

**Speech of the Minister of Public Health, Dr Jamil Jabak,  
at the launch of the 2019 National Mental Health Awareness Campaign**

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

As is customary, we meet today to launch the national mental health awareness campaign.

This year, the campaign is of special nature as it addresses the interaction between mental health and economic growth by launching the National Initiative for Mental Health in the Workplace.

In fact, mental health is of key importance; there is no health without mental health and mental health is as important as physical health. However, several factors affect our mental health, be it personal, social or professional with impacts which can be both positive or negative .

Thus, what is the link between mental health and the workplace? In fact, we spend most of our lives at work and work in and by itself protects us from mental disorders. However, a psychologically unhealthy work environment - that is, one that is loaded with stress and poor managerial and organizational practices which affect the mental health of staff - can increase the risk of mental disorders, especially depression, anxiety disorders, or substance use disorders.

An unhealthy work environment, through its impact on staff, can increase staff absenteeism and turnover and cause low productivity levels, all in all translating into major economic losses . For example, staff turnover is particularly expensive for employers because it leads to the loss of valuable talents and entails both recruitment and retraining costs .

On the other hand, workplaces which promote and protect mental health score high levels of productivity and return on investments through interventions aimed at promoting mental health in the workplace.

It is therefore the duty of employers and managers, but also of their own interest, to effectively reduce factors that are detrimental to and promote factors which help sustain mental health in the workplace. More to the point, they must seek to build a culture that promotes mental health and supports staff who suffer from mental disorders. Mental health in the workplace is a pivotal issue which cannot be ignored anymore and which is gaining increasing attention on a global level due to its correlation with health, productivity, the economy and every conceivable development sector .

Fortunately, there is much scientific evidence and many recommendations put at our disposal in this regard. In fact, a charter has been established by the Ministry of Public Health and the World Health Organization, which outlines the key principles and procedures to be

implemented by employers if they want to be on the right track and commit themselves to the protection and promotion of mental health in their workplace.

To these employers and managers, we say: # do\_not\_miss\_the\_ opportunity. Signing the National Charter for Mental Health in the Workplace, is an opportunity to start working towards protecting and promoting mental health in the workplace. By signing the Charter and pledging to implement it, you are taking a major step towards the success of your organizations and contributing to the national vision that aims to give "all individuals in Lebanon the opportunity to enjoy the best possible mental health".

This initiative is part of the National Mental Health Strategy 2015-2020 which is implemented by the National Mental Health Program at the Ministry of Public Health in partnership with the World Health Organization and other UN agencies, ministries and civil society organizations. Much has been achieved through this participatory implementation of the strategy, with the aim of promoting the mental health system and provide community mental health services based on scientific evidence and human rights principles. The strategy also aims at strengthening mental health programs and preventing mental disorders.

Today, we invite employers to take part in this endeavor and seize the opportunity. Because "Mental Health in the Workplace" is a true opportunity; an opportunity for staff as well as for employers and organizations. Let us not miss the opportunity and, together, pledge to build a better environment in the workplace .