The Working Mind
Veterinary Medicine

AN OPENING MINDS PROGRAM

Canadian Veterinary Medical Association

Association canadienne des médecins vétérinaires



Why Mental Health Training Makes You a More Informed and Compassionate Veterinary Leader

In veterinary medicine, leaders balance patient care, client expectations, team dynamics, emotional demands, and business pressures, often all in the same day. When stress builds up and isn't addressed, a lot is at risk: the wellbeing of the people caring for animals, patient outcomes, team communication, performance, retention, workplace culture, and more. **The Working Mind for Veterinary Medicine** provides an evidence-based framework to recognize how daily work challenges may impact ourselves, colleagues and our team. This is particularly relevant to veterinary workplaces, where supporting people early can make a difference for the individual, the team, and ultimately the clients and patients served. Built specifically for veterinary medicine, the program reflects the realities of veterinary practice rather than generic workplace scenarios.

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Why This Training Matters for Veterinary Medicine

The mental health of Canada's veterinary professionals is an important concern. A survey[1] of Canadian veterinarians found:

- **29% reported** experiencing depression
- **9% reported** experiencing anxiety
- **26% reported** suicidal thoughts, plans, or attempts within the previous 12 months
- **51% reported** high levels of emotional exhaustion
- **64% scored** high on traumatic stress
- **42% reported** burnout

Research[2] has also found high levels of **burnout, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress** among veterinary team members, and that the prevalence of serious psychological distress among team members was almost twice that of veterinarians.

These findings reinforce the value to leaders of having all team members complete **The Working Mind for Veterinary Medicine – Employee** course and, as a leader, completing **The Working Mind for Veterinary Medicine – Manager/ Leader course.** Together, these courses equip everyone with practical, evidence-informed skills to recognize changes in mental health in themselves and others, have supportive conversations, reduce stigma, and contribute to psychologically healthy and safe veterinary workplaces.

Is one of your responsibilities leading others?

Experience all three employee modules, plus an exclusive fourth module designed specifically for leaders.

- Fulfill your role as a leader in creating and maintaining a psychologically healthy and safe culture, including during critical incidents.
- Support team members through mental health challenges with confidence and compassion.
- Apply the Mental Health Continuum to guide workplace conversations and support team members.
- Navigate return-to-work and accommodation considerations.
- Respond effectively to critical incidents, crises, and provide post-incident recovery.

The Manager/Leader course includes the first three modules as the Employee course, with the veterinary facilitator bringing a leadership lens to the discussion.

During these modules, you'll learn to:

- Recognize and unlearn stigma.

> **"I don't think I truly recognized how deeply ingrained the stigma around mental health and discussing it at work, truly is in this profession. I think I have a better understanding of that stigma and tools to help fight against it in the future for myself and others." -Past Participant**

- Build awareness of psychological health and safety in the workplace.
- Use the Mental Health Continuum to recognize changes in yourself and others.

> **"Using the colours of the Continuum gives a common language to talk about mental health during different situations and gives me the confidence to start conversations that I previously didn't know how to have." -Past Participant**

- Have supportive conversations and connect people with appropriate support.
- Understand how the unique pressures experienced by veterinary professionals influence changes on the Continuum.

> **"The videos were incredibly powerful. I appreciated the courage and honesty of the veterinary professionals who shared their stories. Seeing veterinarians, RVTs, managers, and leaders represented made the course feel relevant to everyone working in veterinary medicine."-Past Participant**

- Explain how Post-traumatic stress injuries occur and their impact on job performance and well-being.

> **"I think the biggest takeaway for me was the content regarding stress injuries, chronic stress and fatigue, as I do think these are such big factors in the veterinary profession."-Past Participant**

- Practical coping and self-care strategies to manage stress while leading others.

1. Perret, J. L., Best, C. O., Coe, J. B., Greer, A. L., Khosa, D. K., & Jones-Bitton, A. (2020). Prevalence of mental health outcomes among Canadian veterinarians. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, 256(3), 365–375. https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.256.3.365

2. Volk JO, Schimmack U, Strand EB, Reinhard A, Vasconcelos J, Hahn J, Stiefelmeyer K, Probyn-Smith K. Executive summary of the Merck Animal Health Veterinarian Wellbeing Study III and Veterinary Support Staff Study. J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2022 Jul 1;260(12):1547-1553. doi: 10.2460/javma.22.03.0134. PMID: 35943942.

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