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PRESS RELEASE

Employers sign up to new Mental Health Charter

Some of Northern Ireland's top employers signed up today to a new initiative, the Mental Health Charter, which signals their commitment to helping employees get through difficulties at work caused by mental illness.



The Charter is a joint project between the Equality Commission, Action Mental Health, Change Your Mind, Disability Action, the Mental Health Foundation, MindWise and Niamh.

“Around a third of lost working days are due to mental ill health. It’s the single most common cause of sickness absence in the public sector and one of the top two across the workforce as a whole,” Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said at the launch event. “Almost a third of the workforce has been diagnosed with a mental health condition. The cost to employers of sickness absence due to mental ill health is colossal.

“The Mental Health Charter is not an accreditation, an award or a set of quality standards. It’s a voluntary commitment by an employer and shows an organisation’s willingness to work with all the partners in this initiative to ensure that Northern Ireland’s workplaces are more supportive of people who find themselves having to deal with mental illness.

“As a first step, we’ll be working with signatories to find out how we can build in long-term sustainable information and training support that will help managers identify and offer help and support to staff with mental health issues. There is a wide range of options for other support from our partners that’s open to all employers.

“Signing the Charter is a company’s sign of commitment to improving the working lives of employees experiencing mental ill health,” Dr. Wardlow said. “It’s a long-term,

practical undertaking that links the Commission and our partner organisations with employers to help them deliver this commitment.”

Further information about this initiative is available online:

www.equalityni.org/MentalHealthCharter.

Photo Caption:

At the launch, hosted in the Senate Chamber at Stormont by the All Party Working Group on Mental Health, chaired by Mark Durkan MLA, were all the partners to the Mental Health Charter: Action Mental Health, Change Your Mind, Disability Action, the Mental Health Foundation, Mindwise and Niamh, pictured here with Lord Mayor of Belfast Alderman Brian Kingston, who signed the Charter on behalf of Belfast City Council, and Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, Dr Michael Wardlow.