



Emergency Health Services - Alberta

The Alberta Journey Upstream: Moving EMS Mental Health Strategies from Reaction to Prevention



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Emergency Health Services - Alberta



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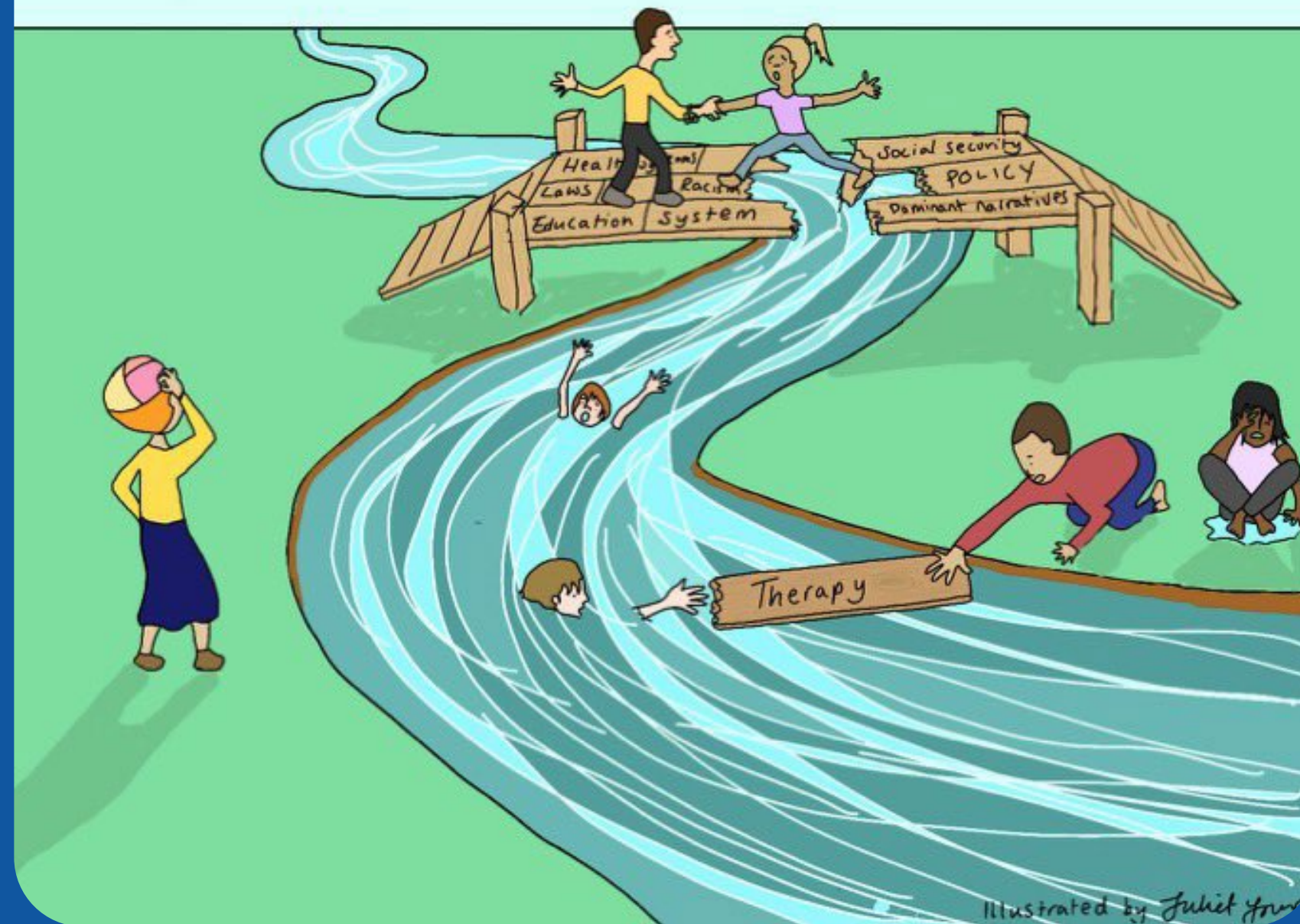
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Going Upstream

There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. Some of us need to go upstream and find out why they are falling in. (Desmond Tutu)





A Downstream to Upstream Continuum





From Reactive to Proactive

10 years ago

- Peer support = post-event (CISM) support
- Reintegration program

5 years ago

- Peer support adds stress management
- Psychologist presentation @ new recruits

2 years ago

- Prevention programming (e.g., new recruits, wellness webinars, suicide prevention, proactive peer support)



Our Supports

Proactive

Building Resilience

- Mental health promotion
- Working Minds First Responder
- EMS Natural Allies Suicide Prevention
- Wellness Webinars
- Recruit presentations

Reactive

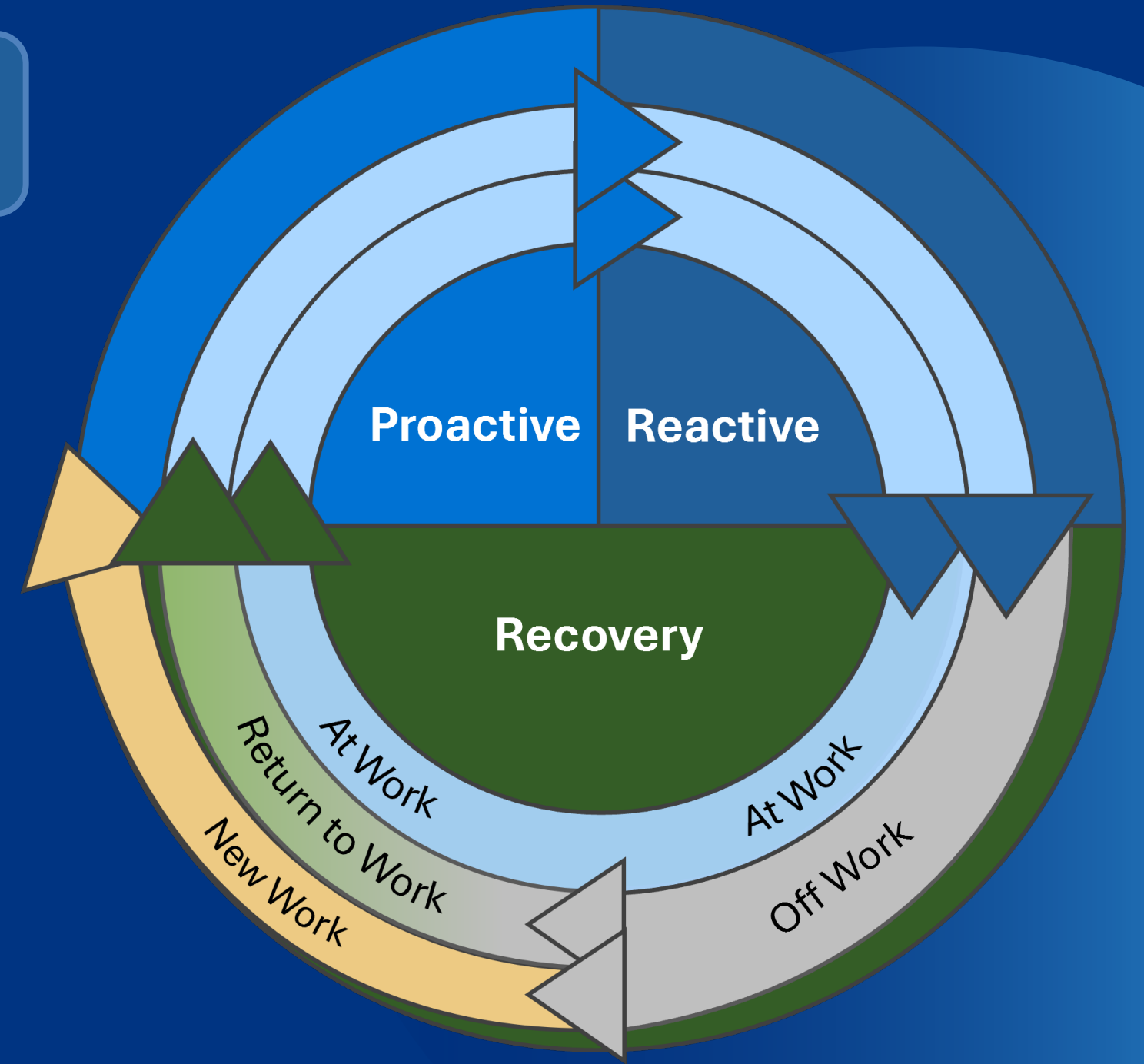
Immediate Assistance

- Peer Support
- Support from a mental health professional
- Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)
- Spiritual care support

Recovery

At Work, Off Work & Return to Work

- Leader Support
- Peer Support
- Support from a Mental Health Professional
- Reintegration Program
- Return to Work (RTW) Orientation





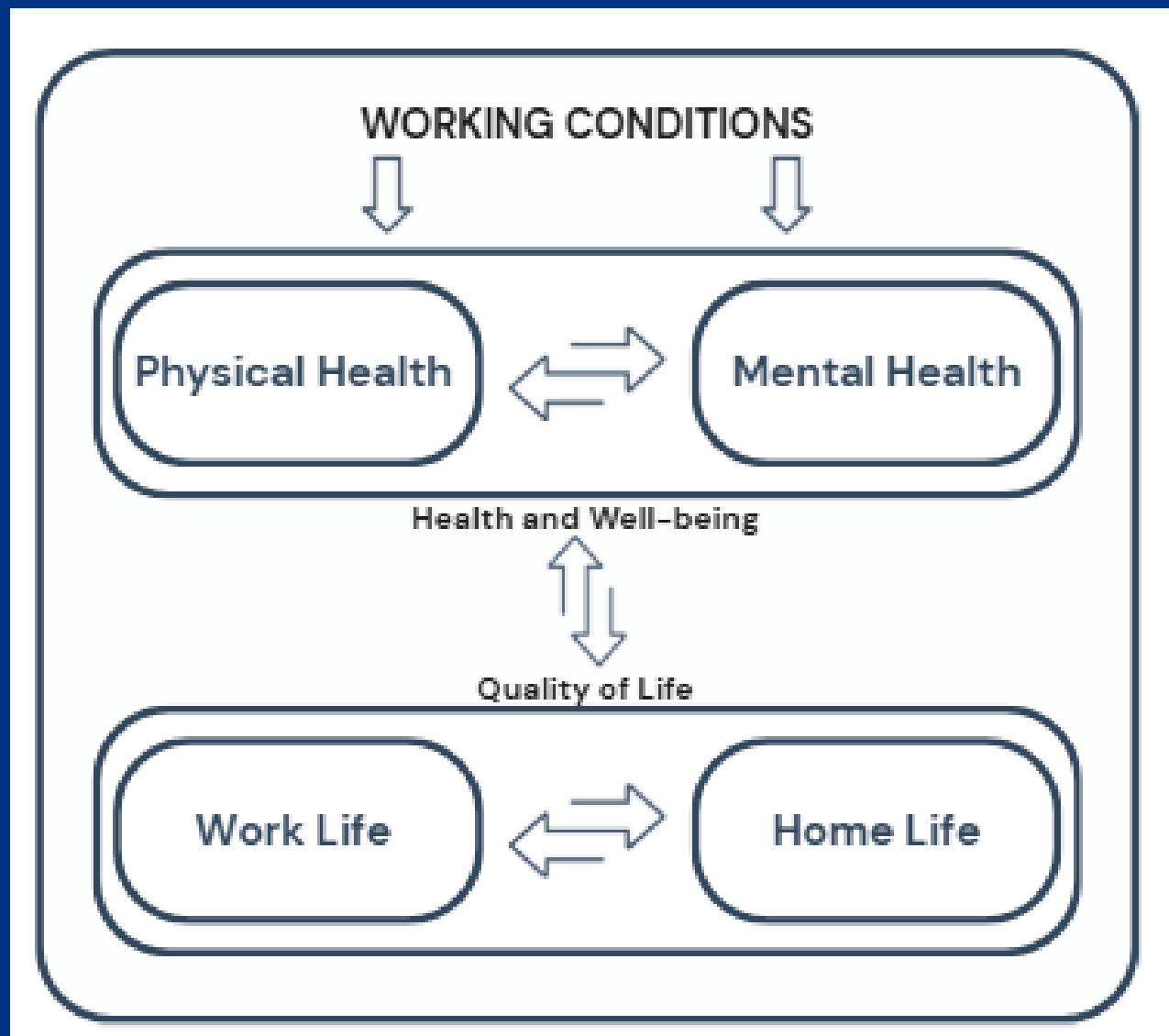
Organizational Structure





Employee Wellness Strategy

Dimensions of Health



Four Pillars of Our Strategy



Measuring & Monitoring Employee Wellbeing

WellBQ -General: Non-frontline EHS Staff

- Original NIOSH tool with minor adaptations for EHS environment

WellBQ -P: Frontline Paramedics

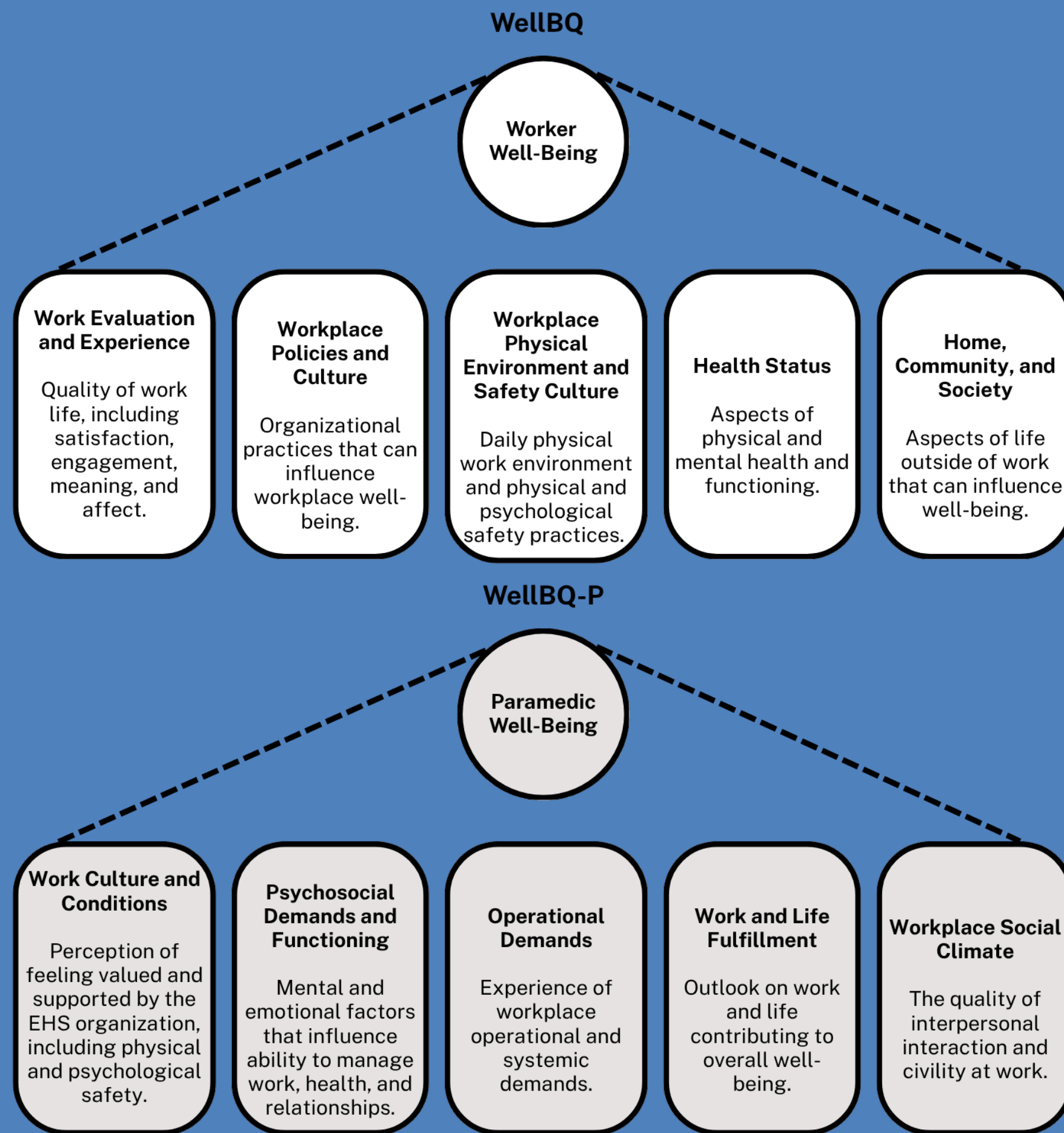
- NIOSH tool adapted & validated for frontline Paramedics

WellBQ -D: Frontline Dispatch Staff

- NIOSH tool adapted & validated for staff in Dispatch (in progress)

WellBQ -Short Form :

- 15 item version of each survey for check in assessments





Program Evaluation

Why?

- Ensure programs are meeting staff needs
- Confirm intended outcomes are being achieved
- Identifies what's working, what isn't, and why
- Support continuous improvement and sustainability

When?

- Designed during program development alongside program goals and logic model

Logic Models



Emergency Health Services - Employee Wellness Overall Program Logic Model

Revised November 2025

Contact: EMSEmployeeWellness@emergencyhealthservices.ca

Goal: EHS employees have the right supports at the right time to promote their wellness and mental health, to prevent mental illness, and to support recovery.

Intended Population: All EHS staff and their families, including Paramedics, Emergency Communications Officers (ECOs), Leaders, and support staff

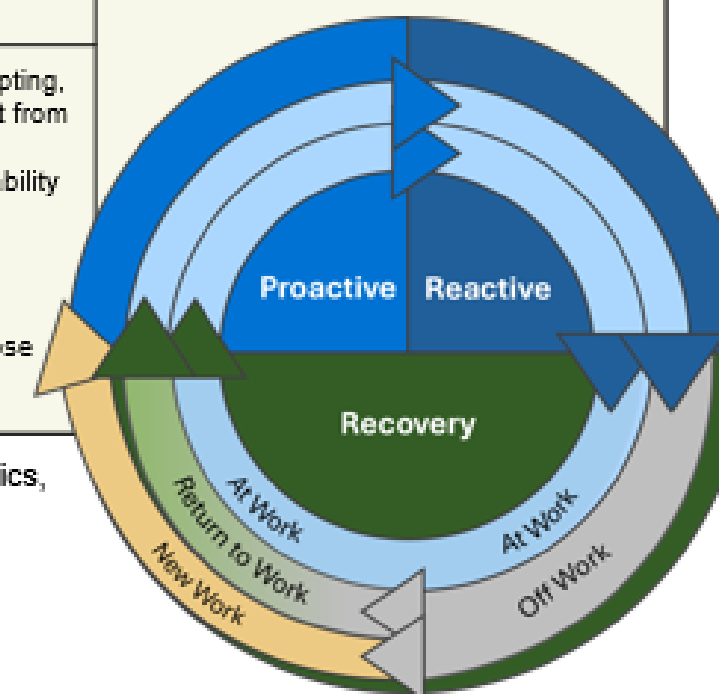
Activities	Outputs	Outcomes		
		Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
Proactive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and deliver EHS-specific wellness and mental health education and training (e.g., Wellness Webinars, Wellness Newsletter, staff orientation & conference presentations)** Provide wellness and mental health info and help-seeking resources (EMS-tailored and generic) Coordinate and deliver EMS-specific suicide prevention training (EMS Natural Allies) Promote, coordinate, deliver and monitor proactive, 24/7 peer support via EHS Provincial Peer Support Program. Promote and support EMS-specific wellness and mental health research studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellness communications provided Information, resources, and referrals provided Staff financially supported to attend MH conferences Reach and uptake of education sessions Reach and uptake of suicide prevention trainings Pool of trained peer support members Responses to requests for peer support (proactive & reactive) Sessions provided (WRS, grief support) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased program awareness Increased uptake and adoption of Employee Wellness programming Increased awareness of available EMS supports and how to access them Increased knowledge of positive coping strategies for emotions, reactions, stress and grief Increased suicide prevention knowledge and skills Increased trust and supportive relationships built (peer, leadership) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased active, intentional self-care Increased informal peer support (caring for peers) Increased formal peer support Increased supportive workplace environment that actively protects wellness and mental health Improved mental health at work and in personal life Increased utilization of formal mental health supports when needed Reduced stigma for suicidality, mental health injuries and illnesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintained well-being and resilience of staff Increased staff engagement and collaboration Increased trust and care among peers and leaders Maintained supportive workplace environment Reduced recovery time after challenges occur Reduced lost time Reduced psychological injury rate Increased staff retention Reduction in disabling injury rate Sustained psychological health (regardless of career outcome) Sustained, healthy return to work
Reactive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote, deliver, and refer to EHS Employee Wellness mental health supports and resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver immediate assistance for workplace or personal challenges via EHS Provincial Peer Support Program, including 1:1 support and workplace response sessions (WRS) for teams. Develop and deliver grief support sessions, tailored to teams' unique needs. Promote and refer to EHS Spiritual Care Program supports (e.g., EHS chaplains). Promote, refer to, and facilitate access to additional mental health supports and resources (e.g., CIPSRT mental health treatments; Employee & Family Assistance Program [EFAP]). 				
Recovery (At Work, Off Work, Return to Work, and New Work) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide mental health information & resources employees and their leaders. Provide peer support to staff who are at work, off work, or returning to work. Develop and deliver mental health & peer support section of Return-to-Work Orientation. Promote, deliver, and monitor specialized EHS Reintegration Program*** for recovery from psychological injury, in connection with external treatment providers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operationalize and implement Prolonged Exposure (PE) sessions for program participants; provide formal and informal peer support as requested. Implement (ghosting) sessions for those able to return to work. 				

Guiding Principles: Comprehensive mental health support for every stage; Evidence-based research and practices; Relevancy and utility for diverse EMS roles (paramedics, ECOs, leaders, support staff); Ongoing engagement with staff, stakeholders and experts; Addressing unique mental health impacts for EMS industry; Alignment with AHS policies and frameworks.

* Contracted service partners, allied first responders, and practicum students are included in program activities where appropriate and feasible.

** The Working Mind First Responder (WMFR) course is part of this education, is implemented by the EHS Learning & Development team.

*** Out of scope activities for the Reintegration Program include: administering the formal Return to Work process, modified duty coordination, and disability case management.





Upstream Programming: Self -Audit

1. Which programming is fully dedicated to upstream function/content? Which contains some?
 - training/education, information, resources, proactive conversations
2. How upstream is our promotion and prevention content?
 - Universal vs selective? Existing symptoms or not? Address risk factors beyond individual level?
 - Remember true prevention versus intervention (e.g., suicide)
 - Mental health promotion is *non-illness* focused
 - How are we framing data on rates of mental illnesses?



Key Takeaways

1. Go further upstream: A comprehensive mental health continuum includes mental health promotion and prevention.
2. We are strongest through pooling our expertise (mental health & paramedics).
3. Our scope is provincial: Scale these strategies and principles to your organization's size and resources.
4. We continue to grow by building informal and formal program evaluation and quality improvement.



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Thank You



Contact us:

EMSEmployeeWellness@emergencyhealthservices.ca





References

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