



MHPSS Bulletin

October-November

A bulletin to connect people, networks, and organizations across British Columbia, fostering the sharing of resources and building knowledge in the field of mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings. Past issues of the bulletin and recordings of Lunch and Learn webinars will be available on our website using the button below.

Provincial Psychosocial Services

Education & Learning Opportunities

New! Public Online Course (Free) by Provincial Psychosocial Services

- [Eco-Anxiety and Climate Distress](#): Learn about ecological/ environmental stress and distress, how it affects you and your community, and ways to mitigate it.
- [Getting Through Tough Days](#): Learn about how stress affects you and practical ways that can help you get through those particularly tough days.

Wellness Exchange Series

The Wellness Exchange consists of five one-hour interactive workshops designed to support mental and emotional well-being.

[Register here](#)

Problem Solving

- Tuesday, Nov 3: 7-8pm (PST)
- Thursday, Nov 5: 12-1pm (PST)

Positive Activities

- Tuesday, Nov 10: 7-8pm (PST)

Psychological First Aid (PFA)

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is intended for anyone interested in learning more about how to provide emotional and practical support during emergencies and crises.

Next session:

Saturday, November 14, 2026 from 08:30 am to 4:30 pm.

Facilitator: Nancy Szastkiw

- Thursday, Nov 12: 12-1pm (PST)

[Register Here](#)

Managing Reactions

- Tuesday, Nov 17: 7-8pm (PST)
- Thursday, Nov 19: 12-1pm (PST)

Helpful Thinking

- Tuesday, Nov 24: 7-8pm (PST)
- Thursday, Nov 26: 12-1pm (PST)

Healthy Connections

- Tuesday, Dec 1: 7-8pm (PST)
- Thursday, Dec 3: 12-1pm (PST)

(Please note that due to high interest, registration on this form does not guarantee spot – a confirmation email will be sent when your spot is secured. If we run out of space, you will be waitlisted. Each session is limited to 30 seats.)

All courses and trainings listed in this Bulletin are voluntary and intended to provide additional learning opportunities. They do not replace or fulfill any mandatory training requirements set by an organization.

Lunch and Learn Webinar

November 25 at Noon-1pm

Featuring a panel of Disaster Psychosocial Support (DPS) Members

This MHPSS webinar will explore lessons from the 2026 wildfire season. Members of the Disaster Psychosocial Support team will share their experiences and reflections on the psychosocial needs of individuals and communities affected by wildfires, including what may have felt different this year and some of the particular challenges encountered.

The discussion will consider the needs of different groups and communities, approaches that may have required additional consideration or adaptation, and lessons that can be carried forward into future wildfire seasons. Team members will also reflect on their deployment experiences and share practical insights for Disaster Psychosocial Support volunteers who have not yet deployed, including what they might want to know or think about before their first deployment.

Please register in advance but feel free to share the invitation. This session will be recorded and sent out to registrants as well as hosted on our [website's education page](#) which also contains past bulletins and past Lunch and Learn recordings.

[Register Here](#)

or <https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/5f125794-e9eb-47e2-...>

Email Nikki to get added directly to the distribution list for all future webinar invitations edu.pps@phsa.ca

Engaging and Useful Links to Explore

BC First Responders' Mental Health has a range of useful self-care resources including webinars. <https://bcfirstrespondersmentalhealth.com/looking-for-help/self-care/>

Check out the latest resources and publications of the **Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance** at <https://mhcca.ca/publications>

The **Climate and Public Health Centre** offers a range of webinars and other resources at [Webinar Recordings](#)

Learn more about **building a psychological health and safety management system** at <https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/health-wellness-public-servants/mental-health-workplace/guide-psychological-health-safety-management-system.html>

Interior Health offers suggestions and resources on **"How to speak with kids about evacuations during wildfire season"**. <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/stories/how-speak-kids-about-evacuations-during-wildfire-season>

After the Smoke Clears: Considerations for Post-Season Wellness

Author: David Hutton

This article has been edited with the use of AI (ChatGPT)

The smoke has cleared, the reception centres and Emergency Operations Centres are closed, and the immediate crisis is finally contained. For every individual who stepped up - whether as a career emergency manager, frontline first responder, health or social service worker, or dedicated volunteer - the close of a grueling wildfire season can bring a much-needed sense of relief.

However, the end of the fire season does not necessarily mean the immediate end of its health and psychosocial impacts. After weeks or months of long hours, disrupted routines, difficult decisions, uncertainty, and exposure to the distress and loss of others, recovery takes time. Moving from the intensity of emergency operations back to normal daily life can bring its own physical and emotional challenges.

Whether disaster response is your profession or something you stepped forward to do for your community, recovery deserves the same attention we give to

preparedness and response.

Navigating the Transition from Response to Recovery

During an emergency, people often put their own needs aside and focus on the task at hand. Long hours, constant problem-solving, heightened responsibility, and the needs of others can keep us moving even when we are tired. It may only be when operations slow down that we begin to recognize how demanding the experience has been.

Expect some fatigue. In the days and weeks following operations, you may feel more tired than expected. Some people may also experience irritability, difficulty concentrating, disrupted sleep, sadness, frustration, or simply feel emotionally drained. Others may feel relieved, proud of what was accomplished, or eager to return to normal routines. There is no single way people respond after a demanding emergency.

Recognize that reactions can emerge later. Not everything is felt during the emergency itself. Once the immediate demands have passed, some people may become more aware of stress or difficult experiences that they had little time to think about while responding. Pay attention to yourself and to your colleagues in the weeks that follow.

Give yourself permission to transition gradually. It can be difficult to move immediately from an intense operational environment back into ordinary work and family routines. Where possible, create some space between responding and the next major demand. Recovery is not simply about stopping work; it is about giving your mind and body an opportunity to readjust.

Stay connected. One of the strongest supports following difficult events is often other people. Maintain contact with colleagues, friends, family, and the people who understand what you have been through. Sometimes a coffee, a walk, a phone call, or simply asking someone, "How are you doing now that things have slowed down?" can make an important difference.

Reclaiming Your Physical Health

The physical demands of wildfire response can accumulate over a season. Long shifts, disrupted sleep, irregular meals, extended travel, smoke exposure, physical exertion, and prolonged stress can all take a toll.

Restore your sleep and routines. Several nights of good sleep may not immediately compensate for weeks of disrupted rest. Re-establish regular sleep, meals, exercise, and daily routines, allowing your body time to recover rather than immediately moving into the next demanding project.

Return to activity gradually. Movement and exercise can support recovery, but recovery itself is not a competition. Listen to your body and gradually return to your usual activities, particularly following periods of significant fatigue, illness, injury, or prolonged deployment.

Pay attention to persistent physical symptoms. Do not automatically assume that headaches, breathing difficulties, ongoing exhaustion, sleep problems, or other physical symptoms are “just stress.” Seek appropriate medical advice when symptoms are persistent, concerning, or interfere with normal functioning.

Making Space for the Human Side of Response

Many organizations appropriately conduct operational debriefs following significant events. These are important opportunities to identify what worked, what did not, and what can be improved before the next emergency. But an operational review is different from checking in on how people themselves are doing.

Create opportunities for voluntary, supportive conversations among colleagues and teams. These do not need to be formal or clinical. The goal is not to require people to recount difficult experiences, but to provide opportunities for connection, acknowledgement, information, and support.

Leaders have a particularly important role. A simple acknowledgement that the season was difficult, recognition of people's contributions, flexibility during the transition back to normal duties, and genuine check-ins can help create a workplace where recovery is understood as part of the job rather than something employees are expected to manage entirely on their own.

Managing Concerns About the Next Emergency

For some people, the end of one wildfire season can quickly bring thoughts about the next one. You may find yourself wondering whether next year will be worse, whether your community or team will be ready, or whether you have the energy to do it all again. After an especially demanding season, these concerns are understandable.

Focus on what you can control. There will always be uncertainty about the next emergency. Rather than repeatedly anticipating what might happen, focus on the practical things within your control - restoring your own health and routines, reconnecting with family and friends, and participating in preparedness activities when the appropriate time comes.

Give yourself permission to recover before preparing again. Preparedness is important, but there is also value in creating some separation between seasons and emergencies. Intentionally stepping away from a state of immediate readiness can provide the space needed to rest, recover, and reconnect with the other parts of your life before turning your attention to what may come next.

Turn concerns into constructive learning. When the time is right, lessons from this season can help strengthen plans, teams, and systems for the next one. Capturing those lessons can provide a sense of purpose and preparedness without carrying the intensity of the response forward.

Notice when anticipation is affecting the present. Some concern about future emergencies is natural. However, if worries about the next event are regularly affecting your sleep, concentration, relationships, enjoyment of everyday life, or ability

to step away from work, consider talking with someone you trust or seeking additional support.

Being prepared for the next emergency does not mean continuing to live as though the current one has never ended. Recovery now is itself part of being ready for what comes next.

Remember That Recovery Is Individual

There is no correct timeline for recovering from a demanding emergency season. Some people may feel back to normal quickly. Others may need more time. People may also be affected by very different aspects of the response—the decisions they had to make, concern for colleagues, separation from family, accumulated exhaustion, or the experiences of the people and communities they supported.

Most stress reactions following difficult events lessen naturally with time, rest, social support, and a return to routine. However, if distress persists, becomes more intense, or begins interfering with sleep, relationships, work, or everyday life, reaching out for additional support can be helpful.

Supporting One Another Through Recovery

We often talk about resilience and self-care in individual terms, but recovery is also supported by the people around us. Colleagues, teammates, friends, and family can all play an important role by staying connected, checking in, listening without judgment, and recognizing when someone may need a little more time or support. Sometimes the most helpful thing is simply asking how someone is doing—and taking the time to listen to the answer.

Supporting one another also means recognizing that people recover differently. Some may want to talk about their experiences, while others may prefer space or a return to familiar routines. Continue to include one another, notice changes, offer practical help where appropriate, and encourage people to access additional support if they need it. Just as people worked together throughout the emergency, that same sense of connection and looking out for one another can be an important part of recovery.

The end of a prolonged or intense emergency is also an opportunity to reconnect with what was temporarily put aside: family, friends, exercise, hobbies, community, regular routines, and the parts of life that remind us who we are outside our emergency response roles.

Taking time to slow down, check in with yourself and others, reconnect, and rest is not a luxury. It is part of responsible recovery and helps ensure that people remain healthy and able to respond when their communities need them again.

Thank you for looking after our communities this wildfire season. Now, take some time to look after yourself and each other.

Definitions

Psychosocial: The term 'psychosocial' refers to the dynamic relationship between the psychological dimension of a person and the social dimension of a person. The *psychological* dimension includes the internal, emotional and thought processes, feelings and reactions, and the *social* dimension includes relationships, family and community network, social values and cultural practices. 'Psychosocial support' refers to the actions that address both psychological and social needs of individuals, families and communities. (Psychosocial interventions. A Handbook, page 25.)

The title "MHPSS" in this bulletin refers to a broad approach to mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies. It does not signify the endorsement or inclusion of specific services or organizations.

Provincial Psychosocial Services

1333 W Broadway, Vancouver
Canada



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