

# THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF CARING FOR OTHERS

A Factsheet on Supporting Staff Mental Health Through Compensation Equity and Inclusive Benefits

One of the most crucial roles health center leadership plays is taking care of the well-being and mental health of all staff, including their own. While mental health challenges among the healthcare workforce is not a new phenomenon, the COVID-19 pandemic and other societal and traumatic events only served to further exacerbate the problem. This factsheet provides health center leadership with a better understanding of the different mental health struggles their workforce may face and identifies strategies, related to compensation equity and inclusive benefits, to address these ongoing workplace challenges.

**"We can no longer suggest wellness strategies that place ownership on individuals...we need to look at ourselves as leaders, at the role our organizations play."**

*-Jennifer Moss, The Burnout Epidemic*

## Compensation Equity & Inclusive Benefits Strategies

### Free or Low-Cost Mental Health Services

- Enhance employee health benefits by providing free or low-cost mental health services. This may mean expanding health insurance benefits to increase mental health coverage or providing free memberships to virtual/telehealth therapy services.

### A Thriving Wage

- Financial stability is integral to maintaining a state of well-being. At minimum, provide *all* staff a living wage that covers their basic needs (e.g., food, housing). However, it is important to move towards a thriving wage, which allows individuals to build a life focused on their wellness needs (e.g., hobbies, travel, self-care activities, debt elimination).

### Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

- Establish an EAP that is accessible to *all* staff and their families. Ensure that staff know they can access confidential mental health services that are free-of-charge as part of their employee benefits package.

### Flexible/Hybrid/Remote Work Options

- Do not be prescriptive, as there is no one-size-fits-all to work schedules. Develop work options in conjunction with each staff member to address their various emotional, financial, psychological, and familial needs.

### Hazard Pay

- Provide additional pay to staff who perform hazardous duties or undergo physical hardship. This includes employees in a variety of roles and at all levels of the organization (e.g., providers, essential support staff, interns/externs/residents, housekeeping, maintenance, front-desk).

## Defining Mental Health & Trauma in the Workplace

**Burnout** - a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed

**Compassion Fatigue** - physical and mental exhaustion and a diminished ability to empathize and cope as a result of exposure to traumatized individuals

**Vicarious Trauma** - a profound change in one's worldview and belief system as a result of working with traumatized individuals

**Moral Distress** - a conflict and psychological disequilibrium between one's beliefs and values and institutional/workplace constraints

**Moral Injury** - a distressing psychological, behavioral, social, and/or spiritual response to witnessing, participating, or failing to prevent actions in conflict with one's morals

**Primary vs Secondary Trauma** - a traumatic experience that happens directly to a person versus exposure to another person's trauma

**Mass Trauma** - large scale natural or human-caused disasters that directly or indirectly affect large numbers of people

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** - a psychiatric disorder resulting from experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event

**Acute Stress Disorder** - a reaction to a traumatic event that occurs between three-days to one-month after exposure to trauma; may lead to PTSD

*\*Health center staff may experience acute, chronic, or complex trauma and mental health struggles.*

**Regardless of the strategies used to improve staff wellness, it must all start with de-stigmatizing and normalizing mental health and help-seeking behaviors.**

This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$825,000 with 0 percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit HRSA.gov



[www.clinicians.org](http://www.clinicians.org) [www.chcworkforce.org](http://www.chcworkforce.org)

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