

Understanding the Mental Health and Well-Being Needs of Non-Profit Organizations on PEI

A survey delivered by the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being and the Community Sector Network of PEI

Summary

The non-profit sector on Prince Edward Island provides essential services and support to individuals and communities across the province. The COVID-19 pandemic and the devastations caused by Hurricane Fiona have been immensely challenging and the employees and volunteers who work within it have contributed in a vital way. Reports of organizations overwhelmed with funding and labour challenges, experiencing increased demand for services and support, struggling with managing day-to-day operations, and finding ways to support mounting mental health pressures are commonplace.

To deepen understanding of the overwhelm some organizations are experiencing, and the possible implications on programs and service delivery, the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being and the Community Sector Network of PEI partnered by sharing internal resources and expertise to conduct a survey in January 2023. The survey examined the mental well-being realities and needs of staff and volunteers, focusing on the 'helpers' responsible for providing the high level of service that organizations offered to Islanders during the pandemic and in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Fiona.

The PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being and the Community Sector Network of PEI are pleased to share the findings from the survey and offer some proposed actions for supporting non-profit sector organizations across PEI. We invite you to reach out to us to discuss the information contained within this report and to explore opportunities for providing support to non-profit organizations that will benefit the "helpers" as well as those in need of help.

Highlights

High employee morale is trending downward. 49% of respondents ranked staff morale at 4 out of 5 prior to the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 27% ranked staff morale at 4 out of 5 post-Hurricane Fiona.

74% of respondents reported seeing signs of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion in their staff.

33% of respondents reported offering staff training related to mental health and mental well-being-related topics.

The top three factors negatively impacting the mental well-being and morale of staff and volunteers were reported as: fatigue from juggling work/home responsibilities (73%), increasing demands from personal responsibilities (70%), and pivoting priorities based on current activities and needs in our community (52%).

The top three factors positively impacting the mental well-being and morale of staff and volunteers were reported as: workplace culture (64%), workplace colleagues (64%), and flexible work hours (64%).

When asked what barriers leadership faced in supporting staff mental health and well-being needs, the top themes were: time, lack of staffing, lack of support for leadership, funding and resources.

Survey Findings

A total of 102 participants completed the survey with 84 respondents (n=84) answering 'yes' to being a representative of a non-profit organization on PEI. The survey captured basic information about the size, capacity and operating budgets of the organizations.

- 24% had an operations budget of \$1M or more with the bulk of respondents (56%) managing operational budgets between \$100,000 - \$999,000
- 95% of organizations have some combination of full-time, part-time and contract staff
- 31% of organizations referenced a staff size of 2-5 employees
- 5% were run solely by volunteers

Participants were asked to reflect on the general morale of staff and volunteers before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and at the end of 2022 (post-Fiona). 49% of respondents ranked staff morale at 4 out of 5 prior to the declaration of the global pandemic. By the end of 2022, respondents ranking staff morale at 4 out of 5 dropped to 27%.

The remaining questions in the survey positioned the roles of the employees, how they were feeling mentally, how their mental health and well-being are currently being supported, and what is missing/could be bolstered within these supports. Respondents were asked to describe the factors that were impacting or protecting mental health and well-being in a positive way. Workplace culture, workplace colleagues, and flexible work hours received equal weighting for factors that positively impacted their mental health and well-being. Additional responses can be found in Figure 1.

8. What factors are positively impacting or protecting the mental well-being and morale of your staff and volunteers? (Check all that apply)

[More Details](#)

Workplace culture	54
Workplace colleagues	54
Competitive pay	31
Employee benefits (i.e., health, d...	36
Paid Time Off (i.e., vacation/sick...	41
Supportive leadership	52
Clear communication	33
Flexible work hours	54
Remote or hybrid work arrange...	47
Connection with colleagues in t...	35
Other	8

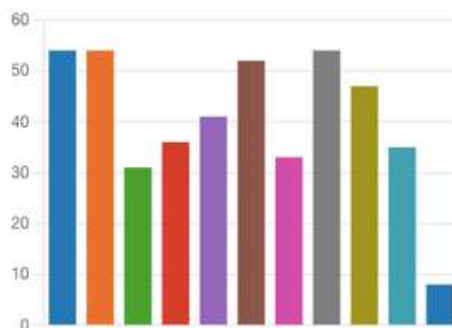


Figure 1

"I truly feel we have this well taken care of. I have a great board and I feel very supported."

-Respondent

Survey Findings

When asked to identify factors negatively impacting the mental well-being and morale of staff and volunteers, respondent's top answers were fatigue from juggling work/home responsibilities (73%), increasing demands from personal responsibilities (70%), and pivoting priorities based on current activities and needs in our community (52%). The remaining responses can be found in Figure 2 below.

7. What factors are negatively impacting the mental well-being and morale of your staff and volunteers? (Check all that apply)

More Details

Increasing demands from clients	42
Increasing intensity of client nee...	41
Increasing demands from partn...	20
Increasing demands from funde...	32
Increasing demands from gover...	28
Increasing demands from perso...	59
Adapting to new technologies	22
Pivoting priorities based on curr...	44
Unfilled staffing positions	30
Inability to take vacation/sick ti...	28
Pay stagnation	35
Fatigue from juggling work/ho...	61
Other	18

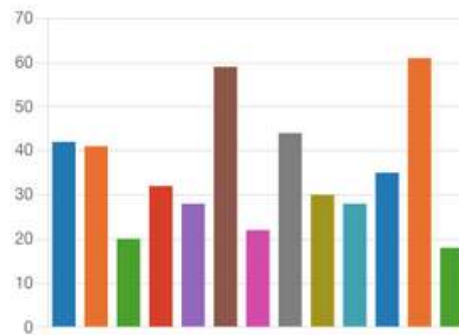


Figure 2

Respondents were asked if they felt positioned to provide support to their staff; 68% indicated they felt they could internally support employees with mental health and well-being needs between 60-90% of the time. When asked to describe the top barriers for leadership in supporting their staff's mental health and well-being needs, responses citing time, lack of staffing, lack of support for leadership, funding and resources were common. Respondents offered the following commentary:

- "Ensuring we have the finances to continue to provide meaningful and productive work and have a salary they can depend on."
- "Access to consistent operations funding to implement employee benefits such as competitive pay, employee benefits, paid time off."
- "The ability to provide health insurance (financial barriers) is the top barrier, as well as insufficient staffing (again, financial barriers) which leads to burn-out."
- "Leadership is overworked. Organization is under-resourced and under-funded."

Survey Findings

Figure 3 below outlines the types of supports that respondents believe would improve their ability to better support staff.

14. What resources do you think would be helpful to better support your staff? (select all that apply)

[More Details](#)

Additional staffing	58
Paid Time Off (Vacation time/Sic...	23
Professional development and t...	53
Roundtable for executive direct...	21
Community of practice for staff ...	26
Support to navigate existing pro...	29
Access to health benefits	22
Psychologically safe workplace ...	14
Access to Employee Assistance ...	23
Other	13

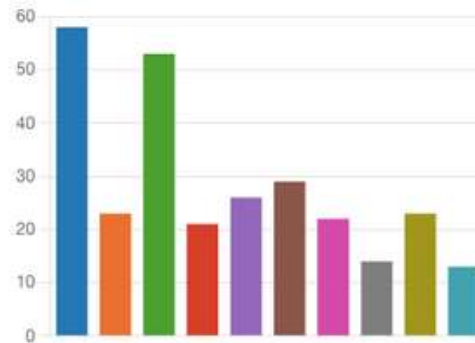


Figure 3

Respondents are seeking additional staff (69%), professional development and training (63%) and support in navigating existing provincial or community-led mental health supports and services (35%). Only 33% of respondents currently receive or offer training to their staff in mental health and mental well-being-related topics.

Respondents were asked what prioritization of mental health within the organization's culture would look like, and responses described a need for additional time and funding in order for this vision to come to fruition. Quotes:

- "The heaviest barrier for us is access to funding that will allow for additional staff to help with the workload and to secure health benefits."
- "I feel we do prioritize what's in our control. It's the outside stuff that impacts us more - challenging clients, negative media, trying to be helpful/supportive to our community and feel like we aren't making headway, or it's even appreciated."
- "Open, formalized and regular discussions on mental health topics as they relate to our work, and training for staff & management. Barriers: accessibility & cost of training, time for discussions."
- "Paid time off, employee health plan, more funding to pursue professional development opportunities. The main barriers are financial - we need more provincial and federal government support for our operations. We have access to lots of funding for projects, but not enough access to funding to support the day-to-day operation of our organization, year after year." / "core/operational funding to ensure that the organizations goals can be met while also supporting our staff with competitive pay, health benefits, paid time off, flexibility."

Non-profit organizations on PEI have weathered a string of events over the past few years, impacting their day-to-day operations. Despite the extra demands that have been placed on many of the agencies surveyed, a great commitment and resolve to supporting Island neighbours who rely on their services and support is evident. A notable observation is the struggle of staff and volunteers trying to balance the increased demands from their employers and clients with personal priorities, including their own mental health and well-being. Training and professional development opportunities to support or bolster staff and volunteer mental health and well-being would be viewed as valuable investments to help ensure they are equipped to manage the increased needs of Islanders. Core operational funding for the Island's non-profit sector would be an important and welcomed investment for reducing the day-to-day stressors organizational leaders are facing.

The activities referenced below represent a commitment of collaboration between the Community Sector Network of PEI and the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being. Many of the themes that arise in the activities are longstanding and we acknowledge the past work that has been done to address them. As organizations with province-wide mandates to support the non-profit sector (CSN PEI) and improve mental well-being outcomes for all Islanders (PEI AMWB), we invite researchers, government, community organizations, and the business community to join us in actioning these recommendations.

- Professional development and training and resources on mental health and well-being; available and accessible to all employees.
- Enhanced data collection from the non-profit sector that can inform the mental health and well-being supports required to recover from the (impact of the past three years adversities).
- Establishment of a funders table where groups can compare and contrast their funding practices and consider what contributes best to sustainability and growth within the non-profit sector.
- Convening opportunities for the non-profit sector to gather, collaborate, shape and inform the scope of non-profit needs related to mental health and well-being.
- Professional development workshops that reflect a research-to-policy-to-practice element where best practices can be shared and opportunities for collaboration can be fostered.
- Enhanced support and resources for non-profit organizations to mitigate leadership burnout and turnover.
- Support for organizations to secure health benefits for their employees.
- Advocate for core and increased funding for the non-profit sector.



Mandate: Create conditions for positive change that advance resiliency, and improve the mental well-being of all Islanders, in order to prevent future incidences of chronic mental health issues, and addiction, from occurring.



Mandate: To develop an empowered community sector that uses its collective voice for change, with the vision of creating a sustainable and valued community sector for Prince Edward Island.

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