

# The WorkSafeBC Critical Incident Response Program: A resource for you and your patients

**D**uring the course of their work, people may be exposed to a distressing event, and the impact of the exposure can linger. It could be witnessing violence or death, being threatened, or experiencing a near miss where something terrible could have happened but didn't. Even with experience or strong coping strategies, people may replay an event or struggle with what they saw or heard.

As a physician, you know this can happen to even the most seasoned professionals—including health care professionals—and can result in irritability, difficulty concentrating, or changes in sleep patterns and appetite, among other symptoms. Although people are inherently resilient and usually return to normal functioning in time, for some it can be helpful to get support from a mental health clinician and have their responses to these work-related experiences validated and normalized.

## Mental health professionals are available after a critical incident at work

For over 2 decades, WorkSafeBC has offered critical incident interventions to workers and employers across the province after an event experienced in their work. The Critical Incident Response (CIR) Program has an open referral policy, and services are available to any employer or person working in BC and to BC-based workers working temporarily outside the province, even if they may not be a worker under the Workers Compensation Act or if they have not

filed a claim. Through the CIR Program, we refer people to mental health professionals across the province to obtain support and psychoeducation, review healthy short-term coping strategies, and be reminded of formal and informal resources. The services are voluntary and confidential, with some limitations.

Over the years, we have developed a network of qualified registered clinical counsellors, social workers, and psychologists who come with various lived and professional experiences; we try to pair those who are accessing our services with a mental health professional we believe will match their needs. Our network is responsive, and we are often able to connect people with mental health clinicians within days. Those accessing our services are eligible for an initial session and up to 5 hours of follow-up support. We encourage people to access services soon after a work-related critical incident, usually within 3 weeks. Services are not diagnostic in nature and can be accessed in person or virtually.

The CIR Program is not intended to replace other key supports, including turning to trusted confidants when feeling overwhelmed or using individualized self-care strategies. But for some, the CIR Program can be a helpful short-term support. Anyone who feels the psychological impacts of an incident lingering and thinks they could benefit from longer-term support can file a claim with WorkSafeBC, provided they are a worker under the Workers Compensation Act.

This early-intervention service is available to your patients who may have been exposed to a distressing event in their work, as well as to you. It is not intended for general

or cumulative stressors, nor for events that occur outside of work. We recently briefed the Physician Health Program on the services available through the CIR Program.

## To get support or learn more

If you have questions, would like to consult or make a referral, or have experienced a critical incident in your work and want support, call our external answering service at 1 888 922-3700. They will connect you with one of our CIR Program team members, all of whom have backgrounds in clinical counseling or social work. The line is open 7 days a week, 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. For more information, see [www.worksafebc.com/critical-incident-response](http://www.worksafebc.com/critical-incident-response). ■

—Amber Sawkins, MSW, RSW  
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WorkSafeBC

## Coming soon:

### 5th Annual WorkSafeBC–NAOEM Joint Conference for Community Physicians

Join us on Saturday, 26 October, for the WorkSafeBC–Northwest Association of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (NAOEM) joint conference. Attend in person (in Kelowna) or online. In-person attendees can also participate in a worksite visit on 25 October and an educational event that evening.

For more information and to register, visit <https://ubccpd.ca> and search for “WorkSafeBC-NAOEM.”

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*This article is the opinion of WorkSafeBC and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.*