

LONDON, October 10, 2013 /PRNewswire/ --

- Senior executives from some of the largest employers across Europe are spearheading a programme to 'Target Depression in the Workplace'
- More than 34.6 million employees in the European Union could be at risk of taking time off work due to depression and its cognitive symptoms, with a potential loss of one billion working days
- The Target Depression in the Workplace initiative aims to recommend concrete tools and resources that will enable company executives to better identify and support employees with depression as well as promote good mental health in the workplace

A group of major European employers today launch a drive to combat the impact depression and its cognitive symptoms have in the workplace. One in 10 employees in Europe take time off work due to depression, which equates to more than 34 million people at risk of missing work in Europe. This is the first time senior European executives have come together to assess and address depression in the workplace.

"The catastrophic impact depression can have on the individual and their family is well acknowledged, but largely unresolved is the impact depression has on work," said Professor Martin Knapp, Professor of Social Policy and Co-Director of LSE Health and Social Care. "New research has shown that an average of 36 days is taken off work per episode of depression. Across the European working population this could mean something approaching 1 billion working days lost to depression. The economic impact is potentially enormous, and this does not take into consideration the reduced productivity of people who keep on working while they are depressed."

Depression, the leading cause of disability worldwide, has a direct impact on company profit due to presenteeism (attending work whilst ill) and absenteeism (taking time off work). The

cognitive symptoms of depression - concentration difficulties, indecisiveness, and/or forgetfulness - are present up to 94% of the time in an episode of depression and cause significant impairment in work function. People with depression report on average 5.6 hours per week of total health-related lost productivity time more than those without depression.

Some of the largest employers in Europe, including Royal Mail Group Ltd, BT Group plc, Barclays, Unilever and Deutsche Post DHL, that collectively employ over 600,000 people in Europe and generate revenues of almost €200 billion annually, have formed a Steering Committee with the aim to come up with concrete action to help other businesses reduce the impact of depression.

"Mental health is the dominant workplace health issue of our time. Work can either be beneficial or harmful to mental health and employers can make a major contribution to the wellbeing of society by their actions," said Dr Paul Litchfield, BT Group plc Chief Medical Officer and Target Depression in the Workplace Steering Committee Advisor. "Combatting depression has been a priority for BT for many years and is an integral part of our Mental Health Framework which has delivered significant business benefits as well as helping very many of our people. Through the Target Depression in the Workplace initiative, we are looking forward to working with other employers to drive best practice to a higher level and to disseminate it as widely as possible."

Target Depression in the Workplace is chaired by Mr Bill Wilkerson, Executive Chairman Mental Health International. Vice Chair is John Duncan, Group HR Director at Royal Mail Group Ltd.

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SOURCE The Target Depression in the Workplace Steering Committee