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## Stronger Together

### Building individual and social resilience to cope with the impacts of natural hazard events

A Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) regional communication and awareness campaign to enhance capacity for mental health and psychosocial support in disaster management in the Caribbean

<https://www.paho.org/spc-crb/stronger-together>

## Campaign essentials

### Campaign at a glance

The Caribbean is highly prone to natural hazards, including seismic activity, hurricanes, landslides and floods. These events have resulted in lost lives, serious injuries and severe damage to housing and infrastructure. A single hurricane event can affect more than one island, and completely erase the gains of many years of productivity. As a result, these unpredictable hazards create disruption and have an ongoing impact on people's lives - affecting their mental health and psychosocial well-being.

Although everyone is affected in some way by disaster events, there are a wide range of reactions and feelings that a person can experience. People may feel overwhelmed, confused or very uncertain about what is happening. They can also feel very fearful, anxious, numb or detached. However, people who feel safe, connected, calm and hopeful, have access to social, physical and emotional support and find ways to help themselves after a disaster, will be better able to recover long-term from mental health effects.

Against this context, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) are launching a regional communication and awareness campaign on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in disaster management in the Caribbean. Under the theme "*Stronger Together*", the campaign aims to offer information and strategies to assist communities in the region in better coping with the psychological impact of adverse events before, during and after a disaster situation. It also aims to raise awareness to reduce the stigma about seeking mental health and psychosocial support.

This communication campaign is part of a joint project by PAHO/WHO and CDB entitled "*Building individual and social resilience to cope with the impacts of natural hazard events: enhancing capacity for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in disaster management in the Caribbean*". This 18-month project aims to build regional capacity for MHPSS in disaster management in the Caribbean; strengthen in-country competencies to conduct needs assessments and action plans; develop and implement a regional communication campaign; and conduct monitoring and evaluation of the project.

### This guide is for you

If you are reading this campaign guide, you are probably interested in getting involved in the campaign. That's great, because achieving campaign objectives will only be possible if we work together as a community.

Whether you work for the government, a nongovernmental organization or a media outlet, whether you are a community leader, health care provider, first responder, volunteer, parent or an active member of your community who would like to get involved, this guide is for you.



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## What we are trying to achieve

This regional communication and awareness campaign aims to:

- offer information and strategies to assist communities in the region in better coping with the psychological impact of adverse events before, during and after a disaster situation; and
- raise awareness to reduce the stigma about seeking mental health and psychosocial support.

For this purpose, the campaign will convey the general principles of psychological first aid (PFA) to the general public, community leaders and first responders. It is hoped that the information given, will help individuals and communities to anticipate, cope and recover from disasters.

Natural hazards tend to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. Therefore, the campaign pays special attention particular groups within the general population that may be at greater risk of negative outcomes during a disaster situation, such as children and adolescents, women, older persons, indigenous peoples, people with pre-existing mental disorders, migrants, persons with disabilities, homeless persons and people living in shelters.

Additionally, knowledge of the different gender roles in the Caribbean has been used to develop gender-sensitive communication messages, including the different roles of men and women in the family and the community, a possible rise of gender-based violence post-disaster as well as gender differences in the way in which health services are accessed.

## The slogan

The campaign slogan is: Stronger Together.

## Who we are targeting

This campaign is focused on the following audiences:

- Communities with emphasis on children/adolescents, men and women bearing in mind the specific needs and rights of:
  - Women and girls, i.e. changing attitudes that cause gender-based violence, providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and ensuring economic opportunities; and
  - Men and boys, i.e. masculinity norms that may have a negative impact, increased usage in drug and alcohol.
- First Responders and community leaders will be utilized as a target audience and communication channel. Experience in Caribbean rescue missions has shown that areas with strong communities fared better after a disaster.



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## Overarching messages of the campaign

- **Helping others is one of the best ways to cope with difficulties.** Listen, comfort them and participate in regular social activities and don't hesitate to accept and ask for help. Reach out to those who are the most affected or in greatest need of help including injured, elderly people, people with disabilities, widows, children and their caregivers, who may be overwhelmed.
- **By working together, we can cope with this situation.** Listen to others, comfort them and participate in regular social activities and don't hesitate to accept and ask for help from those you trust in your family or community. Work with others to organize community and social activities such as religious ceremonies, community meetings, cleaning, sports or the arts.
- **It is important that you take care of yourself, so you can help others.** Helping others and getting help from others is one of the best ways to cope with difficulties. Listen to others, comfort them and participate in regular social activities, even if it just sitting and talking together as a group.
- **Children need love and attention especially during this difficult time.** Children who are affected by a crisis may be at risk of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation. Young children are often particularly vulnerable since they cannot meet their basic needs or protect themselves. Be attentive and comfort them throughout the day and at night and ensure that you and your family is aware of where they are at every moment during the day in order to prevent further harm. Children should be kept close to their parents or trusted caregiver (day and night) and ensure that they know their name and where they live.
- **Children are best cared for by persons they know and trust.** If you are aware of children without parents living nearby you, notify child protection services or the police (or helpline/protection working group) of where the children are. Do not move a child from its community until you are sure that he or she has genuinely been lost or abandoned. Do not give your child away to people who promise them a better future elsewhere. If you think you can no longer care for your child and you need help, seek assistance from an identified organization (add name and contact info).
- **It is very common for persons to want to use alcohol or drugs when you feel bad.** However, when you drink or use drugs it takes longer to overcome the painful feelings and anxiety. Also, when you drink or use drugs you will distress your family and will make it more difficult to protect and support your family and rebuild your community.

## How you can get involved

We have developed the following communication materials that you can use and adapt:

- An Illustrated booklet on Psychological first Aid (PFA)
- Video public service announcements (PSAs) and video testimonials
- Radio PSA's and audio versions of the video testimonials
- A radio Jingle
- Graphical materials for social media

## Key concepts and definitions

### What is mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)?

The composite term “mental health and psychosocial support” describes any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder. The social and psychological problems encompass a broad range of pre-existing (such as extreme poverty, severe mental disorder and alcohol abuse), emergency-induced (for example, family separation, disruption of social networks and community structures, grief, depression and increased gender-based violence), or humanitarian aid-related problems (including the undermining of community structures or traditional support mechanisms and anxiety due to lack of information and disruption of livelihoods).

### What is psychological first aid (PFA)?

PFA describes a humane, supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support. PFA is not something that only professionals can do; it can be provided for people in a position to help others who have experienced and extremely distressing event. PFA involves the following themes:

- providing practical care and support, which does not intrude;
- assessing needs and concerns;
- helping people to address basic needs (for example, food and water, information);
- listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk;
- comforting people and helping them to feel calm;
- helping people connect to information, services and social supports;
- protecting people from further harm.

### What are the key action principles of PFA?

The three basic action principles of PFA are **LOOK**, **LISTEN** and **LINK**. These action principles guide how to view and safely enter a crisis situation, approach affected people and understand their needs, and link them with practical support and information:

- **LOOK:**
  - Check for safety
  - Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs
  - Check for people with serious distress reactions
- **LISTEN:**
  - Approach people who may need support
  - Ask about people’s needs and concerns
  - Listen to people, and help them to feel calm
- **LINK:**
  - Help address basic needs and access services
  - Help people cope with problems
  - Give information
  - Connect people with loved



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## Additional resources

If you want to learn more about MHPSS and psychological first aid, check the following resources:

- Pan American Health Organization. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Disaster Situations in the Caribbean. Available from:  
[https://www.paho.org/disasters/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1649:mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-in-disaster-situations-in-the-caribbean&Itemid=807&lang=en](https://www.paho.org/disasters/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1649:mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-in-disaster-situations-in-the-caribbean&Itemid=807&lang=en)
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group (IASC). Advocacy Package. IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Disaster Management. Available from:  
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/1304936629-UNICEF-Advocacy-april29-English.pdf>
- World Health Organization. Psychological First Aid: Guide for field workers. Available from:  
[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44615/9789241548205\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44615/9789241548205_eng.pdf?sequence=1)
- World Health Organization. Building Back Better: Sustainable Mental Health Care After Emergencies. Available from: [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85377/9789241564571\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85377/9789241564571_eng.pdf?sequence=1)
- World Health Organization. mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide (mhGAP HIG). Available from: [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/162960/9789241548922\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/162960/9789241548922_eng.pdf?sequence=1)
- Sphere. The Sphere Handbook 2018. Available from: <https://handbook.spherestandards.org/>