

Employees returning to the workplace, and those who may have remained in the workplace and are expecting the return of colleagues, will have a range of responses. A psychologically safe and healthy reintegration of the workforce requires an intentional approach that provides direct resources to individual employees and supports leaders to understand and address the needs of staff. A successful reintegration process meets the needs of staff in a systematic way, with the goal of a renewed, supported, and engaged workforce.

A key priority of reintegrating the workforce is the mitigation of employee fears and concerns. Staff may be worried about their personal health and the health of those they care about. To support employees, leader should focus on understanding and responding to the personal experience of their employees from both a work *and* personal perspective. The 'staff continuum of needs' is a fluid framework specific to the transition phase of co-existing with COVID-19 and a reintegration of the workforce.

Staff continuum of needs



Employee safety is the foundation of the continuum and considered an essential element of support. The end of the continuum represents a high-functioning workforce. If we are expecting renewed engagement, innovation and creativity in the workplace, the earlier needs must be understood, met and re-evaluated on an ongoing basis.

Equally important is the recognition that there may be an ongoing level of vigilance at all levels of the organization. Employees may be monitoring whether we are moving towards a more 'normal' state versus a second wave of 'retreat'. This low level but chronic vigilance may result in heightened responses to otherwise typical experiences in the workplace. A stance of compassion for ourselves and those we work with is a protective factor throughout the reintegration process.

The staff continuum of needs is intended as a fluid framework relevant for individual employees and leaders. For individual employees, the framework encourages staff to self-reflect and identify what needs have or need to be met for successful reintegration. For both individual employees and leaders, the framework can support the organization and development of appropriate resources, education, and training.

Given the fluid nature of the reintegration process, this continuum of needs will need to be revisited on a regular basis to ensure individual employees and leaders are accessing the most relevant information and resources.

Safety

Physical safety of staff is the foundational aspect of workplace reintegration. Workplace infection control processes and environmental strategies have been in place throughout the response to COVID-19. Risk assessments to understand if additional safety protocols including social distancing will need to be addressed and communicated to employees prior to their return and reintegration to the workplace. Ongoing assessment, monitoring and evaluation will be necessary throughout the transition period based on recommendations from Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC), Occupational Health and Safety and the Ministry of Health.

Key considerations

- ▶ Safety concerns raised by staff returning to the workplace may be different compared to those who have remained in the workplace.
- ▶ Staff returning may have a higher expectation of changes or alterations in the physical environment that those who have remained at work and remained safe.
- ▶ Consider safety concerns of staff who will be using transit to return to work. *Note there may be a financial impact on staff when staff are required to pay for parking again if the staff member's family income has been impacted due to COVID-19.
- ▶ Understand that staff may have unique and specific safety concerns.

Key activities

- ▶ Continually review the risks based on consultation with PHSA Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), IPAC and the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC).
- ▶ Communicate safety updates, considerations, expectations to staff prior to their return to the workplace and to those currently in the workplace.
- ▶ Plan how you will monitor ongoing safety in the workplace.
- ▶ Conduct an individual check-in with staff PRIOR to their return to the workplace and with staff who have remained in the workplace and are expecting the return of colleagues.
- ▶ Develop a plan for checking-in with employees on an ongoing basis during the reintegration process.

Security

Security for staff relates to both the home and work environment. Staff may have questions about workplace security during the transition and reintegration period. If there are changes in the workplace or workflow, changing priorities, or discussion of budget issues these must be accompanied by clear statements with rationale. Providing reassurance in the absence of data and evidence will not have the intended effect. Workplace security also means re-stating and identifying any updates to pay or benefits, changes in COVID-19 related perks or workplace policies around vacation time.

Home security is equally important during the reintegration phase. Staff may have experienced significant changes to their home life during COVID-19. Contemplating returning to work when child-care (or family-care), and/or commuting issues are competing concerns will impact the readiness or ability for staff to return to the workplace.

Key considerations

- ▶ Once the safety plans for each facility are complete and the risk assessments have been done, who will return to work, when and on what schedule?
- ▶ What personal and workplace factors are barriers and benefits for staff returning to work?
- ▶ Will your considerations be based on principles of equity, safety and employee preferences in the context of operational considerations?
- ▶ Are there initiatives/previous work that does not need to continue, requires revised prioritization?
- ▶ When will we begin our performance planning process so I know my goals for the year?
- ▶ How much of the change can be anticipated in advance of return to work and/or how much of the change in workplace practice, process, flow can be decided collaboratively with your team when they return?

Key activities

- ▶ Decision making for workflow/process/return to work schedule based on PHSA and local policies/considerations/directives.
- ▶ Communicate updates, considerations, expectations to staff prior to returning to the workplace and to those currently in the workplace.
- ▶ Create strategies to communicate information to staff prior to their return and to those who have remained on site (e.g. regular email updates, scheduled team meetings, forums for staff to ask questions).

Psychological Health & Safety

Employees continue to express and experience a range of responses as we move through the phase of transition and reintegration. We know that psychological health and wellness is a priority for employees during this reintegration phase. Anxiety and uncertainty remain key concerns. Findings from our Psychological Health & Wellness survey indicated that employees reported feeling supported by managers and leaders who offered regular, genuine and personalized check-ins about their work and personal related wellness.

Key considerations

- ▶ Expressions of anxiety and uncertainty may be related factors of safety and security.
- ▶ Individual coping can be highly variable. Assumptions about coping (positive or negative) must be assessed.
- ▶ Psychosocial stability depends on early and easy access to specific resources.
- ▶ Factors unrelated to the workplace may be impacting employee wellbeing.
- ▶ Uncertainty may be ongoing, with a fluctuation between coping and requiring support.
- ▶ A psychologically safe work environment allows employees to express their experience without fear of being judged and with an understanding that support can be provided.
- ▶ Leaders are not responsible for solving the employee's psychosocial challenges. Leaders are responsible for asking about needs and supporting employees to access the appropriate resources.

Key activities

- ▶ Communicating and distributing known and available psychosocial resources. See [PHSA Supporting our Workforce website](#) for a summary of all resources.
- ▶ Access facilitated team sessions by contacting psychhealthsafety@phsa.ca
- ▶ Register for [Resilience in the Workplace - Co-existing with COVID-19: What is your plan?](#)
- ▶ Provide opportunities and avenues for individual employees to have a 1:1 conversation about concerns. Consider leaders training for conducting employee Psychosocial Check-ins [Psychosocial Check-In Training Learning Hub](#)
- ▶ Leader self-care: [Working Well during COVID-19](#)

Recognition

We have witnessed staff respond in a highly flexible and responsive manner in an environment of uncertainty and fear. Predictable workplace routines have been disrupted, with approximately 3,000 PHSA employees and contractors working from home for extended periods of time. It is critical that there is local and global recognition for staff who have not only coped but been creative, innovative and responsive to the changes required to continue providing service while simultaneously developing new ways of working. As we move towards reintegration of the workplace, a new set of expectations, changes in the workplace and in work process will be introduced. Ongoing recognition of the day-to-day dedication and commitment of our staff is essential for a healthy workforce and supports renewed engagement.

Key considerations

- ▶ Consider additional strategies for recognizing staff who have gone above and beyond the existing programs/initiatives will be essential to not only hold but fully engage our workforce.
- ▶ How can your team best celebrate their achievements and success during this time?
- ▶ What existing recognition strategies can be mobilized quickly (especially leaders to staff)?
- ▶ How do we keep the momentum of PHSA and site-specific recognition intact?
- ▶ Ensure day to day and long term recognition is valued and prioritized to continue.

Key activities

- ▶ Long service awards – ensure in-person events are replaced with virtual events so celebrations are held and not forgotten
- ▶ Ensure employees are aware of perks, and recognition resources: [Employee Perks](#), [PHSA Supporting our Workforce website](#), [e-cards](#) (peer to peer recognition)
- ▶ PHSA+ Awards: Virtual ceremony for recipients with ELT (planning underway)
- ▶ Awareness days/weeks/months: Continue to tie to recognition
 - e.g. Indigenous Health is planning a virtual event for staff to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day,.

Renewed engagement

Addressing the continuum of staff needs can result in a renewed and engaged workforce, even during times of transition. As the reintegration process unfolds, there is potential for employees to tap into their creativity and strengths to continue to provide the service/practice that they did pre-COVID-19 but perhaps in a different or new way. This aspect of the workplace *Continuum of Needs* is critical for retention and recruitment. Engaging employees in innovation and creativity can support a thriving workforce. Renewed engagement is not intended as a 'low priority' in the continuum, instead meant to indicate that the other factors must be in place and addressed before 'renewal' and engagement can be fully realized.

Key considerations

- ▶ Assessment of aspects of renewal and engagement can be done in combination with assessing and validating 'security' in the workplace.
- ▶ Asking the questions such as: what did you do for COVID-19 that you would consider keeping as a workplace practice moving forward? Are there things you can let go of? How would you re-prioritize your pre-COVID-19 work or practice? Is there an opportunity to evaluate organizational or program structure?
- ▶ Asking any of the above questions assumes that the earlier needs in the continuum have also been addressed or incorporated into any of the renewal/engagement work.

Key activities

- ▶ Access leadership development resources: [Co-existing with COVID-19 Leaders Workshop](#)
- ▶ Access Team resources: Co-existing with COVID-19 Team Session, Co-existing with COVID-19-Resilience in the Workplace: What is your Plan? (see Learning Hub)
- ▶ Engage your team in formal and informal opportunities to co-design new workflows, practices and processes