



# Mental Wellness During COVID-19

## For Health Professionals

Helpers are an important part of First Nation communities. This is not always the medically trained helpers. There are spiritual helpers, medicine people and many other natural helpers that are using their skills to help community through this difficult time. As a community, it is imperative we work together to ensure our community wellness needs are met. Mental Wellness Teams and Crisis Response Teams are also working with health teams to ensure members needs are taken care of.

Health care workers experience additional challenges during infectious disease outbreaks, including concerns about the health of themselves and their family, stigma from within their communities, and managing the distress of those they are supporting. In our communities, we can be challenged by limited staffing to be able to meet the demands of the community including gathering and disseminating credible information, supporting others such as colleagues and community members, ensuring access to necessary resources such as food and medicine, and addressing existing challenges of the community such as poverty or social issues. In some of our communities, we may be restricted by the geographical location of our community from scarcity of resources if we are isolated or remote or the added exposure of others in more urban communities that have high traffic. The increased vulnerability of our communities often significantly taxes the resources of staff who may be overwhelmed by increase in demand for care, staff shortages, lack of information and lack of adequacy to personal protective equipment.

It is important to ensure good communication with your supervisor and leadership who can relay information they are receiving from Indigenous Services Canada and First Nation and Inuit Health Branch. Requesting and/or attending meetings for regular updates, following (or creating) the communities pandemic plan and planning for access to new funds and resources can all help you feel capable of managing the increased demands in your job.

The extreme stress, uncertainty, and often difficult medical nature of global infectious disease outbreaks, such as Coronavirus (COVID-19), require special attention to the needs of healthcare personnel. Taking care of yourself and encouraging others to practice self-care sustains the ability to care for those in need.

### **Strategies for sustaining healthcare personnel and volunteer wellbeing**

**Meet Basic Needs.** Be sure to eat, drink and sleep regularly.

**Take Breaks.** Give yourself a rest from tending to patients. Taking a walk, listening to music, reading a book, or talking with a friend can help.

**Talk** with Elders and Knowledge Keepers for guidance.

**Incorporate ceremony.** Smudge every morning, do sunrise ceremony, and check in with others to reaffirm your love and relationships.

**Connect with Colleagues.** Talk to your colleagues and receive support from one another. Infectious outbreaks can isolate people in fear and anxiety. Tell your story and listen to others.

**Contact Family.** Contact your loved ones, if possible. They are an anchor of support outside the healthcare system. Sharing and staying connected may help them better support you.

**Respect Differences.** Some people need to talk while others need to be alone. Recognize and respect these differences in yourself, those you care for and your colleagues.

**Stay Updated.** Rely on trusted sources of information. Participate in meetings to stay informed of the situation, plans and events.

**Limit Media Exposure.** Graphic imagery and worrisome messages will increase your stress and may reduce your effectiveness and overall well-being.

**Communicate Constructively.** Communicate with colleagues clearly and in an optimistic manner. Identify mistakes or deficiencies in a constructive manner and correct them. Compliment each other—compliments can be powerful motivators and stress moderators. Share your frustrations and your solutions. Problem solving is a professional skill that often provides a feeling of accomplishment even for small problems.

**Self Check-Ins.** Monitor yourself over time for any symptoms of depression or stress disorder: prolonged sadness, difficulty sleeping, intrusive memories, hopelessness. Talk to a peer, supervisor, or seek professional help if needed.

**Honor Your Service.** Remind yourself that despite obstacles or frustrations, you are fulfilling a noble calling—taking care of those most in need. Recognize the service of your colleagues.

### **Try to stay connected**

Times like this require alternate method of connecting with clients and community. Keep in touch by telephone, email, social media, text, or webchat such as Facebook Chat, Skype or other webchat platforms. If you are unable to connect for support, check to see if resources are available in your community. If you are sharing content, use this from trusted sources, and remember that your community might be worried too.

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### **Reach Out!**

Here are some helpful numbers if you need to talk.

**Indian Residential School Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419**

**Hope for Wellness Helpline: 1-855-242-3310**

First Peoples Wellness Circle  
www.fpwc.ca

Nipissing First Nation, 857 Yellek Trail North Bay, ON P1B 8G5  
Tele: (705) 313-4942 Toll Free: 1-833-311-fpwc