



## **Building Psychologically Safe Workplaces in Canada: Insights from the “2025 Psychologically Safe Workplaces Summit”**



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## Introduction

In an era where mental health challenges are rising and employee expectations are evolving, creating psychologically safe workplaces has moved from being a nice-to-have to a business necessity. On **June 25, 2025**, OHS Canada and Talent Canada co-hosted the *Psychologically Safe Workplaces Summit*, gathering occupational health experts, human resource professionals, corporate leaders, and policy thinkers for a day of insight, debate, and forward-thinking strategy.

This report distills the major lessons from the summit and outlines best practices to help organizations across Canada foster psychological safety as a core element of workplace health, productivity, and sustainability.

## 1. Psychological Safety: From Idealism to Imperative

“Psychological safety isn’t just about being nice. It’s about being real—and safe enough to do so.” – Keynote Speaker

### Redefining Safety

Traditionally, workplace safety focused on physical risks—slips, falls, and mechanical hazards. But speakers emphasized the need to redefine "safety" to include emotional well-being and mental resilience. Psychological safety, defined as the shared belief that it is safe to take interpersonal risks, is now a foundational pillar of organizational health.

### Business Case

Data shared at the summit underscored that psychologically safe teams:

- Experience **higher retention** and **lower absenteeism**
- Generate **more innovation**
- Outperform in **complex, dynamic environments**

Leaders are urged to stop treating mental wellness as an HR side project and embed it in core organizational values and performance metrics.

## 2. Leadership as a Lever for Cultural Change

Leadership emerged as the single most critical factor influencing the workplace psychological safety.

## Role of Leaders

Leaders must:

- **Model vulnerability** by speaking openly about challenges
- **Invite dissenting voices** and questions
- **Ensure follow-through** on psychological safety commitments

One panel discussed how even well-meaning managers can unintentionally contribute to toxic environments if they discourage feedback, act defensively, or show favoritism.

## Training and Accountability

Organizations were encouraged to:

- Invest in **leadership development** focused on empathy, conflict resolution, and inclusive communication
- Implement **360-degree feedback loops**
- Align psychological safety with performance reviews and strategic outcomes

## 3. Embedding DEI into Psychological Safety

“You can’t have psychological safety if your team members don’t feel they belong.”

### Inclusive Foundations

Psychological safety cannot be achieved in exclusionary or biased workplaces. A truly safe environment ensures all individuals—regardless of race, gender identity, language, or disability—feel heard, respected, and protected.

### Policy Recommendations

Speakers outlined key components of an effective DEI policy that supports psychological health:

- Clear anti-discrimination guidelines
- Mechanisms for reporting and resolving bias or microaggressions
- Organizational culture audits to track inclusion gaps
- Inclusive language campaigns (e.g., “Words Matter” initiatives)

Integrating DEI into safety policies was positioned as not optional, but essential.

## 4. Mental Health: Proactive, Not Reactive

### Shifting the Paradigm

Panelists repeatedly challenged the reactive model of waiting for crises or clinical diagnoses. Instead, they promoted **proactive mental health** systems emphasizing:

- **Resilience training** (e.g., stress management, mindfulness)
- **Early intervention** via psychological check-ins or digital assessments
- **Peer-support programs**, particularly in high-risk sectors like healthcare and first response

### **Access and Equity**

The summit also addressed access disparities. Rural and marginalized workers face unique barriers to mental health services. Organizations were encouraged to:

- Expand virtual care platforms
- Partner with culturally competent providers
- Offer trauma-informed services that reflect workers' lived experiences

## **5. Accountability and Continuous Improvement**

### **Measuring What Matters**

What gets measured gets managed. Psychological safety cannot remain an abstract goal. Suggested tools included:

- **Pulse surveys** on psychological safety (e.g., “Do you feel safe speaking up at work?”)
- **Incident tracking** for bullying, harassment, or psychological injury
- **Benchmarking** across sectors and jurisdictions

### **Feedback Loops**

Safe environments are iterative. Organizations should:

- Establish formal **feedback channels**
- Encourage anonymous input
- Review psychological health metrics alongside safety reports and KPIs

## 6. Practical Examples and Case Studies

### Healthcare Sector

A hospital shared its success with a **“Check-In Champions”** program, where designated team members conducted weekly peer mental health check-ins and escalated support when needed.

### Construction Industry

One large employer implemented **resilience and psychological first aid training** for site supervisors. In a year, stress leave dropped by 19%.

### Public Sector

A government agency introduced a **DEI-aligned performance appraisal system**, linking inclusive leadership behaviors to advancement opportunities.

## 7. Emerging Themes for Future Action

The summit concluded with a consensus that psychological safety is a long-term, whole-organization project. Key future areas include:

- **AI and Privacy:** Balancing mental health monitoring tools with data protection
- **Workplace Design:** Using architecture and flexible scheduling to reduce psychological strain
- **Sector Collaboration:** Sharing best practices through national forums and open-source toolkits

## Conclusion

Psychological safety is not optional—it is a core driver of workplace effectiveness. Organizations that invest in psychological safety gain resilience, innovation, and trust.

By aligning leadership, policy, and practice, Canadian workplaces can build supportive environments that protect mental health and empower teams.

## Recommendations Checklist

- ✓ Develop a psychological safety strategy aligned with health and safety policy
- ✓ Train leaders on inclusive, trauma-informed supervision
- ✓ Implement psychological risk assessments
- ✓ Create peer-support and early intervention programs
- ✓ Measure outcomes and adjust strategies based on feedback