

# Mental Health Supports for Frontline Workers

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## Information & Resource List



## Territorial Acknowledgment

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As a provincial umbrella association, AMSSA acknowledges that B.C. is on the unceded homelands of First Nations who have stewarded this land since time immemorial. We recognize the privilege that we have as settlers on this land, and acknowledge that AMSSA's operations is on the unceded traditional territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. As an organization, AMSSA is committed to creating a safe space for indigenous voices.

## Funder Acknowledgment

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Frontline workers who support newcomers through changing circumstances can often find themselves providing crisis counselling, despite this falling outside of their scope of work and training. These challenges highlight the need for accessible mental health supports tailored to frontline workers. The following resource shares valuable information about mental health supports that frontline workers can access to incorporate practical tools and self-care strategies for their wellbeing.

## Why Mental Health Support is Essential for Frontline Workers

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Frontline workers face unique stressors as they assist individuals navigating complex transitions, such as migration and resettlement. The essential role that they play in supporting newcomers in often challenging circumstances means also hearing stories of conflict and loss that over time may lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced professional efficacy, and physical health issues. This exposure can create some mental health challenges for frontline workers, including compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.

### **These challenges can take a toll on workers' mental health, especially when dealing with:**

- High-stakes situations requiring crisis intervention.
- Exposure to clients' traumatic stories and experiences.
- Balancing professional responsibilities with emotional demands.

Research highlights alarming rates of burnout in helping professions, with some studies indicating that over half of frontline workers experience symptoms such as emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment. These stressors emphasize the importance of prioritizing wellness to ensure frontline workers can continue to provide effective support while maintaining their own well-being.

### **KEY TERMS**

**Career Burnout** is characterized by exhaustion caused by stressed linked to one's profession and can manifest in emotional, physical, and mental forms. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), individuals experiencing career burnout can feel emotionally drained, demotivated, and unconfident, leading to difficulties in pursuing their work and personal tasks. Professional and personal relationships can be affected as a result, especially as the individual facing career burnout may socially withdraw. In terms of physical manifestations, career burnout can affect one's appetite and sleep, and it may lead to headaches and back aches. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance, exercising, engaging with coworkers, and reaching out for help are some ways to address career burnout. <sup>[1]</sup>

**Vicarious trauma**, also known as secondary traumatic stress, is a psychological trauma that results from a service provider becoming indirectly exposed to the psychologically traumatic events of their client in the workplace. <sup>[2], [3], [4]</sup> Individuals experiencing vicarious trauma can have their world views affected and shaped by the traumatic experiences of their clients. <sup>[2]</sup> Risk factors of vicarious trauma for service providers can be individual and environmental. <sup>[4]</sup> The CAMH notes that vicarious trauma can lead to an individual's existing past traumas being triggered or can create new ones. <sup>[2]</sup>

**Compassion fatigue** (CF) is a form of exhaustion that can result from extended periods of being empathetic and supporting others while not adequately supporting oneself. <sup>[5]</sup> Working as a frontline worker who is deeply involved in the wellbeing of clients can be taxing in emotional, physical, and interpersonal ways. <sup>[6]</sup>

## REMINDER

**“Caring for yourself is not a luxury, but a professional and ethical responsibility to ensure you can care for others effectively.”**

*- Nel Noddings*

This quote underscores the importance of self-care as a fundamental part of professional ethics and responsibilities. It reminds frontline workers that maintaining their mental health is not only beneficial for their personal well-being but also crucial for providing sustainable, high-quality support to others. Neglecting self-care can lead to burnout, compassion fatigue, and a diminished ability to help those in need. Prioritizing wellness ensures frontline workers can continue to make a meaningful impact without compromising their own health.

## SELF-CARE STRATEGIES

Self-care is a necessity for maintaining emotional and physical well-being, particularly for those in helping professions. Frontline workers face unique stressors that can erode their resilience over time. Prioritizing self-care helps mitigate the risks of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma. It allows individuals to recharge, maintain emotional balance, and continue providing high-quality support to others. By embedding self-care practices into daily routines, frontline workers can safeguard their mental health and sustain their capacity to care for others.

### Practicing self-care during the workday:

- Take short breaks: Step away from your workstation for a few minutes every hour. Use this time to stretch, take deep breaths, or grab a glass of water to refresh your mind and body.
- Stay hydrated and nourished: Keep water and healthy snacks at your desk and ensure that you are not skipping meals to maintain your well-being, energy and focus.
- Set boundaries with clients and colleagues: Clearly communicate your availability and workload limits. Practice saying “no” to avoid taking on tasks that fall outside your scope or capacity.
- Use time management tools: Prioritize tasks, delegate when possible, and use tools to stay organized.
- Engage in a mindfulness exercise: Spend 5-10 minutes practicing mindfulness. Whether it’s on YouTube or on Apps like Calm or Headspace, they can guide you through quick meditations right at your desk.
- Limit exposure to secondary trauma: Whenever possible, reduce unnecessary exposure to distressing content or stories.
- Connect with a colleague: Build rapport with coworkers by sharing a light conversation or offering mutual support which fosters a sense of camaraderie and reduces feelings of isolation.

### Practicing self-care outside work hours:

- Exercise regularly: Engage in activities like walking, yoga, or cycling to reduce stress and boost endorphins. Exercise and movement are one of the best ways to release stress and anxiety. Aim for at least 30 minutes a day.
- Pursue a hobby: Dedicate time to an activity you enjoy, such as painting, reading, or gardening. Hobbies help shift focus away from work stressors and reduce stress.

- **Disconnect from work:** Avoid checking emails or thinking about work after hours. Use this time to focus on personal well-being and relaxation.
- **Spend quality time friends and family:** Strengthen relationships by sharing meals, conversations, or leisure activities with family and friends or people in the community.
- **Practice gratitude:** Before bed, write down three things you are grateful for. This simple practice can improve mood, reduce stress and foster a positive outlook.
- **Practice sleep hygiene:** Maintain a consistent sleep schedule and create a calming nighttime routine. Ensure that you are getting enough sleep regularly.
- **Seek professional support when needed:** Don't hesitate to access counselling or therapy to process challenging emotions. It's important to regularly reflect to identify stressors and adjust coping strategies accordingly and be aware if more supports will be beneficial.

Frontline workers play a critical role in helping newcomers navigate complex challenges, however, the emotional toll of their work cannot be overlooked. By utilizing the resources and self-care strategies outlined in this guide, frontline workers can build resilience, maintain their mental health, and ensure they remain effective in their roles. Taking the time to prioritize well-being is not just beneficial for the individual but also enhances the overall quality of care provided to the communities they serve.

## RESOURCES

Access to mental health supports and strategies is crucial for building resilience, managing stress, and fostering wellness. By equipping frontline workers with the right tools and resources, we can help them navigate the emotional demands of their roles more effectively to improve both personal well-being and professional effectiveness.

**Burnout to Balance: Self-Care in the Settlement Sector – AMSSA Webinar:** This webinar by AMSSA provides an overview of occupational hazards such as burnout, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue. It explores individual self-care strategies across emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual domains, and offers insights into fostering workplace resiliency at team and organizational levels.

**Virtual Mental Health Supports:** The Government of B.C. provides various virtual mental health services, including free or low-cost counselling, workplace mental health supports, and resources.

**Self-Care and Stress Management for Helpers:** This course by the Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute (CTRI) teaches stress management and self-care techniques for professionals in helping roles.

**Workplace Strategies for Mental Health:** This website offers tools and strategies to support workplace mental health and resilience.

**Mental Health First Aid:** This training program by the Mental Health Commission of Canada teaches participants about mental health first aid and psychological safety, including how to assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis.

**BC Frontline Worker Occupational Awareness Training:** This free online course provides psychological tools to help frontline workers manage the emotional and behavioural impacts of their roles.

**HealthLink BC:** HealthLink BC offers free, confidential health information and advice, including mental health support, accessible by dialing 8-1-1.

**A Self-Care Guidebook for Frontline Workers:** Developed by Americares, this guidebook addresses stress management, healthy boundaries, and self-regulation techniques tailored for frontline workers.

**Mind Remake Project:** This project provides an extensive list of free and printable PDF workbooks, manuals, and self-help guides covering various mental health topics, including anxiety, depression, and stress management.

**Crisis Services Canada:** Crisis Services Canada provides 24/7 crisis support via phone and text at 1-833-456-4566.

**Supporting Migrant Worker Mental Health Through Trauma-Informed Practice – AMSSA Migrant Worker Hub E-Learning Course:** This e-learning course focuses on the mental health challenges migrant workers face in Canada and provides practical strategies and applications of trauma-informed practice in supporting a worker who may be experiencing mental health challenges. This e-learning course also provides wellness and self-care practices for migrant worker support providers.

**Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Many employers offer confidential counselling services to employees and their families. Please consult your human resources department for details.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- [5] <https://cmha.ca/news/empathy-and-compassion-fatigue/>
- [6] <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/is-there-a-cost-to-protecting-caring-for-and-saving-others-beware-of-compassion-fatigue>

# About AMSSA

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AMSSA is a unique province-wide association that strengthens over 90 member agencies as well as hundreds of community stakeholder agencies who serve immigrants and newcomers, and build culturally inclusive communities, with the knowledge, resources and support they need to fulfill their mandates.

## OUR VISION

A just and equitable society in which everyone benefits from social and economic inclusion.

## OUR MISSION

AMSSA facilitates collaborative leadership, knowledge exchange, and stakeholder engagement to support member agencies that serve immigrants and build culturally inclusive communities.

## OUR PURPOSE

AMSSA's purpose is to co-create the conditions of success for our members to build better lives for immigrants and newcomers to BC.

AMSSA's 2020 - 2025 Strategic Plan is an impact-driven strategy focusing on four pillars:

- 1 SUPPORT OUR MEMBERS**
- 2 STRENGTHEN THE SECTOR**
- 3 DISRUPT SYSTEMS**
- 4 EXCEL AS AN ORGANIZATION**

## WE VALUE

**EQUITY** and strive to be the catalyst for change which disrupts systems promoting racial and social injustice.

**INCLUSIVENESS** and work with our members and stakeholders to place voices that have been marginalized in positions of influence, creating space for all perspectives.

**INTEGRITY**, striving to always work to the highest standards, encouraging innovation, risk taking and leadership; we are always open to new thoughts and maintain accountability in our work.

**DIVERSITY**, recognizing our own individual biases and engaging members and stakeholders in meaningful ways that promotes inclusion of all voices and perspectives.

**MUTUAL RESPECT** by respecting what everyone has to offer within their own context of life experiences, opening our hearts and minds to always listening and learning.

**COLLABORATION**, engaging in equitable partnerships, mindfully exploring old and new ideas to advance the work of AMSSA and our members.

**SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION**, engaging in continuous individual and organizational reflection and collaboration.

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