

MAINTAINING STAFF MORALE

Staff working in homelessness serving settings demonstrate an unwavering passion and commitment to serving their vulnerable neighbours. Supporting staff morale is essential for staff retention and to keep everyone present for their clients and each other. This work can be very stressful. This resource provides tips and strategies to support staff involved in COVID-19 responses and recovery.

- **Issue Hazard Pay or Other Incentives:** Hazard pay is a form of compensation granted to essential staff members who have been asked to keep working in hazardous conditions, including COVID-19. Some have offered additional pay as an Essential Workers Premium. Others have considered retention bonuses while balancing the direction for staff to stay home when they are sick. Consider when to start, when to end, and how to message these increases or incentives. The issuance of hazard pay and other incentives may depend on contracts and conditions that organizations have enacted as part of declaring an emergency. Hazard pay has been noted to range anywhere from a \$2 to a 50% increase in pay. In Ontario for example, on April 25, the Government announced that [pandemic pay](#) will be issued to some shelter workers.
- **Be Visible and Vocal:** Leaders must be seen and heard often. Embrace Zoom and other technology to make sure your crew sees you every day. Silence is not golden; even small updates matter, particularly during a crisis. Prioritize one-on-ones, team meetings, and check-ins to ensure benchmarks are being met. See some [key messages for leaders](#) when working under pressure.
- **Be Transparent:** During this period of unknowns, it is critical for leaders to take a consistent and calm tone and measured actions when it comes to long-term plans. Transparency, even when information is fluid, is a key component of maintaining trust. Provide the who, what, when, where, and why so staff don't fill in the blanks themselves. Use language such as:
 - “Here are the actions we have taken...”
 - “Here is how this will affect you/your team...”
 - “This is why we are handling it this way...”
 - “This is when it will go into effect...”
- **Be Confident:** If your staff trusted you a month ago, then project confidence that they can continue to trust you. Focusing on what can be done can create a more action-oriented environment.
- **Be Real:** Pandemic conditions are not pretty or smooth. If you are struggling with work/life balance for example, share that with staff. They want and need to know you are in the trenches with them.
- **Be Flexible but Set Expectations:** Be clear on essential daily goals and benchmarks but also empathetic and flexible with organizational policies.
- **Give Staff Some Control:** People feel most anxious when they have no control. Ensure staff have opportunity to celebrate small victories in areas they can control such as providing a portal or venue for staff to share pandemic hacks and mishaps.

- **Foster a Mindset of Problem-Solving Thinking:** Times like this often result in “yes, but we can’t do this now” thinking. Challenge staff to come forward with “yes, and this is what we can do instead” solutions. This can change thinking from reactive to proactive.
- **Give Back:** As an organization, find ways to “pitch in” and then share news and outcomes both internally and externally to bolster morale and organizational pride.
- **Address Stress:** Consider these [9 key messages](#) for leaders to communicate with staff when under pressure. More resources to address stress are available in [CAEH’s COVID-19 Resource on Self-Care](#).
- **Give Pep Talks:** A good pep talk includes giving clear direction, showing empathy, and making meaning. See this article on the [Science of Pep Talks](#) for further information.
- **Support Accessing Professional Help:** No one is immune to emotional challenges that arise in times of crisis. Support people to access psychologists or counsellors to address their concerns. Many counsellors work online.
- **Show Appreciation:** Consider handwritten thank you cards from management or the board, e-mails from management with inspirational messages, gift cards, flowers etc.
- **Bring Treats:** Bake treats for staff once a week - never underestimate the power of a freshly baked cookie! Or have snacks delivered for those who are working from home.
- **Humour:** Share encouraging and funny videos, GIFs, or cartoons. Check out these [videos](#) related to COVID-19 as an example that can help lighten the mood.
- **Kindness:** Be kindness warriors – commit to doing a kind thing a day for another staff member.
- **Gratitude:** Create a gratitude wall, a whiteboard, or a bulletin board where people can list things or people that they appreciate.
- **Share Your “Why”:** Create a “why” wall or board where staff can list why they do this work. It can be extremely motivating to reflect on the compassion and passion that has called staff to help their vulnerable neighbours.
- **Staff Input:** Ask for ideas on maintaining morale and make concrete plans to action what you heard.
- **Host Virtual Get-Togethers:** Consider virtual coffee meetings, happy hours, or lunches. Try to keep conversation light as this should be a time to decompress. Some organizations or teams have held virtual dinner parties using platforms such as Zoom or Skype.
- See the Institute for [Healthcare Improvement’s \(IHI\) Conversation and Action Guide](#) for some more ideas on how to sustain joy in the work (page 4).

Disclaimer: This document is a collection of resources and/or ideas compiled by the team at CAEH. Please follow [Public Health Agency of Canada guidelines on COVID-19](#) as the primary resource for all health-related concerns.

CAEH will continue to update this resource as new information or ideas become available. Please refer to the CNH3 website Resources page at cnh3.ca/resources for additional information. If you have an idea or resource to share or are seeking further support, please contact us at info@caeh.ca.