

MEMORANDUM

TO: Health Policy Branch, Health Canada

FROM: Renze Nauta, Program Director, Work & Economics
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DATE: June 1, 2026

SUBJECT: The Importance of Work: Considerations for Health Canada's Men and Boys' Health Strategy

WHO WE ARE

Cardus is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.

Cardus's Work and Economics program has for decades conducted research on the importance of work and on policies to promote employment among people who have difficulty accessing the labour market.

ISSUE

Health Canada is consulting to develop a Men and Boys' Health Strategy.¹ Employment is a crucial part for men to lead fulfilling lives. Cardus believes any strategy that seeks to improve men's mental health and well-being should include employment as a core consideration.

BACKGROUND

The benefits of employment are often viewed through a financial lens where employment generates income for the worker and contributes to economic growth. However, the benefits of work are much more than just a paycheque and stronger GDP. Work is an anchor point that provides structure, socialization, and purpose to people and links them to their communities and broader society.

RECOMMENDATION

Cardus recommends that the Government of Canada consider employment as a key pillar for men's health. Further, the strategy should consider the anticipated impact of artificial intelligence on men's participation in the labour market.

RATIONALE

(1) Employment has strong social and emotional benefits generally.

The social and emotional benefits of employment should not be underestimated by policymakers. A study found that even in cases where an individual could make just as much money on welfare, the individual often worked a job, leading the author to state that the simplest explanation is that "people have a strong preference for work".² This finding corresponds to a British study that noted in their context that "the main cost of job loss is psychological".³ The effect of employment status is also felt generationally: a one percent increase in unemployment was estimated to cause a 20

¹ "Improving the health of men and boys in Canada", Health Canada, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/improving-health-men-canada.html>

² F.T. Juster, "Rethinking Utility Theory", *Journal of Behavioural Economics* 19, no. 2 (1990): 170-172.

³ Clark, A.E., and A.J. Oswald, "A Simple Statistical Method for Measuring How Life Events Affect Happiness." *International Journal of Epidemiology* 31, no. 6 (2002):1141.

percent increase in child neglect, although the effect is mitigated by state-provided unemployment insurance and health insurance.⁴

Work anchors people to community because people put their time, efforts, and talents at the service of others. It is one of the primary touchpoints, alongside family life, for forming community and social bonds.

(2) Unemployment has particularly strong effects on men specifically.

There is evidence to suggest that employment status has a particularly strong effect on men, and this stronger effect should be worth considering in policy formation. For example, men have a much higher mortality rate following unemployment. One study found that “the overall mortality risk among men increased by 44 percent during the first four years following job loss”.⁵

Men are more likely to die prematurely when they have an early retirement.⁶ This speaks to an innate desire for men to work and contribute to society through employment. This desire should be affirmed and steps should be taken to support men’s employment through policy and through partnerships with civil society. Employment anchors men in particular to inward purpose and drive, as well as to their society and community as a whole.

(3) Consider the importance of employment for the worker over strictly-technocratic approaches to labour and efficiency.

There are emerging challenges across the developed world that governments will have to navigate. These challenges include the potential impact of AI on the labour market, which some predict to be substantial,⁷ as well as slowing global economic growth more generally.⁸ Governments should focus on policies that promote full employment while also having income assistance and skills training programs targeted to those who need it most.

CONTACT

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and assist with future considerations on this issue. Please do not hesitate to contact us at rnauta@cardus.ca.

⁴ B. Dijkema and M. Gunderson, “Work is About More Than Money”, December 17, 2019, <https://www.cardus.ca/research/work-economics/reports/work-is-about-more-than-money/>.

⁵ B. Dijkema and M. Gunderson, “Work is About More”.

⁶ B. Dijkema and M. Gunderson, “Work is About More”.

⁷ J. Angelo, “Microsoft AI chief gives it 18 months—for all white-collar work to be automated by AI”, *Fortune*, May 18, 2026, <https://fortune.com/article/why-microsoft-ai-chief-mustafa-suleyman-predicts-ai-automation-18-months/>.

⁸ “Global economy under pressure could slow to 2.3%, signals UN Trade and Development”

UN Trade and Development, <https://unctad.org/news/global-economy-under-pressure-could-slow-23-signals-un-trade-and-development>.