

C11. Resilience for All Staff

Module 3: Staff Wellness

In times of crises employers have a duty of care to help prepare and support staff – national and international -- to face known challenges and risks that will affect their physical and psychological wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic is generating an increased need for, and interest in, staff wellness resources and INGOs have a responsibility to thoughtfully address these issues. In addition to legal and moral obligations INGOs bear to protect the wellbeing of their staff, there are acute risks associated with not supporting the health and safety of individuals during this time. Organizations have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to mitigate foreseeable risks to their organizations and their personnel.

This section breaks down the key factors to consider when regarding health and wellness throughout the employment lifecycle including **Pre-Assignment** and **On Assignment**. Additionally, specific guidance has been included for concerns related to **Work from Home**, **Support to Managers** and **Frontline Personnel**.

Prior to Assignment and Travel

Prior to assignment and travel, it is important that staff understand their psychological readiness, personal vulnerabilities, and strengths to manage the realities of working during a pandemic. Employers should help staff fully understand these risks to obtain risk acknowledgement for employment. Ensure that staff are well informed about the risks and obtain a realistic security briefing prior to travel.

While Employed and/or on Assignment

An organization begins to cultivate a culture of care from the moment an employee joins it. Consequently, staff wellness considerations should be integrated into the onboarding process and well as continued throughout an employee's tenure with the organization.

As organizations consider the staff wellness needs of their employees, they should consider the needs of their entire staff regardless of their direct or indirect contact with the virus, their race/ethnicity, age, gender, vocation, or affiliation. The needs of family members of employed staff are also an important group to consider. Therefore, employers should think about what family support services they can provide, especially in the event of re-imposed travel restrictions and for unaccompanied staff.

Work from Home

Some organizations may designate that some or all their personnel continue to work from home even if government restrictions on movement are lifted. Organizations need to consider the level of support they provide to employees while working from home, particularly in situations when employees are working from home at the direction of their

employer rather than the government. The human experience of living in isolation from loved ones or coexisting with others in confined living quarters with less freedom than typical can raise issues or exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.

Support to Managers

As a focal point for overseeing and supporting staff, managers hold an important responsibility in attending to the wellbeing needs of staff. Consequently, managers are likely to encounter complicated situations that are difficult to navigate. Employers must support managers and leadership in order to prepare them for these situations.

Support to Frontline Personnel

The mental health and wellbeing of frontline workers (e.g., nurses, doctors, ambulance drivers, contact tracers, those involved in dead body management) needs to be addressed and supported. People in these roles need to be provided with ongoing resilience and psychosocial support both during and after the outbreak.

Internal Communications

Many of the other recommendations on internal communications in this document also serve to promote the psychological health and wellbeing of staff, particularly those communications that provide specific, concrete information that support employees in feeling safe and in control.

In addition:

- Clearly communicate that their physical and emotional safety is a top priority for the organization;
- Acknowledge the complex and difficult emotions that people are likely experiencing, the difficult decisions they may be making, and the multiple caregiving demands they may be facing;
- Integrate positive mental health/resilience messaging into “regular” communications;
- Thank staff and their family members for their efforts and acknowledge risks they may be taking;
- Frequently remind staff about support resources available to them; this might include organization-specific resources such as an Employee Assistance Program or community resources such as a crisis hotline. During an event such as a pandemic these providers may produce specialized materials such as hand-outs and webinars which should be made available;
- Encourage staff to take care of themselves and their loved ones. Remind them of core messages related to good hygiene and the efficacy of social distancing. Remind them to look out for one another and the most vulnerable.

Staff Wellness Action List

Highly Recommended

Prior to Employment or Travel

- ✓ Staff should be provided thorough information about the physical and psychological risks of a job or assignment. Discussions should include explicit discussion of the following risks and their potential psychological impacts:
 - Quarantine requirements on the front and back end of any travel.
 - If staff are infected with COVID-19, or another pandemic illness, they may be confined at their post/duty station for the duration of their illness. A medevac may not be possible.
 - In the event of border closures, airline groundings, and other events, staff may find themselves needing to stay in location for far longer than initially planned. An explicit discussion of what contractual obligations the organization has to support the staff member, and for how long, should be included.
- ✓ Ensure that your Human Resources team has accurate emergency contact information for each staff member.
- ✓ Encourage each employee to establish a will, financial power of attorney, and durable power of attorney to include clear and detailed health directives.

While Employed or on Assignment

- ✓ Every employee should receive educational information about stress and resilience and resources the organization provides to support the wellbeing of their personnel. Educational resources should be supplemented by COVID-19-specific information, including mental health and resilience dimensions of the pandemic.
- ✓ Information should be provided in appropriate languages.
- ✓ Every organization should have some form of counseling/individual support in place for employees, in appropriate languages. This might be through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), an in-house mental health counselor or specialized service.
- ✓ Identify a main point of contact (e.g. Family Liaison) to provide a direct line of support and a channel of communication between the family/emergency contact and the organization when an employee is unable to communicate due to a health emergency, limited access to a reliable means of communication, or in the event of a fatality.



GISF '[Family First: Liaison and support during a crisis](#)' provides generic guidance on the planning and provision of family liaison and support in a crisis. Although not designed for a pandemic, the guidance and tools can be adapted for any situation.

Work from Home

- ✓ Provide educational information about emotional health and relational concerns that may surface or be exacerbated under current conditions (e.g., depressed or anxious mood, grief/loss, burnout, substance misuse/abuse, parenting, suicide, intimate partner violence).

Support to Managers

- ✓ Leadership must manage their own stress and model good self-care. Modeling is a powerful managerial tool. In periods of high stress, it is important for managers to “practice what they preach” in terms of practicing self-care and a healthy work-life balance.
- ✓ Managers should know what resilience and mental health care resources are available, how to access them, and how to communicate this information accurately to staff.



Examples of resources for managers include: [Manager Guidance for Supporting Staff](#) Tip Sheet from The KonTerra Group; [Staff Care for Managers](#) online class from DisasterReady.org or [Wellness and Resilience for Frontline Workers and Managers](#) online class from Humanitarian Leadership Academy.

Support to Frontline Personnel

- ✓ All staff working as frontline personnel should have access to confidential pre- and post-assignment resilience consultations.

A resilience consultation is a confidential conversation with a trained mental health provider to enhance your strength and vitality before or after a challenging assignment.

A **pre-assignment resilience consultation** is an opportunity to discuss psychological preparedness for an assignment. It may include discussion of experience in similar environments, coping strategies and resources, assignment-specific risks, and how to maintain resilience during the assignment.

A **post-assignment resilience consultation** provides the opportunity to reflect on the challenging and growth-promoting experience during the experience and transition plans. Ideally, resilience consultations are provided to individuals, they could be conducted in small groups by a trained facilitator.

- ✓ All staff working as frontline personnel or in emergency response teams should have access to individual, confidential consultations/counseling.
- ✓ Provide regular opportunities for social support and collective reflection among affected staff.

Recommended

Prior to Employment or Travel

- ✓ Offer employees in high-stress roles or assignments an individual, resilience consultation to help them evaluate their psychological readiness for the assignment.

While Employed and/or on Assignment

- ✓ Identify roles that expose specific staff to higher levels of stress and risk of burnout; determine what resources (e.g. training, psycho-educational materials) you can provide to these specific groups during the onboarding process.
- ✓ Provide family liaison services, especially when/if travel restrictions begin to be re-imposed and for staff who are unaccompanied. The Family Liaison serves as a point of information between the family and organization. More robust Family Liaison support may include proactive check-ins with family members and practical and emotional support. For example, consider what unique needs the family may have in light of these circumstances related to childcare, elder care, food security, and financial stability. What resources/benefits can be leveraged or enhanced by the organization?

Work from Home

- ✓ Provide opportunities for staff to offer input into policies that directly affect their work experience.
- ✓ Consider ways to allow staff to structure their days to manage energy, other commitments, such as childcare, and work within their home or remote environment.
- ✓ Develop a protocol for response to reports of employees who are struggling to cope.

Support to Managers

- ✓ Provide a brief and regular forum to allow employees to express their concerns and ask questions and encourage peer-support amongst colleagues. Without breaking confidentiality, pay particular attention to any staff who you may be aware are experiencing difficulties in their personal life, who previously experienced a mental health crisis, or who are lacking social support (this is especially salient for those in frontline roles as they may experience community ostracization). What resources can you encourage staff to access?
- ✓ In the event of an employee's death, think about how to establish opportunities for the bereaved colleagues and family members to mourn in a way that does not compromise public health strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but reflects the traditions and rituals of the community.

Support to Frontline Personnel

- ✓ When applicable, the Rest and Relaxation (R&R) and compensatory leave policies for frontline personnel should be reviewed to ensure that frequency and length are appropriate to bolster psychological health and renewal.
- ✓ Provide dedicated post-crisis/assignment support to help staff members reflect on the issues and possible risks associated with returning to a new "normal" and share resources available to support them.
- ✓ Engage and partner with community leaders to counteract any negative misconceptions or narratives promoted within the community that may endanger the health and wellbeing of frontline and specialized workforce members.

Beneficial

Prior to Employment or Travel

- ✓ Offer every employee an individual, confidential consultation to help them evaluate their psychological readiness for the new assignment or for continuing their work. Depending on available resources, this may not be possible. Other alternatives that would support staff to reflect on their psychological readiness include:
 - ✓ Small group discussions facilitated by an outside expert.
 - ✓ Written information that includes reflective questions for staff to consider prior to accepting an assignment.

While Employed and/or on Assignment

- ✓ For individuals who may be quarantined, consider providing customized self-care resources and access to individual and family confidential support.
- ✓ Introduce/expand a mental health resource (e.g. organization's EAP) to include family members.

Work from Home

- ✓ Employers should have discussions with EAP partners to see what programming is available that could benefit the workforce.
- ✓ Develop a list of community mental health resources in each location the organization has operations.

Support to Managers

- ✓ Organizations should provide training to managers on how to recognize and respond to staff who are exhibiting signs of struggling to cope (e.g. concerning behaviors, observable changes in mood or physical wellbeing, and/or significant decreased work performance).

Support to Frontline Personnel

- ✓ Offer a peer support group focused on maintaining resilience and managing stress during an emergency response.
- ✓ Provide training in psychological first aid, especially for managers, so that team members have the skills to provide support to colleagues.