

A Functional Needs Framework for Every Community
Emergency Planning and Response for People with Disabilities



Responding to the Needs of Evacuees with Mental Illness

This document is part of a series created by Disability Alliance BC in order to help local Emergency Programs in British Columbia integrate the needs of people with disabilities into their emergency plans. The series was developed for the **A Functional Needs Framework for Every Community** project, based on key areas identified by local Emergency Programs.

Links provided in this document are live and were accessed February 2017.

Created by
Disability Alliance BC



Generously funded by
Emergency Management BC



The *Guide to Welcoming People with Disabilities in Ontario's Reception Centres*, produced by Inclusive Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2010, includes a section on "People with Mental Health Care Needs." Page 25 of the guide discusses key things to consider in reception centres and group lodgings. For the full guide, please go to:

 <http://www.inclusionresearch.org/IEPCwebsite/FINAL%20rev%20Guide%207-20-10.pdf>

PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS

People who are coping with an emergency reception centre situation will have various reactions as they struggle with the disruption and loss caused by the disaster. A person's mental health needs may not be immediately clear. A range of mental health problems may surface at different times during a centre stay.

A person may have a mental health diagnosis or complications from substance abuse that will not be apparent to you. They or their support person may choose not to disclose this information because of the stigma and misinformation that surround mental illness. A small percentage of persons with mental illnesses may speak or act in unusual ways that others could find frightening or disruptive of centre routines.

Centre staff should expect such events to be very rare, and most persons with mental illnesses to adapt well to the centre. When providing services to persons you believe to have a mental illness, be careful to ensure their rights are not violated and they receive the assistance needed to access centre services.

If you feel that a person may have mental health care needs:

- Speak calmly. Loud stern tones will likely have either no effect or a negative effect on the individual
- Use non-threatening body language – keep your hands by your sides if possible, don't intrude into their personal space
- Eliminate or reduce commotion – if possible move away from loud sounds, bright lights and crowds
- Look for personal identification – medical ID may indicate a mental illness and offer a contact name and telephone number
- Ask a support person for advice if one is present, or call the caregiver organization of the person being helped, if known – they are usually the best resources for specific advice on calming the person and ensuring everyone's safety
- Prepare for a longer interaction – the person should not be rushed. Be patient and supportive.
- Use short direct phrases – too much talking can distract the person or confuse the situation



WHEN PROVIDING SERVICES TO PERSONS YOU BELIEVE TO HAVE A MENTAL ILLNESS, BE CAREFUL TO ENSURE THEIR RIGHTS ARE NOT VIOLATED AND THEY RECEIVE THE ASSISTANCE NEEDED TO ACCESS CENTRE SERVICES.

SUGGESTED ACCOMMODATIONS

- Quiet rooms for calming and counseling
- Privacy screens

EXPERTS IN MENTAL HEALTH

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) has materials and courses that may be of assistance to ESS around helping evacuees with mental illness.

CMHA has *Responding with Respect* workshops. Please see their website for descriptions of their workshops on understanding and responding to people with mental illness.

 <http://vancouver-fraser.cmha.bc.ca/get-informed/responding-respect-workshops>

To book a workshop, contact courses.vb@cmha.bc.ca

CMHA also produced an easy-to-read resource for police response to people with mental illness. This document has valuable information that could be helpful to ESS.

 http://www.cmha.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/policesheets_all.pdf ■

