

# About the Canadian Emergency Response Psychosocial Support Network (CanEMERG)

Mental health guidance & resources in times of crisis and disaster, produced by the Trauma & Recovery Research Unit at McMaster University

Psychological distress during and after an extreme stressor, such as an emergency or disaster, is often short-lived. However, it can also develop into mental health difficulties that include *depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress injury (PTSI)*, increased substance use, and *moral injury*. Many people also experience *anticipatory anxiety* when they fear exposure to traumatic events, such as Canada's ongoing wildfires.

Throughout this website, we present mental health and well-being resources that are intended to prevent the development of longer-term mental health difficulties following an emergency or disaster.

Here, you will find resources to help you recognize common responses to trauma and stress, to identify when you are in need of well-being supports, and to know where to go for free, evidence-informed mental health and well-being support that is available across Canada.

We also provide mental health and well-being tools and resources that are aimed to help you and your family cope before, during, and after *potentially psychologically traumatic events (PPTs)* such as pandemics, natural disasters, and other emergency situations.

These tools and resources are based on *psychological first aid (PFA)* principles to provide basic emotional support and help build coping skills that enhance well-being and mental health. PFA has been found to reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress, and distress, as well as improve mood, connectedness, and a sense of control among youth and adults.

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These tools will equip all Canadians, including community members, public safety personnel, health care providers, military members and Veterans, and other essential workers to recognize common psychological responses to emergencies and disasters — as well as how and when to find support.

Here, we also recognize that emergencies and disasters may place additional burden and result in disproportionate outcomes for members of equity-deserving groups including Indigenous populations, BIPOC communities, and LGBTQ2SIA+ individuals. We address this burden by providing information about culturally sensitive mental health and well-being resources available to members of equity-deserving groups. Over time, we will also provide plain language information about these disproportionate impacts, including learning tools focused on *minority stress*, a theory that describes how stress related to one's identity affects mental health.

Over time, we will also provide guidance and support to community-based, municipal, provincial, and federal organizations and leaders about how to best support the psychological needs of community members during disasters and emergencies.

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## About the Trauma & Recovery Research Unit at McMaster University

The Trauma & Recovery Research Unit is well known for our work characterizing trauma-related illness and PTSD among military members, Veterans, first responders, and survivors of childhood abuse and trauma.

We have also been involved in the development and testing of novel treatment interventions aimed at often-unexplored aspects of PTSD and trauma, including guilt and shame, moral injury, dissociation, and cognitive dysfunction. We work closely with government sectors including Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces.

Under the supervision of our principal investigator, Dr. Margaret McKinnon (*Homewood Chair in Mental Health and Trauma, Professor and Associate Chair Research, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University*), we have published nearly 150 peer-reviewed papers and chapters.

Our unit is supported by federal and provincial funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Canadian Institute for Military and Veterans Health Research, Veterans Affairs Canada, Defence Canada, the PTSD Centre of Excellence, MITACS, and the Workers Safety Insurance Board of Ontario; by a generous donation to Homewood Research Institute from Homewood Health Inc.; and by generous gifts from private foundations including True Patriot Love, the Cowan Foundation, the Military Casualty Support Foundation, the FDC Foundation, and the AllOne Foundation.

We are situated in Hamilton, Ontario, where we are proud to have created a creative, collaborative, and open-minded Research Team.