. It involved key stakeholders like industry associations, mental health professionals and educational institutions.

The project delivered a pan-Canadian survey that showed that a large majority of hospitality workers who responded suffered from mental health issues, with 87% experiencing burnout and 77% experiencing depression. The project’s response included the creation of the CNECTing Platform and the CNECTed Certification Program, which provided flexible, industry-specific mental health education. Despite challenges, such as in engaging racialized communities and overcoming logistical delays, the initiative successfully launched multiple resources, reaching a broad audience and laying a foundation for future work.

The significance of this project lies in its potential to influence broader policy and practice, highlighting the need for leadership engagement and culturally sensitive approaches in mental health initiatives. The findings advocate for policies that mandate mental health training for management and stress the importance of adaptable, inclusive mental health services.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 Eighty-seven percent of surveyed front-line staff in the food and beverage sector experienced burnout, 77% reported depression, 84% faced high levels of anxiety and 63% struggled with disordered eating. Sixty-seven percent of these workers kept their struggles to themselves.
- 2 Too few racialized hospitality workers opted to participate in the survey, suggesting the need to cultivate engagement with racialized communities and organizations to better understand the mental health needs of these workers.
- 3 Teaching leadership rather than individual front-line staff about workplace mental health can cultivate better working environments and promote a culture that cares about mental health and well-being.

The Issue

In Canada, the hospitality sector has long been characterized by high-pressure environments, unconventional working hours, and a culture that often normalizes substance use and undervalues mental health. This has led to a significant mental health crisis among workers in bars and restaurants, a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic introduced additional stressors, such as job insecurity, reduced hours and fears of virus exposure, compounding the already prevalent issues of low wages and emotionally intense work. These factors have contributed to heightened levels of anxiety, depression and substance use disorders among hospitality workers, who are often expected to suppress their mental and emotional struggles to meet job demands.

Historically, efforts to address mental health in the hospitality industry have been sporadic and insufficient, with few initiatives addressing the unique challenges faced by these workers. Previous attempts were often narrow in scope and impact, lacking a comprehensive strategy to tackle the root causes of the mental health crisis in this sector. Many of the existing support systems were not designed with the specific needs of hospitality workers in mind, as they fail to consider the workers' irregular work schedules and the industry's prevalent culture of substance use.



What We Investigated

In response to this ongoing crisis, the Mind Your Health project by Not 9 to 5 was launched, aiming to develop training on mental health for hospitality workers. This initiative sought to establish a unified approach that incorporated input from both workers and mental health professionals. It led to the development of various resources, including webinars, a guidebook for post-COVID-19 reopening, and a digital certification program. These tools were crafted to directly address the experiences and challenges faced by workers, promoting a shift toward a healthier, more supportive industry culture.

The research questions guiding this project included:

- How prevalent are mental health and substance use issues among service and hospitality workers?
- What are the barriers to addressing these issues within the workplace?
- How can workplace leadership be engaged to support mental health initiatives?

As a foundation for the resources developed, the project conducted a survey with 673 Canadian hospitality workers and numerous industry stakeholders. Insights from this survey informed the development of the [CNECTing Platform](#), the [Workplace Mental Health Guide and Resources](#), the [CNECTed Certification Program](#), and the Kitchen Table Talks webinar series. The CNECTing Platform provided a dedicated online space for hospitality workers to engage with others in their hospitality community and share resources. The CNECTed Certification Program offered flexible multimedia learning tailored to various preferences, allowing participants to progress at their own pace.

The project was characterized by its flexible and inclusive approach, which is crucial for catering to the unconventional work hours and diverse backgrounds of industry workers. This strategy ensured that the developed resources were both accessible and relevant, effectively addressing the unique challenges faced by employees in the service and hospitality sector.

What We're Learning

Mental health challenges were common among the hospitality workers surveyed

Over the course of the Mind Your Health project, Not 9 to 5 engaged 673 service and hospitality professionals through a comprehensive survey, which revealed critical insights into the mental health challenges faced by this workforce. The survey highlighted that 87% of front-line staff experienced burnout, 77% reported depression, 84% faced high levels of anxiety, and 63% struggled with disordered eating. Notably, 67% of workers who responded to the survey kept their struggles to themselves, underscoring the urgent need for accessible mental health resources. Project partners feel that these data demonstrate that the challenges in the hospitality industry are worse than originally estimated.

Racialized hospitality workers may be more open to personalized, qualitative engagement strategies

Despite the coordinators' intention to target racialized hospitality workers to better understand their mental health needs, the survey had few racialized participants. In face-to-face discussions, racialized community members tended to be wary of the data collection methods and unsure of how the data would be used. This underscored the need for more personalized, qualitative engagement strategies that focus on building relationships over time.

Leadership is the key to creating a workplace that supports strong mental health

While initial project efforts focused on targeting individuals for training and uptake of resources, feedback from participants and employers indicated that involving leaders and managers leads to more enduring changes in workplace culture. This echoes findings from other projects supported by the Future Skills Centre on the central role of managers and supervisors in quality of work. Given the labour shortages in the hospitality industry, there is more pressure on employers to provide good-quality work to attract and retain the workers they need.

A growing network of partners is a testament to need in the industry

A number of new partnerships emerged as a result of this project, demonstrating need and enthusiasm for the project's approach to mental health. New partnerships included mental health organizations across Canada, educational institutions and industry associations, some of which have integrated project materials into their own curricula and programs. These collaborations extended the project's impact and underscored the value of the developed resources.

Why It Matters

The insights gained from this initiative underscore the critical need for targeted mental health support within the service and hospitality sectors. The findings highlight the pervasive mental health challenges workers face in these industries, emphasizing the need for systemic changes to workplace cultures and the implementation of supportive measures at an organizational level.

A key takeaway from the initiative was the pivotal role of leadership in mental health initiatives. The project showed that active involvement of workplace leaders in mental health education and fostering supportive environments increased the likelihood of resource use and cultural shifts within organizations. This underscores the need for policies that mandate mental health training for management and leadership to ensure they can effectively support their teams.

The initiative also uncovered barriers to engaging racialized communities, such as distrust and apprehension toward data collection methods. This insight is vital for those designing mental health interventions, highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive approaches that focus on trust building and community involvement. Policies should mandate that mental health services be co-designed with diverse community representatives to improve the relevance and effectiveness of these programs.

Moreover, the project demonstrated the potential for mental health initiatives to be scaled and adopted across various regions and sectors. The use of the project's resources by different organizations, including educational bodies and professional associations, showed the broad applicability of these strategies. This indicates that similar approaches could be effectively used in other sectors experiencing mental health issues, potentially leading to widespread systemic changes.

► What's Next

Not 9 to 5 continues to offer mental health resources to the hospitality sector via the [CNECTing platform](#). Their expanding list of partnerships means that their mental health resources are being offered to a growing number of workers across Canada and beyond.



State of Skills: Sustainable jobs for economic growth

Green-related skills and knowledge are growing in significance and are becoming widespread across many sectors and occupations, requiring more workers to upskill by building upon their existing competencies.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

Noumi, C. and McDonough, L. (2024). Project Insights Report: Mind Your Health, Not 9 to 5. Toronto: Future Skills Centre. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/not-9-to-5/>

Funded by the
Government of Canada's
Future Skills Program



Mind Your Health is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

© Copyright 2025 – Future Skills Centre / Centre des Compétences futures