

# in the know so happy together

by | **Kathy Bergstrom, CEBS**

Canadians are among the happiest people in the world, according to the recently released *World Happiness Report 2016*.

Canada was sixth highest among the 157 countries ranked by the report, which measures happiness based on how people rate their lives on a ladder scale where 10 is the best possible life and 0 is the worst. The report then explains most of the differences across countries and over time by six factors: gross domestic product per capita, healthy years of life expectancy, social support (as measured by having someone to count on in times of trouble), trust (as measured by a perceived absence of corruption in government and business), perceived freedom to make life choices and generosity (as measured by recent donations). Differences in social support, incomes and healthy life expectancy are the three most important factors.

Denmark is the top-ranked country, and the United States ranked 13th. East African country Burundi is at the bottom of the list.

How do employers and benefit plan sponsors play a role in happiness?

Supplying a regular paycheque is an obvious function employers have in the happiness equation, but John Helliwell, one of the report's editors, explained that income is only one part of the story. Helliwell works for the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, based in the Vancouver School of Economics at the University of British Columbia.

"There's a whole lot more to life than a material standard of living," he said. "The whole purpose of the *World Happiness Report* is to allow people to bring into their minds and thinking the other aspects of life that are important."

Certainly health and welfare benefits and pensions play a part in healthy life expectancy, trust and freedom to make life choices. But organizations have an opportunity to do more to boost employees' well-being, Helliwell said.

For example, flexible work schedules improve feelings of trust and sense of freedom to make life choices. Flatter wage structures also heighten trust and provide employees with a greater sense of involvement. Wellness programs have potential but must permeate the culture in order to be effective. Employees also benefit from programs that allow them to do good in their communities.

## **World Happiness Report 2016 Ranking of Happiness**

- |                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Denmark         | 9. Australia      |
| 2. Switzerland     | 10. Sweden        |
| 3. Iceland         | 11. Israel        |
| 4. Norway          | 12. Austria       |
| 5. Finland         | 13. United States |
| <b>6. Canada 😊</b> | 14. Costa Rica    |
| 7. Netherlands     | 15. Puerto Rico   |
| 8. New Zealand     |                   |



Instead of thinking about designing programs to solve a problem, employers should consider how to make everyone happier, healthier and more productive, Helliwell suggested.

"It's about, in some sense, reaching out to the people and saying, 'How could we do it better? What would you like us to do for you?' Giving people that say automatically delivers that sense of well-being, engagement and positivity right at the beginning."

*John Helliwell will be a keynote speaker at the 49th Annual Canadian Employee Benefits Conference November 20-23 in San Diego, California. Visit [www.ifebp.org/canannual](http://www.ifebp.org/canannual) for details.*