

HOUSING AND WELLNESS PROGRAM

# A Comprehensive Wellness Guide for **First Nations Housing Staff**

## STRESS



First Nations Housing  
Professionals Association

L'Association des professionnels de  
l'habitation des Premières Nations



## **Housing Staff**

Prioritizing the wellness of First Nations housing staff is essential to supporting healthy, resilient communities. Housing staff play a vital role in providing safe, secure, and culturally appropriate housing, directly impacting the well-being of residents.

Supporting the physical, mental, and emotional health of staff helps sustain this important work. Providing practical resources and strategies for self-care, stress management, and balance can help reduce burnout, strengthen capacity, and support effective service delivery.

Investing in staff wellness also contributes to stronger workplaces by improving morale, retention, and creating a more supportive environment. While housing staff may not address all wellness or mental health concerns directly, having the knowledge and resources to recognize challenges and connect individuals to appropriate supports is key.

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## Acknowledgment

The **First Nations Housing Professionals Association (FNHPA)** is delighted to introduce the Housing and Wellness Program, aimed at offering crucial information and guidance to First Nations individuals residing on-reserve or engaged in housing-related roles. This initiative delivers educational programs, tools, and resources tailored for First Nations housing staff, residents, and youth. Through the implementation of this program, our aim is to address housing, health, and safety concerns holistically.

# STRESS

## The Impact of Stress on our Health

Stress is a natural response that our bodies have to challenging or demanding situations. While it's a normal occurrence, prolonged or excessive stress can harm our physical and mental health. First Nations housing staff face unique stressors due to the nature of their work.

Recognizing these challenges is important to create appropriate interventions and support systems to help reduce the negative effects. Stress can lead to:

### Burnout

Emotional demands can lead housing staff to feel drained and overwhelmed due to ongoing exposure to community challenges.

### Physical health impacts

Ongoing stress can affect physical health, increasing the risk of high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, weakened immunity, and weight gain linked to elevated cortisol levels.

### Interpersonal relationships

Chronic stress can strain relationships at work and home, making it harder to maintain healthy connections with colleagues, community members, and loved ones.

### Reduced quality of life

Ongoing stress can lower overall quality of life and interfere with daily functioning.

### Increased risk of mental health disorders

Chronic stress can worsen or contribute to conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Substance use

Some individuals may turn to substances as a coping mechanism, increasing the risk of dependency and further impacts on mental and physical health.

## Identifying Common Stressors

Housing staff working within First Nations communities often face a range of unique stressors due to the complicated social, economic, and cultural dynamics in these areas.

Some common stressors include:

- Community expectations for quick and efficient solution of housing issues.
- Heavy workloads leading to burnout.
- Limited resources such as inadequate funding, aging infrastructure, and insufficient support to adequately address housing needs.
- Complex administrative procedures (e.g., housing programs, funding applications, governmental regulations, compliance requirements).
- Lack of support from Management or Chief and Council on policy implementation and enforcement.
- Housing insecurity, characterized by restricted access to secure, affordable housing and overcrowding.
- Poor crisis management.
- Intergenerational trauma and historical disadvantages.

These stressors are primarily external, meaning they come from outside the individuals. However, many staff also feel stress from internal sources, like fear of failure, self-imposed pressure, and a sense of losing control.



## Stress Management

Stress management techniques are important tools for navigating the challenges of life. By providing individuals with the proper strategies to cope with stress, we can promote resilience, mental well-being, and overall quality of life.

Here are some strategies staff can use to manage stress:

### Develop supportive relationships

Build connections with colleagues, friends, and family who offer understanding and encouragement. Sharing experiences with trusted individuals can foster validation and a sense of belonging.

### Set boundaries and achieve work-life balance

Establish clear boundaries between work and personal life to prevent burnout and protect well-being. Prioritize self-care, hobbies, and meaningful time with loved ones.

### Practice mindfulness and meditation

Incorporate mindfulness or meditation into daily routines to strengthen present-moment awareness and emotional regulation. These practices help individuals acknowledge and accept thoughts and feelings without judgment.

### Engage in healthy lifestyle habits

Maintain healthy habits such as eating a balanced diet, staying hydrated, and limiting excessive alcohol or caffeine. Nourishing the body and reducing stimulants can support both physical and mental well-being.

### Regularly exercise

Incorporate regular physical activity into your routine to reduce stress and boost mood through the release of endorphins. Activities such as walking, jogging, yoga, or dancing enhance physical health while supporting relaxation.

### Ensure sufficient sleep

Maintain a consistent sleep routine to support cognitive function and overall well-being. Quality sleep allows the body and mind to rest and recover.

### Communicate with leaders

Engage in open and honest conversations with supervisors about workload, challenges, and support needs. Collaborative communication builds trust and shared problem-solving.

### Prioritize self-care practices

Make time for activities that promote relaxation and emotional well-being.

### Access mental health supports

Use available mental health resources, such as counseling services, support groups, or employee assistance programs. Professional guidance can offer coping strategies, perspective, and emotional support during challenging times.

### Reduce obligations when possible

Reassess commitments that contribute to excessive stress. Prioritize responsibilities based on importance and capacity, and learn to say no when necessary to protect your well-being.

## Managers Role in Addressing Stress

Managers play a key role in identifying indicators of stress, mental health concerns, and burnout among their team members. It's important that they approach their observations with empathy and uphold confidentiality.

Here are some signs that managers can look for:

### Behavioral changes

- Irritability or mood swings
- Decreased performance and productivity.
- Signs of anxiety
- Appearing withdrawn or less social

### Physical symptoms

Fatigue, headaches, changes in appetite, or disrupted sleep patterns may signal stress or mental health concerns. Managers should pay attention to concerns raised by staff or noticeable changes in physical well-being.

### Emotional symptoms

Frequent crying, appearing overwhelmed, or expressing feelings of hopelessness may indicate underlying distress that requires support.

### Increased absenteeism

Frequent absences can signal stress, burnout, or mental health challenges.

### Isolation from coworkers

Withdrawing from colleagues or avoiding team activities may suggest a need for additional support.

### Conflict or tension

Ongoing conflict or tension within the team may reflect underlying stress or unresolved concerns.

## Promoting Wellness in the Workplace

When managers notice signs of stress or mental health issues among their staff, it's essential to respond with empathy, sensitivity, and a commitment to their well-being.

Here are some steps managers can take to handle these situations effectively:

### Encourage open communication

Create a safe and supportive environment wherein staff members feel comfortable sharing their feelings and addressing any challenges they may face.

### Practice active listening

Listen attentively to staff concerns without passing judgment, demonstrating genuine empathy, and understanding.

### Prioritize well-being

Advocate for staff to prioritize their well-being and destigmatize seeking help for mental health issues.

### Provide information on available resources

Share information about available resources and support services to help staff access the assistance they need.

### Conduct regular check-ins

Schedule regular check-ins with staff and offer support when necessary.

### Collaborate on accommodations

Work together with staff to identify solutions that help them manage stress or mental health challenges.

### Promote workplace self-care

Encourage self-care practices in the workplace and introduce mindfulness techniques to foster stress management and emotional well-being among staff.

### Offer training and education

Provide training and educational opportunities to equip staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to support one another effectively in managing stress and promoting mental health.

### Lead by example

Demonstrate positive behaviors and attitudes related to mental health and self-care, serving as a role model for staff members.

## Integrating Traditional Healing Practices into the Workplace

Culture plays a vital role in health and well-being, underscoring the importance of traditional healing practices in supporting First Nations housing staff.

These practices strengthen community connections and promote a holistic approach that honors physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

To integrate traditional healing practices into the workplace, consider the following approaches:

### Education and training

Provide learning opportunities that highlight the importance and benefits of traditional practices in supporting mental health and wellness.

### Designated spaces

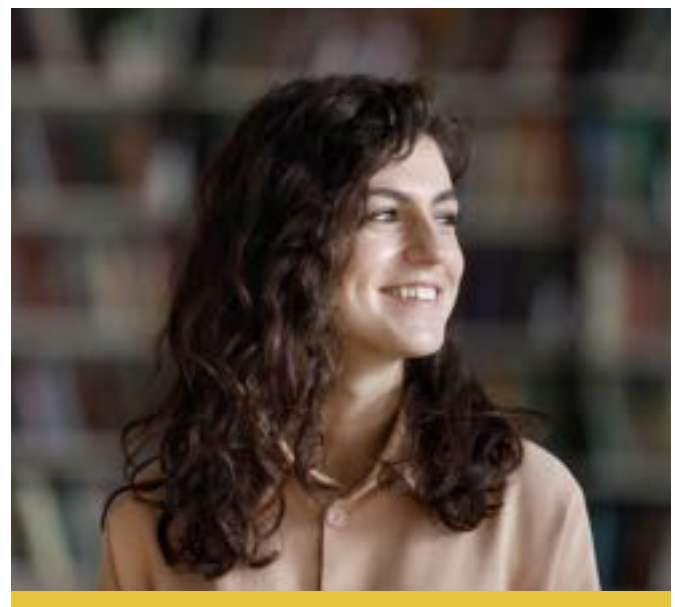
Create dedicated areas within the workplace where traditional practices can take place, such as spaces for smudging, talking circles, or drum circles.

### Collaboration

Build partnerships with Elders and Knowledge Keepers who can guide and facilitate traditional healing practices in the workplace.

### Cultural protocol adherence

Ensure all practices follow appropriate cultural protocols. Seek guidance from community leaders or Elders, respect sacred items and spaces, and honour specific cultural teachings.





# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The tips and tools outlined in this guide support the mental health and wellness of First Nations housing staff. By prioritizing wellness, promoting work-life balance, and fostering a positive work environment, organizations can strengthen overall staff well-being.

A holistic approach that supports physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health is key to cultivating a healthy workplace.

It is important for First Nations housing staff to recognize that they are not alone; resources and support systems are available during challenging times. Encouraging open communication and sharing information about available supports can empower staff to seek help when needed.

This guide provides general information and is not a substitute for professional medical or mental health advice.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis or requires immediate assistance, please contact one of the mental health hotlines mentioned in this guide or seek help from a qualified healthcare professional. These hotlines offer confidential support, crisis intervention, and resources for individuals facing mental health challenges.

**First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line** 1-855-242-3310  
[hopeforwellness.ca](http://hopeforwellness.ca)

**Suicide Crisis Helpline**  
9-8-8  
[988.ca](http://988.ca)

**Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line**  
1-866-925-4419

**MMIWG Support Line**  
844-413-6649

# ACTION PLAN

Implementing a wellness guide requires planning and collaboration within the workplace. Below is a proposed implementation plan for any workplace seeking to use this guide:

## 1. Conduct a Needs Assessment

Perform a comprehensive assessment to gauge the current state of staff well-being using surveys, interviews, or focus groups. Identify stressors, challenges, and areas for improvement.

## 2. Establish a Wellness Committee

Form a dedicated team committed to implementing the guide and ensuring its successful integration within the department or organization.

## 3. Customize the Guide

Tailor the wellness guide to align with the specific needs and values of the community and housing staff, ensuring accessibility and relevance to their experiences.

## 4. Provide Training and Capacity Building

Offer training sessions to staff and managers on effectively utilizing the guide. Equip managers with the necessary knowledge and resources to support their teams.

## 5. Integration into Policies

Incorporate the guide's practices into existing policies and staff training programs to ensure alignment with organizational goals.

## 6. Promotion

Use various communication channels (newsletters, meetings, email announcements) to introduce the guide and its benefits, ensuring visibility and awareness among staff.

## 7. Implement supportive strategies

Roll out supportive strategies outlined in the guide, such as regular check-ins, recognition programs, and opportunities for peer support. Foster a culture of openness and trust to demonstrate commitment to staff well-being.

## 8. Evaluation

Establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and feedback to gauge the guide's effectiveness, allowing for continuous improvement.

## 9. Continued support

Provide ongoing wellness support for staff, including refresher workshops and access to counseling services.

## 10. Sustainability

Develop a sustainability plan to ensure the long-term viability of initiatives. Implement processes for regular monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation of practices over time.



By following this **action plan**, the organization can effectively utilize the wellness guide to support staff members and cultivate a healthier, more supportive work environment.

## Methods for Assessing Impact

To assess the impact of the wellness guide and identify areas of success and improvement, staff can use the following methods.

### Surveys

Conduct regular surveys to gather feedback from staff about their experiences with the guide, including questions about perceived improvements in well-being, the effectiveness of strategies, and areas for enhancement.

### Focus groups

Organize focus group discussions to explore staff perceptions and experiences with the guide more deeply. Encourage open dialogue and constructive feedback to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

### Performance metrics

Track relevant performance metrics, such as absenteeism rates, productivity levels, and employee satisfaction scores, before and after implementing the guide. Compare these metrics to assess any changes or improvements over time.

### Case studies

Develop case studies highlighting success stories and positive outcomes resulting from the implementation of the guide. Share these stories with staff to illustrate tangible benefits and encourage continued engagement.

### Qualitative feedback

Encourage staff to provide qualitative feedback through suggestion boxes, one-on-one discussions with managers, or anonymous feedback channels. This feedback can offer valuable insights into individual experiences and perceptions.

### Observations

Managers and supervisors can observe changes in staff behavior, morale, and team dynamics following the implementation of the guide. Look for signs of increased engagement, improved communication, and a more supportive work environment.



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