

Knowledge Summary: People in the Workforce

Learning Together: Emergency Shelters and Substance Use Centres

March 2022



About Learning Together

The COVID-19 pandemic widened existing care and health gaps in emergency shelters and substance use centres. In February 2021, [Healthcare Excellence Canada](#), in collaboration with the [BC Patient Safety & Quality Council](#) and the [Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction](#), launched the [Learning Together: Emergency Shelters and Substance Use Centres Program](#) to share real-time learnings across these care settings. This was a response to an urgent need to quickly improve supports for underserved people and those who care for them.

Knowledge summaries

Emergency shelters and substance use centres have had to adapt to changing public health measures while still responding to multiple ongoing public health emergencies, including the housing and drug toxicity crises.

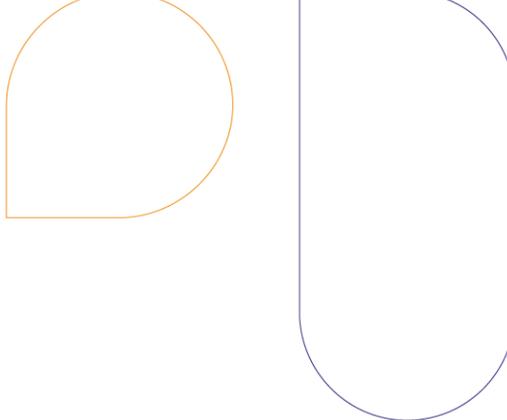
Recognizing the complex intersections between these emergencies, six promising practices were identified to guide pandemic response and preparedness and share 'lessons learned' across the sector.

These promising practices are covered in a series of three knowledge summaries: people in the workforce, preparation and prevention, and plan for COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 care.

People in the Workforce

Supporting people in the workforce was identified as a promising practice with three key areas for improvement:

- Understanding the community transmission risk of COVID-19 that staff, informal supports, clients and their families face, and mitigating risk where possible.
- Increasing psychosocial supports for all members of the care team to improve psychological health and safety.
- Creating policies related to volunteers, peers and non-medical service providers.



Knowledge you can use

Here are some practices that were found to be effective by those working in the sector (emergency shelters and substance use centres) and facing the demands of the pandemic:

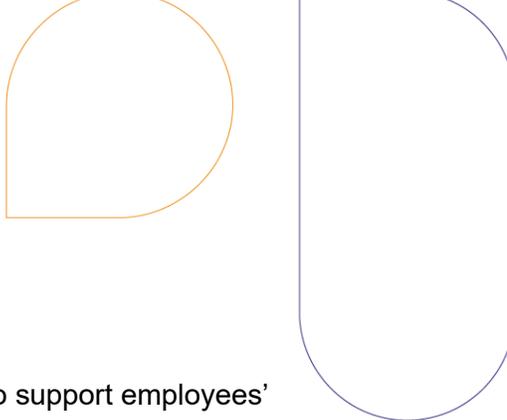
- Acquiring and distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) to staff quickly.
- Expanding Employee and Family Assistance Programs (EFAP) to all staff, including relief and project staff.
- Implementing pandemic pay and bonuses for staff.
- Reframing 'burnout' as a continuum of moral stressors contributing to moral injury ([learn more](#)).
- Providing in-house psychotherapy at staff meetings and through clinical supervision ([learn more](#)).
- Enhancing staff education around effective harm reduction approaches to provide staff with more tools to respond to emerging client needs ([learn more](#)).
- Using a sex and gender-based approach to understand mental health and psychological safety in the workplace ([learn more](#)).
- Supporting staff through the grieving process by honouring deceased clients, making time to debrief, discussing the impact of loss and establishing grief circles ([learn more](#)).

Webinars

For more information on how to support people in the workforce, check out these recordings and recaps of past Learning Together webinars.

Supporting the Wellbeing of Staff in Shelters and Substance Use Centers – Part I focuses on organizational and individual responses to the increased traumatic stress among staff who serve those experiencing homelessness. It explores the importance of psychosocial and trauma-informed training, education and supports for staff well-being. Watch the webinar [here](#) or read the webinar summary [here](#).

Supporting the Wellbeing of Staff in Shelters and Substance Use Centers – Part II discusses how mental health and psychological safety at work is heavily influenced by sex and



gender, and how recognizing this can help leaders build their capacity to support employees' mental health in the workplace. Watch the webinar [here](#) or read the webinar summary [here](#).

Harm Reduction with the [Dr. Peter Centre](#) highlights strategies for providing person-centred harm reduction services during the pandemic and in times of crisis. Watch the webinar [here](#) or read the webinar summary [here](#).

Wellness Together Canada – A Mental Health Portal for Everyone in Canada showcases the free, online mental health and substance use support available to everyone in Canada 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Watch the webinar [here](#) or read the webinar summary [here](#).

Addressing Moral Stressors and Moral Injury in Service Providers During COVID-19 explores the continuum of moral stressors and associated outcomes, including moral injury, in service providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Watch the webinar [here](#) or read the webinar summary [here](#).

More Resources

Reframing 'Burnout' as Moral Stress/Moral Injury

- [Moral Stress Amongst Healthcare Workers During COVID-19: A Guide to Moral Injury](#)
- [Understanding and Addressing Moral Injury: A Toolkit for Leaders](#)

Psychosocial Supports for all Members of the Care Team

- [Wellness Together Canada – Mental Health and Substance Use Support](#)

Sex and Gender-Based Analysis of Mental Health and Psychological Safety

- [Mental Health in the Workplace: A SGBA+ Informed Toolkit](#)
- [Sex and Gender-Based Analysis Video Series](#)

Supporting Staff Through the Grieving Process

- [ICHA – PEACH Resource for Frontline Workers Caring for Clients Experiencing Homelessness in COVID-19](#)

Healthcare Excellence Canada works with partners to spread innovation, build capability, and catalyze policy change so that everyone in Canada has safe and high-quality healthcare. Through collaboration with patients, caregivers and people working in healthcare, we turn proven innovations into lasting improvements in all dimensions of healthcare excellence. Launched in 2021, HEC brings together the Canadian Patient Safety Institute and Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement. HEC is an independent, not-for-profit charity funded primarily by Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.