



## A Call for Support for Family Physicians' Mental Health and Well-being During the COVID-19 Response

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### Background

Many family physicians are on the front lines of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This has resulted in a growth in workplace demands, including long hours, more questions from patients and their families, and pressure to keep up to date on rapidly evolving information and best practices.

Some health care providers are feeling fear and anxiety related to their personal safety and the possibility that they may put loved ones at risk of exposure through their work. Those who need to self-isolate from work or family may also experience feelings of guilt and loneliness.<sup>1</sup> The stigmatization of health care workers may compound these mental health concerns and cause additional negative effects.<sup>2</sup>

### Current efforts/challenges

A number of helpful mental health resources and other measures have been put in place across Canada:

- General mental health information and resources have been produced by the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Mental Health Commission of Canada, and the Canadian Mental Health Association.<sup>3,4,5</sup>
- The Government of Canada has established measures to help small businesses, including family practices, which could help alleviate some administrative concerns that may be causing family physicians additional stress.<sup>6</sup>
- Individual organizations such as the Canadian Psychological Association have offered their members' services to provide mental health care to health professionals during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, significant gaps remain across Canada in the availability of mental health resources that specifically address the needs of health care workers. Canadian health care workers require support both during and after the pandemic.

### Action required

- A COVID-19 mental health strategy is required that pays specific attention to the needs of health care workers. It must address fear and stigma, coping strategies, and other needs based on an assessment of the current context. This strategy should include collaboration with communities and with health, education, and social welfare systems.<sup>2</sup>
- Health care workers need access to psychological care, including informative resources, peer support, psychological first aid, and psychological intervention in severe cases.<sup>8</sup>
- Leadership is required to coordinate mental health services and improve public-facing messaging that emphasizes the need to support and value front-line workers.<sup>2</sup>

## Contact us

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