



## Guideline 5: Mental Health

During and after any disaster, isolation and financial uncertainty can be tough on many people, and coping can be hard. As part of your response and economic recovery process, it is important to integrate support for mental health to help people be resilient in tough times. From an "economy" perspective, failure to do this can impact a business's ability to rebound and restart and ensure that the workforce has the support in place to help them overcome mental health challenges that have emerged.

To truly respond to mental health challenges requires a localized, community-led approach. It will also build on existing partnerships between the public, private and non-government sectors to respond quickly and effectively to people in need.

As part of an Economic Recovery Centre, a community should consider adding mental health and counselling support services. These services can seek out volunteers from the mental health community to provide volunteers who would be willing to meet individually with those needing support, hold group discussions on the challenges people are facing and how to overcome them.

As part of a mental health program for economic recovery, several questions need to be asked through each phase.

#### Response Phase:

- Is your current mental health support comprehensive enough?
- Can employees and business owners access government or non-profit programs to support their mental health?
- Are we adequately equipping our leaders and managers with the resources they need to support themselves and their teams' overall well-being?
- What support are we providing to people who have experienced the deaths of family members, coworkers, or clients?

#### Economic Recovery Phase:

- Do we need to consider additional mental health supports upon re-entry into the community and/or the workplace?

- Do we need crisis response support for issues involving mental health concerns in our businesses and workforce?
- Do we need to enhance our absenteeism management processes/systems?

Provincial Psychosocial Program, a Health Emergency Management BC (HEMBC) division, Provincial Health Services Authority can be contacted for support and consultation regarding mental and wellness response and recovery.

### Planning Across the Recovery Timeline

Portions of the following information have been extracted and may have been modified from the [Province of BC's Mental Health and Wellness Recovery Toolkit](#) developed by Health Emergency Management BC. Modifications relate directly to the addition of the need for support for economic recovery.

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, the psychosocial intervention focuses on re-establishing a sense of safety, calm, and connectedness. As economic recovery and rebuilding progress, there is a shift to re-establishing a sense of place and new normalcy. However, this should not be viewed as a linear process; while many people may experience increased hope and optimism as the rebuilding progresses, others may experience frustration and new stressors as they encounter financial and other difficulties in rebuilding their lives, returning to the workforce and reopening businesses.

In many cases, businesses face increased mental health challenges as they deal with their potential losses both from a personal and a business perspective and the mental health impacts of employees. As such, mental health and wellness supports must continue to address the varied needs of all aspects of the community and the local economy by reinforcing social connectedness as well as ensuring access to supports for an extended period of time following a disaster.

### Activation of Community-Led Support (Chronological)

Escalation of recovery coordination from the local level to the regional or provincial level is

determined based on the event's scope and scale. If the local level's capacity is exceeded or is expected to be exceeded, regional and/or provincial support may be requested. Following the escalation of recovery activities from the community level to the regional or provincial level, coordination will be maintained at the local level as much as possible. As such, regional and provincial level activities should support economic recovery activities at the local level rather than replace them.

There are many mental health and wellness activities, supports, and services that are considered best practices based on previous experiences and the predicted community impacts resulting from a large-scale event or disaster. Typically, you will implement a mental health recovery process in four different phases:

- **Phase 1:** Immediate Days Post-Disaster  
In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, the main focus for people is the safety and security of themselves and their loved ones. This includes securing shelter, food, access to health care, and other immediate needs. Meeting the basic needs of impacted residents helps provide a much-needed calm and initial sense of security.
- **Phase 2:** Short-term (1 - 6 months post-disaster). In the first one to six months following a disaster, general mental health and wellness information must continue to be extended to the community. In addition to messaging about stress, coping and self-care, include information on how to access specific existing services, including crisis lines and counselling services. Attention should also be given to completing community assessments and planning for broader activities aimed at re-establishing a sense of safety and stability in the community.
- **Phase 3:** Medium-term (7 to 12 months post-disaster). In the medium term, recovery difficulties and strains may

contribute to increasing exhaustion levels, fatigue, depression, anxiety, substance use and family violence. In addition to ensuring continued access to crisis lines and wellness resources, additional mental health recovery initiatives and training should be considered based on community needs. Smaller communities may have limited access to such programs, so the MH Working Group (following section) may need to request external supports and possible funding.

- **Phase 4:** Long-term (12 to 36+ months post-disaster). Most people recover from a disaster without requiring mental health services, however, a certain percentage of the population may need additional support. It is not uncommon to see symptoms appear months or even years later, and recovery needs and support for individuals and communities can last from a few years to a decade.

## Establish Community Mental Health and Wellness Working Group

The purpose of the local Mental Health and Wellness Working Group is to establish and maintain a working group with essential service providers and key community representatives (government and NGOs) to address community mental health and wellness needs throughout the recovery phase (short, medium and long-term) of a disaster. Details on establishing a Community Mental Health and Wellness Working Group can be found in the Mental Health and Wellness Toolkit 2021.

It is recommended that you include the Chair or a representative of the Local Economic Recovery Committee from an economic recovery perspective. Mental Health representatives should also be used to work with businesses and volunteers in the Economic Recovery Centre.

There are a significant number of Mental Health and Wellness Resources available. Access to this information should be available for those involved in the recovery process to better help them deal

with recovery's mental health aspects. The following is a list of some of the resources available.

**BC Psychological Association (BCPA):** The BCPA has a list of resources available to the public.

**BC 211:** BC 211 provides online links as well as telephone support to connect residents across BC with services in their community for needs such as getting basic necessities and housing to victim services, substance use support and counselling. Call 211 or visit <http://www.bc211.ca/home>.

**Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA):** CMHA has information and tools on mental health and wellness. This includes skill-building courses, links to free and low cost counselling services, mental health check-ins and strategies for parents. A list of resources for coping with natural disaster stress can be found [here](#).

**Canadian Red Cross:** The Canadian Red Cross provides training courses, disaster support services and recovery guides such as [coping in crisis](#). The Canadian Red Cross also provides two online PFA courses; [Caring for oneself and Caring for Others](#) as well as a [free basic PFA Guide](#).

**Health Emergency Management BC (HEMBC) Disaster Psychosocial Program:** HEMBC's Psychosocial Program, which includes the Disaster Psychosocial Service (DPS), provides psychosocial guidance to health authorities and communities before, during and after disasters. DPS provides Psychological First Aid (PFA) training and support to communities during emergencies and disasters. Services can be requested by contacting [dpsprogram@phsa.ca](mailto:dpsprogram@phsa.ca).

## **Crisis Lines**

Crisis lines provide free, 24/7 telephone services for individuals in immediate need for support:

**The Crisis Line (Crisis Centres Association BC):** 24/7 confidential Mental Health Support call 310-6789 (no area code required) for emotional support, information and resources specific to mental health. If you are considering suicide or are concerned about someone who may be call 1-800-SUICIDE: 1-800-784-2433

**Crisis text Line:** Trained Crisis Counselors help texters through active listening and collaborative problem solving.

**Hope for Wellness:** Immediate wellness counselling, crisis line and online chat for Indigenous people across Canada. 1- 855-242-3310

**Kids Help Phone:** A bilingual (English/French) text, online chat and phone support for children and youth. 1-800-668-6868

**KUU-US Crisis Line Society:** Provincial aboriginal crisis line for Adults/Elders: 250-723-4050, Child/Youth: 250-723-2040, Toll Free Line: 1-800-588-8717.

**Residential School Crisis Line Support:** A specialized crisis line providing holistic support for former Residential School students and their families. 1-877-477-0775

**Senior's Distress:** A free and confidential telephone support service for seniors, their caregivers or anyone concerned about a senior to help with loneliness, connection to resources and difficult life transitions. 604-872-1234

**Trans Lifeline:** Crisis line for Trans people staffed by Trans people. 1-877-330-6366

**Youth in BC Distress Line:** Distress Line for youth staffed by counsellors and trained volunteers who are committed to helping youths in crisis. 1-866-661-3311

## **Other Mental Health and Wellness Links**

**Anxiety Canada:** This website contains information about dealing with anxiety and links to free online courses and apps with coping resources for anxiety such as the [MindShift App](#).

**Bounce Back BC:** An online resource with workbooks, activities, videos, and access to a trained coach who can provide up to 6 phone sessions to help with anxiety, depression, stress and worry.

**Government of BC:** A list of virtual mental health supports for different groups including the general public, parents, educators, healthcare workers, youth, seniors and indigenous people.

[Heads Up Guys](#): A website with information and resources on depression for men by men.

[Health Link BC](#): This website and service can help with information on general health questions, healthy eating and exercise and medications questions. Visit their [website](#) for more information or call 811 from anywhere in BC. Health Link BC also has a [list of available mental health services](#) for different populations.

[Here to Help BC](#): A website with mental health and substance use information and resources including screening self- tests, information sheets and workbooks.

[Kelty's Key](#): Online guided CBT therapy, courses and self-help resources on topics such as depression, anxiety, grief, insomnia, family support and substance use.

[Mood Disorders Association of BC](#): Provides education, treatment and support for individuals living with mood disorders. [Mind Health BC](#): Information on a variety of mental wellness topics, self-screenings, and links to resources.

[Substance Use Services](#): A network of direct and contracted services for individuals suffering from substance use problems, including counselling, needle exchanges, opiate replacement therapy, withdrawal management and prevention programs for youth. Phone toll-free: 1 866 658-1221.

[The Alcohol & Drug Information and Referral Service](#): Find resources, support and referral information for treatment and counsellors across the province. Phone toll-free: 1 800 663-1441 or 604 660-9382 (Greater Vancouver).

[Wellness Together Canada](#): Tools and resources to support Canadians with low mood, worry, substance use, social isolation, and relationship issues.

Regional Mental Health and Substance Use Information in BC:

[Fraser Health](#)

[Interior Health](#)

[Island Health Northern Health](#)

[Vancouver Coastal Health](#)

[Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre](#)

Ministry of Child and Family Development: [Local Child and Youth Mental Health Offices](#)

Pamphlets on Coping & Emotional Support

Alberta Health – [Help in Tough Times](#) provides a list of resources and links on a variety of topics including crisis support, unemployment, disaster and substance use. The information and links under [Recovery after a Disaster or Emergency Resources](#) provide an overview of strategies and supports for coping with grief, managing stress, social and emotional support and environmental concerns.

Canadian Mental Health Association – [Coping With Natural Disaster Stress](#). This resource provides an overview of coping skills, information and supports available for help with dealing with wildfires, mental health & wellness and stress. Short brochures on a number of topics including anxiety, depression, loneliness and anger can be found [here](#).

Canadian Psychological Association - [Resources for Responding to Emergencies and Disasters](#): includes fact sheets on coping information for children, youth and adults covering topics such as responding to stressful events, gun violence, fires, pandemics, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis.

Canadian Red Cross – [Coping with Crisis](#): Information and resources for individuals affected by disaster and emergencies. Includes information on signs and symptoms of stress, helpful links and a [guide on well-being in recovery](#).

[Domestic Violence and Disasters](#) – A document by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families with information on the effects of disasters on domestic violence.

[E-Mental Health](#) – short information sheets and screening tools on a variety of mental health topics affecting children, youth and adults including dealing with traumatic events, grief and stress.

First Nations Health Authority – [Mental Health & Cultural Supports](#): A list of support services specializing in indigenous mental health.

[Health Link BC](#) – A service by the government of BC including self-assessments, a fact sheet generator, resources and information sheets on topics such as physical and mental health, nutrition, exercise and medication. Resources are available in multiple languages.

[Here to Help](#) – Short articles with information on a variety of mental health and substance use topics for different audiences.

[One Step at a Time](#) – a step-by-step guide to disaster recovery compiled by the Government of British Columbia.

[Public Health Agency of Canada](#) - Official information provided by the government of Canada about topics such as health promotion, emergency preparedness and response, travel health, food safety and public health notices