

BC WILDFIRE SERVICE

Mental Wellness

April 1, 2026



Mental wellness training and support

At New Recruit Boot Camp (NRBC) we prioritize educating recruits about the risks and hazards inherent in the job, both physical and mental. This includes presentations from the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team. We foster a culture of peer support and encourage open discussions about mental health, creating a space for vulnerability rather than a stoic approach.

Since NRBC training is time-limited, we provide proactive mental health programs for all BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) employees.

The Canadian Mental Health Association [Resilient Minds](#) course is aimed at helping first responders engage in areas relevant to their work – trauma, mental health challenges – as well as building resiliency and the skills to assist those who may be struggling with a mental health challenge or crisis.

The [BC Fire Fighter and Wildfire Occupational Awareness Training](#) is also available to BCWS staff as of 2024 and includes more training about how to manage daily stress and anxiety.

We offer mental health support services to all BCWS employees and their families, including a confidential 24/7 mental health support line.

BCWS accesses the CISM service, which provides support for critical incidents such as death, serious injury, threatening situations, attending a motor vehicle accident (MVA), suicide, disasters, a busy fire season, or any situation that may overwhelm one's coping abilities. CISM is operated by trained peers in BCWS and in the Ministry of Forests, in conjunction with mental health professionals. The team can provide one-on-one support, phone support, or on-scene group sessions/debriefings.

What is new for 2026?

Our focus is on the total health and wellbeing of BCWS staff, including physical, mental and emotional health and wellness.

BCWS has a dedicated internal Mental Health Leadership Team, with representation from many different areas of our organization. Their role is to support the implementation of [Canada's National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#).

After the intensity and scale of the 2023 wildfire season and the tragic loss of six B.C. wildfire fighters, we have held recovery retreats where participants are given space to process the cumulative and acute stress of their work. With guided mental health workshops, professional counseling and peer connection, these gatherings reinforce our commitment to their resilience and well-being.

Evidence among first responder organizations indicates that a healthy peer support network is a critical first line of defense against workplace stress, cumulative trauma and mental health crises. Staff can access peer support formally through the CISM team, and we are exploring the formalization of a Peer Support Network building upon grassroots peer support programs forming within our organization.

We're committed to learning from several recent and very challenging seasons to ensure our staff have the support they need — not just during wildfire seasons but year-round. In collaboration with Laurentian University, we are providing new psychosocial health resources for staff, as well as supporting the development of mindfulness interventions specific to wildland fire personnel. We recently partnered with Alex Lane, a Master's student at the University of Northern British Columbia, to assess mental health outcomes and psychosocial risks in BCWS staff. The study identified high rates of probable mental disorders compared to the general public. The research provides critical insights to improve mental health support for all wildfire personnel.

The mental health and safety of our staff remain a top priority, and we continue to work toward a culture where seeking help is encouraged and stigma-free.

Learn more:

Total Worker Health: See Total Worker Health factsheet