



Addressing Burnout Among the Crisis Intervention Workforce



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Introduction

This resource describes strategies that administrators and supervisors at Community Behavioral Health Centers can use to support the crisis intervention workforce and reduce burnout. Addressing burnout is important because not only can it have lasting effects on a person's well-being, it also negatively impacts client care and service delivery. While employee-level strategies such as stress management, self-care, and mindfulness are important for fostering individual coping and resilience, organization-level strategies are crucial for targeting structural and cultural causes of burnout. By placing accountability on the organization instead of individuals, organizational-level strategies can be more effective at sustainably reducing burnout and improving workforce well-being than employee-level strategies alone.¹

What does burnout at work look like?

Burnout is an occupational phenomenon encompassing three dimensions:

Exhaustion. Experiencing a sense of depletion, overextension, and fatigue.

Depersonalization. Feeling detached and emotionally distant from work.

Feelings of inefficacy. Having a reduced sense of professional accomplishment.

This resource introduces five domains related to burnout: workload, control, reward, community, and fairness.² It provides an overview of the domains and includes examples of organization-level strategies to consider for addressing each.



Workload

Chronic excessive workload contributes to burnout by preventing employees from having necessary time to rest and recover. Unrelenting deadlines, working overtime, and taking on work outside one's usual role are scenarios that may cause staff to feel overwhelmed and lead to emotional exhaustion.^{3,4}

Strategies

- ✓ **Streamline tasks and engage auxiliary staff in workflows when appropriate.** Consider whether administrative or other auxiliary staff can support more non-clinical, non-urgent tasks, such as crisis assessment documentation, medication verification, and communication with pharmacies.
- ✓ **Assess processes and implement systems to address redundancies and inefficiencies.** Build electronic health record workflows so an individual's past assessments and crisis plans can be easily retrieved or carried forward for the current encounter.
- ✓ **Allow flexible scheduling.** For example, if a clinician responds to cases in the community, can you allow them to complete their case notes afterwards? Supervisors can allow staff to shift their schedules based on needs and interests, such as to attend a training for professional development. Leadership can support flexible schedules to accommodate different working styles (e.g., remote work) and outside-of-work responsibilities (e.g., parent or caregiver).
- ✓ **Model well-being in leadership roles.** Select and develop leaders who demonstrate a commitment to staff well-being and are skilled in effectively managing staff and navigating bureaucracy.⁵



Control

Control includes the ability to make independent decisions and choices and to have control or autonomy over one's work and work-life. Lack of control relates to an employee's capacity to influence their workload and/or work environment, professional autonomy, and access to resources that support their work. The inability to control these factors contributes to job disengagement, which may lead to burnout over time.^{3,6} Burnout due to perceived lack of control is especially common in providers who work in fast-paced, highly demanding environments.⁷

Strategies

- ✓ **Provide opportunities for peer consultation.** Designate spaces for case discussions with peers, including informal, ad hoc peer consultation during normal working hours. Encourage such discussion. Having dedicated time to engage with each other and experience multiple perspectives contributes to staff feeling they are supported and in control of their role and decisions.
- ✓ **Provide routine, clinical group supervision.** Clinical supervision involves staff oversight, support, and ongoing training by more-experienced colleagues. Identifying new or alternative ways to approach future cases together may enhance staff competencies and improve decision-making.
- ✓ **Offer meetings for problem resolution.** Hold regular team meetings to discuss problems, adapt workloads, and manage conflicts. Organizational leadership can solicit feedback from staff through these meetings and follow up with concrete action steps to demonstrate their commitment to address issues.
- ✓ **Offer role variation.** Allow different staff within a role to vary their tasks based on interests and needs so they feel engaged, connected to the work, and that they have control over their workload.
- ✓ **Factor staff values into performance evaluations and goal-setting.** Supervisors can discuss goals, motivation, and values of their staff as part of a performance evaluation process, at least annually. Supervisors can help customize work to meet the individual employee's goals.



Reward

People need to be rewarded and recognized for their work. Examples include receiving bonuses or spot awards, having opportunities for career growth, and feeling appropriately compensated. When rewards and recognition are distributed inconsistently or inequitably, this can affect employee morale and contribute to a feeling that work is unimportant or undervalued.

Strategies

- ✓ **Formalize systems for staff appreciation.** Create a kudos board for staff to share recognition and praise with one another. Staff that receive kudos could have the opportunity to choose a prize.
- ✓ **Build transparency around pay and promotions.** Include salary information in job descriptions (this may already align with state and local pay transparency laws).⁸
- ✓ **Provide non-monetary rewards.** Offering meaningful professional development and education opportunities can expand staff skills and expertise while also increasing satisfaction and retention.
- ✓ **Provide expanded benefits.** Flexible schedules and offering benefits in addition to health insurance, such as caregiver or transportation subsidies, can support staff's financial well-being while also helping them manage competing work-life obligations.



Community

The quality of the social environment at the workplace, including one's sense of mutual support, cooperation, and mutual expression of positive feelings by team members, contributes to a sense of community among staff. A shared sense of community creates an environment where staff feel supported. Lack of trust and unresolved workplace conflict can lead to feelings associated with burnout. Organizations should strive to create a culture in which each role is valued for its unique perspective and where each member feels safe and empowered to contribute.⁹ Organizational environments centered on equity and respect enable employees to thrive and form positive connections. Supervisory skills in communication, conflict resolution, and team building also impact the sense of community within a workgroup.⁵

Strategies

- ✓ **Offer opportunities for cross-disciplinary staff to meet, connect, and learn.** Creating opportunities such as interdisciplinary rounds or shared meals can help facilitate connections among staff. These forums allow staff to learn about each other's specialty areas (e.g., youth team, intensive outreach team, psychiatry team) and share work-life experiences during working hours.
- ✓ **Offer presentations and community engagement opportunities.** For example, clinicians could give a presentation to local school leadership on best practices for using mobile crisis intervention services. Providers in the community could also present to mobile crisis teams and share resources and the best ways to access their services to foster bi-directional relationships.
- ✓ **Create job shadowing opportunities.** Staff in different roles or in different units may shadow each other to improve understanding of various roles, collaboration, and communication.¹⁰
- ✓ **Foster inclusion, belonging, and community-building.** This is important for both clinical and non-clinical staff and may be achieved through creating organizational committees or affinity groups around identities or interests so staff can share resources and network.
- ✓ **Address stigma around mental health and substance use in the workplace.** Organizations may require comprehensive anti-stigma training with all staff to demonstrate the value of staff with lived experiences, such as peers and family partners. Trainings focusing on increasing empathy of staff for people experiencing mental health or substance use issues may also be beneficial (e.g., National Alliance on Mental Illness's Provider training).¹¹



Fairness

Organizational fairness is compromised when employees do not trust leadership or feel a lack of transparency.^{6,12} Siloed decision-making with limited employee involvement, inequitable or inconsistent policies and procedures—these can all lead to a sense of cynicism and result in burnout.⁶



Strategies

- ✓ **Offer opportunities for direct communication between leadership and staff.** Supervisors should provide clear and consistent messaging around policies and practice. Maintain an “open door” policy, actively seek out feedback via employee surveys or other mechanisms, prioritize transparency, and notify staff of organizational changes before they are implemented. Distribute a periodic newsletter and hold frequent all-hands meetings or more-informal lunch gatherings and coffee klatches at times that are convenient for staff.
- ✓ **Implement Employee Advisory Committees.** Employee Advisory Committees can help bridge communication gaps between staff and executive leadership. Committee members are elected by staff to represent and communicate employee needs, concerns, and values to leadership.
- ✓ **Gain exposure to day-to-day work of staff.** Executive leadership can shadow staff at various levels to understand their day-to-day experiences and build trust and community.¹³ Staff benefit when leadership has a realistic view of their everyday experiences, and may see it as a demonstration of leadership’s commitment to fairness.

Getting Started: Considerations for Implementation

When implementing strategies to mitigate burnout, organizational leadership should involve clinical and non-clinical staff at all levels. Engage staff in the development of needs assessments, identification of relevant strategies, and creation of implementation and evaluation plans alongside leadership. A whole-organization approach, with continued support from leadership and ongoing collaboration and feedback from employees, is often essential for creating and sustaining meaningful change in the workplace.

Conduct a Needs Assessment

An important initial step in addressing burnout is conducting a needs assessment to understand the organization’s strengths and challenges, as well as contextual, structural, and societal factors that shape staff experiences. As part of this effort, you may wish to ask staff to complete a burnout self-assessment, such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

Identify Relevant Strategies

Based on findings from the needs assessment, leadership and staff should next collaborate to develop tailored strategies to mitigate burnout. For example, emergent challenges, such as lack of childcare and caregiver support, may inform decisions around flexible schedules and time-off policies. Recognizing the multifaceted needs of staff is important for creating a sustainable solution to address burnout.

Create an Implementation Plan

Finally, engage staff in the development of a detailed plan for implementing and evaluating organizational initiatives to reduce burnout. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s [evidence-based guide](#) on addressing burnout in the behavioral health workforce provides an overview of implementation and evaluation strategies as well as potential measures, outcome indicators, and qualitative and quantitative data sources.¹⁴



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