

# QUICK START GUIDE

## Addressing Operational Stress Injuries for Infectious Public Health Crises

A Quick Start Guide for Paramedic Service Organizations

### COMMIT

**Cultivate a psychologically safe and healthy workplace**

- Demonstrate visible leadership commitment to addressing OSI by providing the required resources and role modeling good stress management, empathy, and support
- Listen to concerns and identify the needs of workers while respecting and protecting their confidentiality and privacy
- Reduce and challenge the stigma associated with OSI by taking all OSI-related reports seriously and ensuring that supports are offered
- Support workers in engaging in daily practices that promote mental health and wellbeing, including the use of mental health support services
- Build confidence in workplace safety by establishing and reinforcing infection prevention and control protocols



Paramedic service organizations are required to protect their workforce from Operational Stress Injuries (OSI), such as post-traumatic stress disorders, moral injuries, depression, and burnout. This *Quick Start Guide* outlines recommendations based on **Ten Organizational Elements** for paramedic service organizations to address OSI during infectious public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.



### COMMUNICATE

**Provide clear and consistent communication**

- Centralize source of information to ensure consistent communication regarding policies and procedures related to the infectious public health crisis
- Align workers with new protocols by communicating how their mental and physical health and safety have been considered in decision-making
- At the start of each shift, provide a briefing on the status of the work environment, safety procedures, and required safety equipment
- Develop a communication plan for family members and cohabitators to build confidence in the organization's infection prevention and control protocols to protect workers and reduce the stigma that workers are "contaminated"
- Increase the frequency of wellness checks during an infectious public health crisis

### EDUCATE

**Provide mental health and infection prevention and control training**

- Psychologically prepare workers on the unique stressors that they may face during the infectious public health crisis (e.g., uncertainty, triage, self-isolation, increased risk of infection, high volume of information)
- Provide refreshers on infection prevention and control (e.g., proper use of PPE) based on current evidence and best practices
- Keep training sessions targeted, interactive, concise, and during paid work hours
- Provide ongoing access to mental health training

### RELIEVE

**Provide opportunities for recovery and maintaining resiliency**

- Ensure shifts are sufficiently staffed to allow for downtime
- Schedule and adhere to rest breaks throughout the shift for healthy meals, water, refreshments, personal hygiene, and rest
- Allow downtime when requested (during a shift), and ensure sufficient recovery time between shifts whenever possible
- Designate a quiet room or area for workers to rest
- Manage call volume by promoting the appropriate use of paramedic services through social media and coordination with public health agencies

### IDENTIFY

**Identify and recognize the common and diverse risk factors of OSI**

- Create a list of organizationally recognized events and stressors that would initiate proactive support
- Identify factors that can diminish confidence in organizational leadership
- Recognize that personal triggers can lead to OSI
- Recognize concerns over personal safety and the safety and wellbeing of loved ones
- Recognize the challenges associated with the societal stigma of being infected, feelings of isolation, and ethical decision-making

## Building Capacity for Productive and Sustainable Work.

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### MONITOR

**Detect early signs and symptoms of OSI**

- Encourage workers to report early signs and symptoms of OSI and remind them of the non-punitive policies
- Monitor changes in workers' behaviours to offer timely intervention where appropriate
- Pay attention to workers who may be particularly vulnerable (e.g., those with pre-existing OSI)
- Provide a reporting process that is straightforward and respects workers' privacy



### SUPPORT

**Provide various types of mental health support services**

- Provide various resources to support workers' basic physical needs (e.g., adequate PPE, ability to return home), informational needs (e.g., training), and psychological needs (e.g., peer support)
- Ensure mental health support services are available to all workers
- Provide a quarantine support program to monitor workers' health and well-being during quarantine and support them in navigating access to services such as social support, medical care, and groceries
- Extend mental health support services to workers' support system

### ACCOMMODATE

**Provide meaningful work accommodations**

- Temporarily assign alternative duties to workers who may not be able to provide frontline paramedic service
- Work jointly with the worker and worker representative(s) and healthcare provider(s) to identify limitations and appropriate and meaningful modified or alternative work
- Monitor and adjust the accommodations as necessary
- Follow-up regularly with workers, even if they have resumed their full duties

### EVALUATE

**Collect relevant data to inform program development and continuous improvement**

- Collect relevant data to identify gaps, barriers, opportunities, and outcomes for continuous improvement in addressing OSI during public health crises
- Evaluate the use of mental health support services and other dedicated resources to address OSI
- Utilize a data-driven decision-making process to inform selection, development, and implementation of OSI-related programs and policies
- Document lessons learned to inform future planning and resource allocation

### ANTICIPATE

**Plan for future infectious public health crises**

- Use lessons learned to plan ahead and ensure that all workers have access to appropriate PPE and mental health support services
- Ensure funds for mental health support services are included in emergency response budget
- Plan necessary human resources (e.g., mental health support personnel) to quickly mobilize resources to support mental health initiatives
- Ensure the organization's emergency response plan is readily available to stakeholders, reviewed in periodic intervals (i.e., annually), and is up to date
- Conduct regular training sessions, drills, and simulated exercises devoted to disseminating and discussing the written emergency response plans



**Get In Touch with CISWP**



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