

COVID-19: We're in this together. Mental Health Resource Guide

Revised April 1, 2020

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Letter from Jerry, Lana, and Renaud

Dear Unifor Local leaders, activists and members,

We understand how challenging the past few weeks have been – sweeping layoffs, isolation, and the uncertainty of the future have turned our way of life upside down. During these difficult times, perhaps the most challenging economically in our lifetimes, it's important for us to remember to reflect on our mental health and how we can support each other.

One out of every five Canadians will experience mental illness in normal times. It is okay to feel out of sorts because of the global COVID-19 crisis. During the pandemic, we must normalize, listen to, and empathize with those experiencing distress. Additionally, we remind those experiencing mental illness to find supports, as limited as they may be, that work for them in order to navigate through this crisis. Now more than ever, we must find community and support one another.

The union has launched an online portal and resource that provides information and supports related to mental health impacts of COVID-19. Here you will find resources related to staying well during the pandemic, the implications of isolation and quarantine, the disproportionate impact the crisis is having on equity seeking groups, community supports, and so much more.

We encourage you to explore this resource and use it to find helpful and appropriate supports. We also encourage you to share this with friends, family and all union members.

Take good care.



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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak may be stressful for you – it is normal to have fear, anxiety, and strong emotional responses related to the impacts of coronavirus disease.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How an individual responds to the pandemic can depend on a variety of factors: background, the community they live in, socio-economic class, and much more.

There are some communities that may experience COVID-19 related stress more strongly, including:

- Equity-seeking communities, particularly those who are or are perceived to be Chinese or Asian
- Front-line workers
- People with mental health issues and/or addictions
- People forced to more closely interact with an abuser due to isolation or quarantine
- Older people and those with chronic diseases and/or compromised immune systems
- Children and teens

With this in mind, the national union formed a COVID-19 Mental Health Working Group to gather, create, and share important resources that members may find useful during the pandemic.

This resource uses a four-pillar approach to help identify key areas where support is needed, including relevant information and resources:

Pillar 1 – Mental Health and Wellness: provides an overview of national supports available for those facing mental illness and/or addictions

Pillar 2 – Quarantine and Isolation: speaks to the impact isolation measures have on those experiencing domestic violence

Pillar 3 – Challenging Stigma, Prejudice and Racism: outlines the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on equity-seeking communities and ways you can combat harmful stigma, prejudice, and racism

Pillar 4 – Take Action: notes ways you can support others through sharing information and how to identify yourself as a mental health ally that people can reach out to

PILLAR 1: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on all of us. Maintaining mental health is a challenge at the best of times, and the crisis exacerbates these struggles immensely. If you are struggling with mental health and addictions, we want you to know you are not alone – many of your friends and colleagues are experiencing the same struggles right now.

In normal times, 1 in 5 Canadians will struggle with mental illness. These illnesses are diseases and you deserve to get the help and support you need to manage these challenging times.

Each person's struggle with mental health is different. Explore the resources below to find the support that is right for you.

Community Impact

Uncertainty of the future, isolation and quarantine, and wage loss are some of the factors affecting communities across the globe. During the pandemic, mental health illness and addictions may be exacerbated – managing an addiction or pre-existing condition may be more challenging. It's important to remember that many people are experiencing the same – we're in this together.

Managing Addictions during COVID-19

COVID-19 has disrupted the supports and strategies people would normally use to help manage an addiction. For example, social supports often play a vital important role in recovery – some of these supports have adapted to telephone and online formats in order to better serve those in self-isolation or quarantine.

Check with your regular support group to find out if there is contact information available. If you are struggling to manage an addiction alone, ask a trusted friend to help you navigate this difficult time.

Managing Anxiety and Depression during COVID-19

Anxiety is a normal reaction to situations that feel out of our control. Some common, possibly anxiety-triggering concerns include:

- Uncertainty about the future
- Personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of others
- Changes to school and work accessibility and format
- Finances and loss of income
- Changes to social interactions, including community and social events
- Access to recreational programs and activities, hobbies, and leisure activities

People who already experience anxiety may find their anxiety worsening – it's important to remember there is a community of people experiencing the same and that there are helpful resources to support you during this time.

Feeling stressed and fearful every day can take a dramatic toll on health and well-being.

TIPS TO REDUCE ANXIETY AROUND CORONAVIRUS

Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage and seek information about coronavirus from trusted sources such as your local health authority, provincial health authority, or the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Connect with people through calls, texts and video chats. Remember to talk about things other than COVID-19!

Make sure you add extra time for stress relief into your daily routine. Exercise or meditation are great outlets to aid in stress management.

Supports and Resources

*This list is not meant to be exhaustive, it is a selection of resources available.

IF YOU ARE IN DISTRESS AND REQUIRE URGENT SUPPORT RIGHT NOW:		
CRISIS HOTLINE	www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en	1-833-456-4566
KIDS HELP PHONE	www.kidshelpphone.ca	1-800-668-6868
WELLNESS AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT (WES) FOR YOUTH ONLINE	www.wesforyouthonline.ca	*Online only
*ONTARIO RESIDENTS ONLY		

RESOURCE	SUMMARY	CONTACT
THE CENTRE FOR ADDICTIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH (CAMH)	CAMH offers numerous answers to frequently asked questions and provides additional resources for a number of issues that can come up during times like this.	www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19
CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION (CMHA)	CMHA provides advocacy, programs and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive.	www.cmha.ca/?s=covid-19
211.CA	Canada's primary source of information on government and community-based health and social services.	Dial 2-1-1 www.211.ca



<p>Crisis Services Canada</p> <p><i>*Text service in English only</i></p>	<p>If you're thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, the Canada Suicide Prevention Service is available 24/7 for voice and 4pm to 12am ET for text.</p>	<p>1-833-456-4566 or text 45645</p>
<p>Beacon - Modern Mind Health</p>	<p>Stronger Minds by BEACON is a free digital program for all Canadians – to support your mental well-being through the COVID-19 crisis.</p>	<p>www.mindbeacon.com/strongerminds</p>
<p>Lifeline Canada</p>	<p>Provides resources in provinces across the country who can help you address your thoughts and other mental health concerns quickly.</p>	<p>www.thelifelinecanada.ca</p>
<p>New Brunswick Info</p> <p><i>*English only, for NB residents</i></p>	<p>New Brunswick's Community Services Database.</p>	<p>www.NBinfo.ca</p>
<p>Bridge the gApp</p> <p><i>*English only, for NL residents</i></p>	<p>An online resource designed to support mental wellness.</p>	<p>www.BridgethegApp.ca</p>
<p>Peer Delegates</p> <p><i>*French only, for Quebec residents</i></p>	<p>Peer Delegates are allies who can point members to helpful resources.</p>	<p>Peer Delegate Website</p>
<p>Unifor Mental Health Matters Booklet</p>	<p>Provides important resources and guidance for people supporting others struggling with mental health and addictions.</p>	<p>Unifor Website</p>

ADDICTIONS SUPPORTS

<p>My Recovery</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>MyRecovery.ca is running multiple, online English-language meetings every day.</p>	<p>www.MyRecovery.ca</p>
<p>Canadian Addictions Counsellor Certification Federation</p>	<p>This association has moved to provide virtual addictions counselling.</p>	<p>www.CACCF.live.clinic</p>
<p>Peer Delegates</p> <p><i>*French only, for Quebec residents</i></p>	<p>Peer Delegates are allies who can point members to helpful resources.</p>	<p>Peer Delegate Website</p>

PILLAR 2: QUARANTINE AND ISOLATION

Overview

Unifor recognizes that measures announced to combat COVID-19, importantly self-isolation, can cause anxiety and, in some cases, lead to violence for those who are experiencing or are at risk of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is unacceptable in any situation, regardless of stresses you or those around you are experiencing.

With workplaces closing, many victims of domestic violence will lose the support the workplace offers and the time away from their abuser.

In addition to this, isolation and quarantine disproportionately affects those who are experiencing poverty; are in foster care; or are a black, Indigenous, or person of color.

Community Impact

Physical distancing and isolation can help protect people from viruses but it doesn't protect people from violence. For people facing domestic violence or abuse, being confined with your abuser can increase risk and reduce safe supports available.

Impact on Women

For women who are already at increased risk of violence, quarantine and isolation in conjunction with mounting financial and social pressures may sharply increase events of abuse. Abusers who feel helplessness or a loss of control are known to engage in domestic and gender-based violence in order to regain a feeling of power over their circumstances.

Impact on those Experiencing Poverty

Isolation and sheltering in place can also be hazardous when facing high levels of poverty, ill health, lack of clean water and inadequate housing – these factors can affect one's wellbeing during the pandemic.

This is particularly true in Indigenous communities after centuries of colonialization and genocide. This knowledge is important to recognize as supports and resources are dedicated to those affected by isolation and quarantine.

Impact on those in Foster Care

Children and youth in foster care may be experiencing separation from their families during isolation and quarantine. Racialized children, specifically Indigenous children, who have been taken into the foster care system are disproportionately impacted by social distancing measures – where they are unable to spend time with their parents during the pandemic.

TIPS ON HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE FACING GENDER-BASED AND/OR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Reach out to your Unifor Women's Advocate

Women's Advocates have training in risk factors, non-judgmental communications and knowledge of community resources. If you don't know her contact information, contact your local union. If your Local does not have an Advocate, consider the following suggestions:

Call, Don't Text

If you are concerned about a friend, member, or family member, make a check-in call instead of texting. There is a good chance texts are monitored. Ask questions that require yes or no answers. Do not ask too many safety questions as abuser may be close by. Keep conversation on everyday topics and slip in questions that will give you a sense of how everyone is doing.

Consider a monetary gift of support

Between layoff with no pay or benefits, inaccessibility of EI, and having to take time off because school and daycares are closed, the economic impacts of the pandemic may trap women in abusive relationships. You can extend financial support in ways that preserve the dignity of the receiver. Leaving a care package where she can get it that includes cash or a gift card. E-transfer funds if she is able to access the money herself. Be sensitive to how your friend can best access financial support.

Be non-judgemental

Being judgemental can further isolate someone experiencing abuse. Be positive and maintain contact – this can create the opportunity for her to ask for help. If you have serious concerns about your friend's safety, call the police for a wellness check. Know that this can increase the chance of violence so do not use this approach lightly. Otherwise, you need to be non-judgmental and respect your friend's decisions.

Contact shelters for support

Remember that shelters are still open although some may have altered protocols. Support can also include risk assessments, safety planning and resource referral. Contact might be more difficult for women during this time. Shelters often have multiple ways of being contacted, beyond phone calls, to avoid detection. For those able to access it, some shelters have moved their counselling online as well

Adapted from materials by Mira Liendo, mental health counsellor and Women Shelters Canada.

Supports and Resources

If you are in danger and require urgent support call 911. If you are facing gender-based or domestic violence and are looking for services:

RESOURCE	SUMMARY	CONTACT
Shelter Safe	List of shelters and other domestic violence services across Canada	www.sheltersafe.ca
SOS Violence <i>*French only, for Quebec residents</i>	List of shelters in Quebec and other domestic violence resources.	www.sosviolenceconjugale.ca
Indigenous Women's Support Program Crisis Line <i>*English only</i>	Connects Indigenous women to counsellors and support groups	604-687-1867 www.bwss.org/support/programs/indigenous-womens-programs/
Crisis Services Canada <i>*Text service in English only</i>	If you're thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, the Canada Suicide Prevention Service is available 24/7 for voice and 4pm to 12am ET for text.	1-833-456-4566 or text 45645

Donate to Shelters

Shelters need our support more than ever, consider making a donation. Many shelters have had to cancel fundraising events. In addition, increased safety measures and contingency planning have driven up costs. Many of them require cleaning supplies, food and personal protective equipment. Check on their social media channels and websites about what they need. Don't use dedicated crisis lines to inquire about donations.

<p>Assaulted Women's Helpline</p> <p><i>*For service in French visit Fem'aide (below).</i></p> <p><i>Multiple languages available, contact them directly to inquire</i></p>	<p>Has served as a free, anonymous and confidential 24-hour telephone and TTY crisis telephone line to all women in the province of Ontario who have experienced any form of abuse.</p>	<p>www.awhl.org 1-866-863-0511 TTY: 1-866-863-7868</p>
<p>Fem'aide</p> <p><i>*French only, Ontario only</i></p>	<p>Helpline for Domestic violence for Franco-Ontarians.</p>	<p>www.femaide.ca 1-877-336-2433</p>
<p>Hope for Wellness Hotline</p>	<p>The Hope for Wellness Helpline provides immediate help to all Indigenous people across Canada. Chat is available on the website.</p>	<p>www.hopeforwellness.ca 1-855-242-3310</p>
<p>Native Youth Crisis Hotline</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>Available anywhere across Canada and answered by staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.</p>	<p>1-877-209-1266</p>
<p>211.ca</p>	<p>Canada's primary source of information on government and community-based health and social services.</p>	<p>Dial 2-1-1 www.211.ca</p>

PILLAR 3: CHALLENGING STIGMA, RACISM, AND PREJUDICE

OVERVIEW

While the world responds to the widespread impact of COVID-19 we must all remember: we are in this together.

Certain communities, particularly those who are or are perceived to be Chinese or Asian, are experiencing stigma, racism, and prejudice because of the continued spread of misinformation related to coronavirus. As cases of COVID-19 are increasingly reported, so are cases of racist behavior – people are placing blame on communities who have nothing to do with the outbreak.

As a global community, we need to wash our hands of stigma, racism, and prejudice.

Community Impact

During any economic crisis, it is black, indigenous, and people of color that are affected the most. This current COVID-19 pandemic is no different.

When mass layoffs occur, workers who are the most vulnerable are often the first to be let go. Equity-seeking communities experience higher rates of poverty, are paid less, endure more precarious or dangerous housing, have less access to good jobs and adequate health care, and have to rely on inadequate public services in order to get by. All this has profound impacts on mental health, putting certain communities at greater risk of anxiety, stress, and depression, and in turn, physical symptoms such as high blood pressure, heart disease, insomnia, and neurological disorders.

The outbreak of this virus has resulted in an increase in racism and discrimination towards the Chinese and Asian community members. This stigma not only negatively affects one's mental health and wellbeing, leading to further isolation, but also leads to physical endangerment due to racist attitudes and actions.

The overall results on equity-seeking communities is a clear increase in stigma, racism, and prejudices aimed at those mistakenly believed to be connected to an outbreak, as seen during the SARS crisis in Toronto.

Racism, Stigma, and Prejudice in the Workplace during the pandemic

Racism and discrimination against Indigenous and workers of colour in the workplace is common. In the context of this current pandemic, it is important to identify the various ways racial discrimination can manifest itself, including:

- Racist remarks and verbal and physical abuse and harassment by co-workers or members of the public
- Racial slurs or “jokes” made at the expense of people of colour
- Racialized workers asked to perform work tasks and duties that pose greater health and safety risks
- Being paid less to do the same work or having less access to full time jobs
- Asian staff being particularly targeted in terms of treatment, work assignments, discipline, harassment, etc.

Racism, Stigma, and Prejudice toward Indigenous communities during the pandemic

Discrimination in treatment and service delivery to Indigenous people existed long before Canada was a country. Federal and Provincial governments have consistently perpetuated racism through unequal access to health care and social services that the rest of the country relies on to stay well. From tuberculosis to H1N1, Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by pandemics. In the current moment, cultural knowledge and teachings are placed at risk as communities remain unprotected and Indigenous elders are put in danger. In the context of this pandemic, historic inequities are exacerbating uncertainty, fear and ability to protect against infection. This can include:

- Limited or no access to clean drinking water with which to wash your hands or high traffic surfaces that are touched regularly including doorknobs and light switches
- Overcrowded housing in communities across the country and an inability to stay physically distanced or isolated from others
- Government provided tents as infrastructure to quarantine people in Indigenous communities in the Canadian winter
- Inadequate or even no access to the testing or health care needed to understand how the disease is spreading across indigenous communities or where it came from

Being an ally: What you can do if you witness racism

Racist ideas, messages and behaviors spread and grow when they go unchallenged. It is important as union members who believe in racial justice and equity to speak out against racism in all forms. We cannot leave it to those directly impacted and targeted to do all the work. We have an obligation to ensure our workplaces and communities are free from harassment and racial discrimination, and it is up to all of us to act in solidarity during these heightened times of crisis.

- If you hear co-workers making jokes about a person's cultural or racial background, report it to the union and employer
- If you see racist materials being distributed in the workplace, take them down and report it to the union and the employer
- If a member of the public is harassing someone, intervene in a non-confrontational manner if it is safe to do so to avoid escalation, and stand with them to make sure they are ok. If they are a Unifor member, report it to the union and employer so that mechanisms and protocols can be developed and put into place to appropriately deal with these situations if they should arise in the future

Other things you can do:

- Contact your Unifor local president for materials and resources on eliminating racism in the workplace
- Be mindful of the language you are using to make sure it is not reproducing harmful racial stereotypes and ideas
- Listen to those impacted by racism so that you can gain a better understanding of their experiences and increase your own awareness
- See other examples and strategies of how you can act and speak out against racial discrimination in various everyday settings, here: www.splcenter.org/20150125/speak-responding-everyday-bigotry (English only)

Supports and Resources

To assist you, we have compiled a list of Canadian and provincial resources that provide services from a culturally sensitive, anti-racism and equity lens. We will do our best to update this list and add further resources whenever possible.

Resource	REGION	SUMMARY	CONTACT
211.ca	National	Canada's primary source of information on government and community-based health and social services.	Dial 2-1-1 www.211.ca
Unifor	National	If you are a member experiencing racism and discrimination in the workplace, please inform your local union, National Staff Representative and/or Unifor Human Rights Director as soon as possible. We will act swiftly to ensure you are protected and make certain your employer is taking immediate and appropriate action.	humanrights@unifor.org
The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)	National	CAMH offers numerous answers to frequently asked questions and provides additional resources for a number of issues that can come up during times like this.	www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19
Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)	National	CMHA provides advocacy, programs and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive.	www.cmha.ca/?s=covid-19
NISA Helpline <i>*English only</i>	National	Nisa is there when no one else will listen. They assist in supporting, helping and creating a plan of action for the best possible solution.	www.nisahelpline.com
Multicultural Mental Health Resource Centre	National	The MMHRC provides resources to support culturally safe and competent mental health care for Canada's diverse population.	www.multiculturalmentalhealth.ca/en/

<p>Mental Health Programs for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada</p>	<p>National</p>	<p>This database describes existing mental health promotion, prevention and intervention programs and models for Indigenous peoples in Canada.</p>	<p>www.namhr.ca/mental-health-programs/</p>
<p>Cross-Cultural Clinic – Vancouver General Hospital</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>British Columbia</p>	<p>The Cross-Cultural Clinic provides multi-lingual and culturally sensitive mental health services to adults suffering from a major mental health disorder.</p>	<p>www.vch.ca/locations-services/result?res_id=105</p>
<p>Richmond Chinese Mental Health Support Group</p> <p><i>*Multiple languages available, contact them directly to inquire</i></p>	<p>British Columbia</p>	<p>This is a support group providing peer counselling, telephone support, audio cassettes, education and hospital/house visits. Service is available in Cantonese or Mandarin.</p>	<p>www.vcn.bc.ca/multicultural/233.html</p>
<p>Alberta Health Services – Indigenous Mental Health</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>Alberta</p>	<p>Indigenous Mental Health provides accessible, culturally appropriate services for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in Alberta.</p>	<p>www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page2762.aspx</p>
<p>Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>Alberta</p>	<p>MCHB is a cooperative of multicultural health care professionals providing support to enhance the health and well-being of individuals and families in the multicultural community.</p>	<p>www.mchb.org</p>
<p>Across Boundaries</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>Ontario</p>	<p>Across Boundaries provides equitable, holistic mental health and addiction services for racialized* communities.</p>	<p>www.acrossboundaries.ca</p>

<p>Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Service</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>Ontario— Greater Toronto Area</p>	<p>Access Alliance provides access to multicultural services and supports in the GTA.</p>	<p>www.accessalliance.ca/c4cc/</p>
<p>Hong Fook Mental Health Association</p> <p><i>*Multiple languages available, contact them directly to inquire</i></p>	<p>Ontario— scarborough</p>	<p>Hong Fook Mental Health Association provides mental health care to Ontario’s Asian communities.</p>	<p>www.hongfook.ca</p>
<p>Ottawa Chinese Community Services Centre</p> <p><i>*Multiple languages available, contact them directly to inquire</i></p>	<p>Ontario – Ottawa</p>	<p>The Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre is a non-profit, non-partisan, charitable organization committed to advancing the full social and economic integration and participation of newcomers, immigrants, refugees, and people of Chinese descent in the City of Ottawa.</p>	<p>www.occsc.org</p>
<p>South Asian Community Health Services</p> <p><i>*Multiple languages available, contact them directly to inquire</i></p>	<p>Ontario – Peel Region</p>	<p>South Asian Community Health Services promotes and helps all communities in achieving and maintaining good physical, mental and social health and well-being.</p>	<p>www.sachservices.net</p>

<p>South Asian Women's Centre</p> <p><i>*Multiple languages available, contact them directly to inquire</i></p>	<p>Ontario – Greater Toronto Area</p>	<p>The South Asian Women's Centre is run by and for South Asian Women in order to care for and empower South Asian Women.</p>	<p>www.sawc.org</p>
<p>Maison Multiethnique Myosotis (MMM)</p> <p><i>*French only</i></p>	<p>Quebec – Montreal</p>	<p>MMM offers psychotherapy for individuals and couples at an affordable price.</p>	<p>www.maisonmyosotis.org</p>
<p>McGill Cultural Consultation Service</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>Quebec – Montreal</p>	<p>The Cultural Consultation Service provides comprehensive assessment and evaluation of patients from diverse cultural backgrounds, including immigrants, refugees and members of ethnocultural communities, as well as Indigenous peoples.</p>	<p>www.mcgill.ca/culturalconsultation</p>
<p>Centre des familles latino américaines</p> <p><i>*French only</i></p>	<p>Quebec</p>	<p>CAFLA offers listening and psychological support to the Latin American community with a focus on young people.</p>	<p>www.cafla.ca</p>
<p>Access</p> <p><i>*French only</i></p>	<p>Quebec</p>	<p>Access provides a variety of on-line mental health materials to support and inform the multicultural community in Quebec.</p>	<p>www.accesss.net/dossiers/sante-mentale</p>

<p>Stop the Spread</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>National</p>	<p>As COVID-19 spreads globally, so too does racism and discrimination against the Chinese and Asian community. Stop the Spread is a project of the Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice working to stop the stigma and racism that is spreading due to COVID-19.</p>	<p>www.stopthespread.ca</p>
<p>Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice</p> <p><i>*English only</i></p>	<p>National</p>	<p>A national organization that educates, engages, and advocates for equity and justice for all in Canada.</p>	<p>www.ccncsj.ca/wp</p>
<p>Health Association of African Canadians</p>	<p>Nova Scotia</p>	<p>The Health Association of African Canadians (HAAC) was formed in 2000 to address African Canadian health issues and the system inequities affecting health.</p>	<p>haac.ca/about-us/</p>

Pillar 4: Take Action

Chances are, you or someone you know is struggling with increased anxiety, elevated symptoms of depression or is struggling with an addiction. It's hard to know how to be supportive at the best of times, and isolation and quarantine create an added level of difficulty in supporting people you care about.

Reaching out to those experiencing mental illness during this time is as important as ever.

Check in with your friends, family, and colleagues and talk about mental health. Talk about the plans you might put in place to manage loneliness and how you'll cope with this sudden way-of-life shift because of COVID-19. Make a plan to check in regularly and support each other through this crisis.

Taking action to support others is also good for our own mental health. While we are not experts in mental health or addictions, there are helpful ways you can provide support

TIPS ON HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT OTHERS

Connect with each other

Make a phone call.

Send an e-mail.

Send a message over social media.

Get in touch and let the people in your life know they are not alone.

Organize a group video chat

Your friends who are feeling additional distress might appreciate the chance to be included without the extra pressure of having to contribute to the conversation.

Create opportunities for laughter even amongst the chaos

Tell a joke or send a meme. Send a video of a child laughing or a picture of a cat doing something weird. This may sound frivolous but laughter is an important ingredient in mental wellness. Turning to each other for sources of laughter and lightheartedness is just as important as the more concrete actions.

Let the people around you know they do not have to respond right away

This is particularly important when supporting people experiencing increased levels of anxiety and distress. The pressure to respond might cause more harm for your friend. Offer to be consistent in your communication whether or not they have the energy to respond.

Be an active bystander if you witness racism, violence or bullying

Intervene if it is safe to do so or support the person who has experienced racism, violence, or bullying.

Don't forget to talk about other things in life too

Our newsfeeds, newscasts and conversations are full of COVID-19. Other important events continue to happen in life, remember to ask about and catch up on other life news when you are checking in with the people you care about.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TO BE A SUPPORTIVE ALLY FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING MENTAL ILLNESS OR DISTRESS

Be There

BeThere.org is focused on building a world where we are all better equipped to support each other. They offer tips and information on what to say to a friend who doesn't seem ok.

www.bethere.org

Here to Help

**Multiple languages available for some materials, contact them directly to inquire. Website is English only.*

HereToHelp offers excellent advice on how to help and support a loved one experiencing mental illness. In this time of isolation and physical distancing be sure to check out the section on providing emotional support.

[HereToHelp website](#)