

The Coronavirus CivActs Campaign captures rumours and perceptions among communities to eliminate information gaps between the government, the media, NGOs, businesses and the public. By providing the public with facts, these coronavirus bulletins aim to create a better understanding of the needs regarding coronavirus and to debunk rumours before they can do more harm.

A toll on mental health

As the country observes Mental Health Awareness Month, we're focusing on the emotional toll on public servants and looking at what the government's obligations are to their health and wellbeing. Caring for the mental health of public health workers bolsters our response to the Covid19 pandemic as a country. While shortages of essential psychiatric medicines and personal protective equipment continue to plague facilities across the country, mental health professionals are hard at work expanding the quality care provided to frontline staff.

The South African Federation of Mental Health (www.safmh.org.za/) has set up a network of mental health professionals to help the country's frontline healthcare workers. Meanwhile, Social Development Minister Lindiwe Zulu has said her department dispatched 276 teams at a district level to improve psycho-social support.

5 steps to self-care

1

Have a routine. Keep up with daily routines as far as possible, or make new ones.

2

Social contact is important. If your movements are restricted, keep in regular contact with people close to you by telephone or online.

3

Minimize newsfeeds. Seek the latest information at specific times of the day. Use your social media accounts to promote positive stories. Correct misinformation wherever you see it.

4

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink or don't drink alcohol at all.

5

Be aware of how much time you spend in front of a screen every day. Make sure that you take regular breaks from on-screen activities.

Questions & Answers

What is the government's responsibility when it comes to the mental health of public servants?

Government has an obligation to ensure the health and safety of public servants. The Constitution of South Africa upholds the rights of all employees declaring their constitutional right to equality, human dignity, reasonable accommodation and fair labour practice. Government also has a common law duty to protect the wellbeing and safety of its employees. Other relevant legislation includes the Employment Equity Act, the Mental Health policy and strategic action plan 2015-2020, and Mental Health Care Act 17 of 2002 which guides the rights of citizens.

Is adequate care being provided to our nurses and doctors?

Organizations have credited President Cyril Ramaphosa for calling for a National State of Disaster so that health personnel were allowed a period to prepare facilities and services and also receive PPE. However, there is a significant lack of mental health professionals in South Africa and mental health services are not easily accessible. Due to stigmas and misunderstandings, many people do not seek help. There are a number of anonymous helplines - see our resources in the next section.

How can the government improve services for health workers?

A regular debriefing of all health personnel to ensure their mental wellbeing would be a good start. The long-term impact of Covid 19 on nurses and doctors could be detrimental if mental health issues are not addressed now. There is much need for ongoing psychosocial support for doctors and nurses. South Africa has an opportunity to scale up mental health services to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of all.



Source: Bharti Patel - SA Federation for Mental Health

Helplines if you're in need

- 1. Online Toolkit on the SADAG website (www.sadag.org) with free resources, online videos, reliable resources, coping skills, online tools and info on social distancing and self-isolation. Contact them on 011 234 4837 or 0800 21 22 23 to find a support group in your area.**
- 2. Chat online with a counsellor 7 days a week from 9am – 4pm via the Cipla WhatsApp Chat Line 076 882 2775 or 0800 4567 789.**
- 3. SMS 31393 or 32312 and a counsellor will call you back – available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.**
- 4. Call Lifeline 24hr counselling on 0800 21 22 23 or 0800-150-150.**
- 5. Call the Depression and Anxiety Helpline on 0800 70 80 90 or 0800 456 789.**
- 6. Call the Suicide Helpline for emergencies on 0800 567 567 or SMS 31393.**
- 7. Call the ADHD Helpline on 0800 55 44 33 aimed at assisting those affected by the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity (ADHD) disorder.**
- 8. Call the Department of Substance Abuse Line 24hr helpline on 0800 12 13 14 for substance abuse support.**
- 9. Visit <https://www.therapyroute.com/> to find a therapist near you.**

Questions

Do you have any questions about coronavirus? Have you heard any myths?

Reach out to us via WhatsApp
on +27 63 311 8397 or
email us on
ccc@accountabilitylab.org
with your questions!