



CNA's Key Messages on COVID-19 and Mental Health



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KEY MESSAGES

- Mental health and well-being is equally as important as physical health, particularly as we confront the longevity of this pandemic.
- It is normal to experience fear, uncertainty and apprehension in these challenging times. It is important to recognize these emotions as real and valid and identify effective coping strategies — beginning with self-compassion.
- Nurses are facing unprecedented challenges and can experience significant work-related stress due to increased workload, lack of resources and personal protective equipment (PPE), concern for personal and family safety, moral distress, and exposure to significant human suffering. Additionally, they face the same stressors as the rest of the population; these stressors include exposure to constant news coverage, uncertainty about the virus, and confusion over social distancing, self-isolation and quarantine requirements.^{1,2,3,4,5}
- Nurses and health-care providers are not exempt from threats to mental health caused by COVID-19. In fact, [they may be at greater risk](#) for worse health outcomes.⁶ In a Canadian Public Health Association [poll](#) of health-care providers, 67% of nurses said they felt anxious, unsafe and overwhelmed. A [second poll](#) found that feelings of anxiety have tripled among health-care workers since COVID-19.^{7,8}
- CNA recognizes the need for dedicated resources and investment to support nurses and health-care providers during this pandemic.
- CNA is advocating for rapid access to no-cost accessible mental health support services specific for nurses and health-care providers both during the pandemic and long after. While virtual and mental health support services for the general public are welcomed, immediate investment in multi-faceted mental health interventions (along with secured investment for long-term mental health support) is needed to ensure the nursing workforce remains healthy beyond the immediate crises.



**THE
LONG GAME**

Prior to the pandemic, approximately 20% of people in Canada were expected to experience a mental health issue or illness every year. Mental health services have been struggling to meet the demand due to a number of barriers including geography, stigma and cost. A recent [poll](#) from the Mental Health Commission of Canada found that over half of participants reported delays in accessing mental health services.⁹

The global spread of COVID-19 and accompanying public health interventions (i.e., physical distancing, isolation and quarantine) have resulted in a surge in mental health issues among the general public and health-care workers. There has been a robust response to meet the acute needs of the population and CNA is pleased that services are being provided quickly and efficiently. However, there is increasing evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic may persist for many months, so long-term supports are needed. In particular, nurses and health-care providers are under significant work-related strain that will persist long after the initial crisis as the health-care system tackles the backlog of delayed care (e.g., surgeries and procedures to maintain chronic conditions). Also, the cohort of nursing students entering the workforce this year — some of who have been fast-tracked in their final year due to the pandemic — will face an unprecedented challenge. New nursing graduates already face challenges transitioning into the workforce; the additional stress of the pandemic will mean an increased need for mental health supports, training and mentorship.

Sustainable, accessible, long-term mental health support is needed to protect the mental health and well-being of the nursing workforce. Interventions should be initiated across all levels of the health-care system, including governments, regional health authorities, employers and units. Innovative strategies should be explored to deliver support where it's needed — while recognizing that everyone copes differently. Investment in research to support evidence-informed interventions will be key to the delivery of effective services. CNA will continue to advocate on behalf of nurses to ensure their mental health and well-being are no longer overlooked.

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- 4 International Council of Nurses. (2020, April 29). ICN calls for government action to stop attacks on nurses at a time when their mental health and wellbeing are already under threat because of COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved from <https://www.icn.ch/news/icn-calls-government-action-stop-attacks-nurses-time-when-their-mental-health-and-wellbeing>
- 5 Wu, P., Styra, R. & Gold, W. (2020, April 27). *CMAJ*, 192(17), E459-E460. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.200519>
- 6 Lai J, Ma S, Wang Y, et al. Factors Associated With Health Outcomes Among Health Care Workers Exposed to Coronavirus Disease 2019. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2020;3(3):e203976. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.3976
- 7 Mental Health Research Canada. (2020). <https://www.mhrc.ca/our-research/>
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- 9 Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2020). How important is mental health for people in Canada?: Highlights of a Nanos Research Survey for the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Retrieved from https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2020-01/polling_report_%20numbers_jan_2020_eng_0.pdf