FACT SHEET:
TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED APPROACHES IN COMMUNICATION

Approximately 3 in 4 Canadians will experience a traumatic event at some point in their lives[1]. Violence in the territories is far too common with more than one third of women and men reporting they had been sexually or physical assaulted prior to the age of 15 and more than half having experienced violence since then[2]. In addition, the legacy of colonial violence and the associated intergenerational and historical trauma necessitates adopting trauma and violence-informed approaches in the Northwest Territories when providing public services.

Incorporating "and violence" recognizes the complex, intersecting violence and inequities that may be impacting one's life. Trauma and violence-informed approaches focus on minimizing the possibility of harm and re-traumatization and maximizing safety, control, and resilience when people engage with service providers and organizations[3].

Adopting trauma and violence-informed approaches requires a commitment at both the organizational and individual level. Adopting these approaches necessitates a shift in thinking, language, and practices. Viewing trauma as an injury shifts our focus, our language, and understanding from "What is wrong with you" to "What has happened to you?" It requires learning agility as we unlearn old understandings and ways of doing things and relearn news ones. It requires openness, empathy, compassion, flexibility and an emphasis on working with and empowering people who have experienced trauma.

ORGANIZATIONAL

The Public Health Agency of Canada has identified the following four principles to guide organizations and service providers in implementing trauma and violence-informed approaches[3]:

1. Understand trauma and violence and their impacts on peoples' lives and behaviour

2. Create emotionally and physically safe environments

3. Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection

4. Provide a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support client coping and resilience

The Public Health Agency of Canada also outlines strategies to implement each of these principles which you may find useful as you embrace trauma and violence-informed principles and approaches. These strategies can be found on their website; (search for "Trauma and violence-informed approaches to policy and practice").

SERVICE PROVIDER

Adopting these approaches involves the recognition that many service providers do not need to know the details of the trauma or violence a person has experienced and as such, should not probe, but should know how to respond appropriately. Rather these service providers need to understand what is trauma, the different types of trauma, the effects of trauma, and recognize trauma responses so they can respond appropriately. Additionally, service providers need to know how to be supportive and how to minimize the potential for causing further harm or re-traumatization. Those service providers that require more detail (e.g., the legal system) or provide trauma-specific services (e.g., therapy) should receive specialized trauma and violence-informed training that is beyond the scope of this workshop and toolkit.

Adopting a trauma and violence-informed approach also involves equipping and caring for your staff as a means of reducing the possibility of developing vicarious trauma. Accordingly, policies, training and practices can develop greater self-awareness and relevant knowledge, sustain personal well-being, and encourage and develop protective factors including self-compassion. Mental health services should also be available to service providers to help them cope and thrive too.

GENERAL COMMUNICATION TIPS

Trauma and violence-informed approaches are person-centred and seek to build trust, safety, and respect. Remaining calm and patient, practicing active listening, adopting a non-judgemental approach, and not interrupting are good places to start when engaging in a dialogue with the person you are trying to help. Using trauma and violence-informed language also involves being mindful of our body language, tone of voice, and carefully choosing our words.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Resources that range from creating a trauma-informed workplace to implementing trauma and violence-informed approaches are abundant. The materials available include webinars, workshops, books, and various guides. We are highlighting a few of these below, rather than repeating their content and encourage you to explore and learn more.

• Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute – Canada CTR1

• *Trauma-Informed. The Trauma Toolkit* (2013). Klinic Community Health

• *Trauma-Informed Practice Guide* (2013). BC Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council

SOURCES

[1] Canadian Psychological Association. Traumatic Stress Section: Facts About Traumatic Stress and PTSD. Retrieved from: https://cpa.ca/sections/traumaticstress/simplefacts/

[2] Statistics Canada. (2018). Gender-based violence: Sexual and physical assault in Canada's territories, 2018. Retrieved from: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00012-eng.htm

[3] Public Health Agency of Canada. Trauma and violence-informed approaches to policy and practice.Retrieved from: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/health-risks-safety/trauma-violence-informed-approaches-policy-practice.html