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Committee Co-ordinating Executive Group (CEG)
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Psychological Support Arrangements

1. Purpose

To provide the CEG with an update of the work carried out by the Capital and Coast District Health Board in relation to the psychological impacts of emergencies and the arrangements that need to be put in place to psychologically assist our communities and emergency management professionals during and after disasters.

2. Background

The Wellington CDEM Group Plan notes in para 22.1.7 that:

“The psychological impacts of an emergency event have not been fully addressed. Although there are professionals in the Region, there has been no planning for a co-ordinated approach. After an event, emergency workers are likely to suffer post traumatic stress and there will be psychological distress in the community.”

The Capital & Coast DHB Reconciliation and Mental Health Mass Casualty Plan provides for the Board’s Mental Health Services to:

- Provide psychosocial support to casualties and others following a disaster
- Visit affected areas to assess the impact of the disaster on the mental health of the community
- Provide support for local counselling services – and where possible, to ensure services being offered are coordinated, complementary, and appropriate
- Oversee the provision of any specialised services that may be needed.

While this planning provides a framework for the psychosocial response, it is acknowledged it is still at a relatively high level and requires more detail, and more resources.

It is also acknowledged that the type of support most victims of a disaster will need will be provided by CDEM Welfare Groups and Non Government Organisations counselling and support services – and that it will be essential for these agencies to be involved in the detailed planning of this aspect of the response.

3. Progress made to date

The planning for post-disaster psychosocial support is being undertaken nationally as a part of the development of the Ministry of Health's National Health Emergency Plan.

The project "Foundations for Psychosocial Support in Emergency Management" was presented to emergency planners and others in workshops in March this year. It provides resources for assessing the likely psychosocial impact of disasters; and guidelines for providing support to affected individuals, communities, and emergency staff.

4. Where to from here?

The principles outlined in the 'Foundations' document will form the basis of a local Psychosocial Support Plan. The Capital & Coast DHB Emergency Management and Mental Health Services will oversee the project, the key features of which are likely to include:

- The provision of 'psychological first aid' training and resources for CDEM Welfare Centres
- Arrangements for the assessment of affected individuals and communities
- The provision of counselling and other mental health services in the response and recovery phases – and at other trigger points (e.g. anniversaries, after shocks)
- Arrangements for the provision of specialist psychiatric services where they are indicated.

The DHB's Emergency Management planning programme was suspended in April to provide resources to manage the H1N1 outbreak – but tasks are currently being rescheduled, and it is expected work on this project should recommence in November.

5. Conclusion

The psychosocial support for both victims of a disaster and responders is an important aspect of disaster planning.

The current local planning is at a relatively high level and requires more detail and resources. The Ministry of Health has developed foundations for planning in this area, and the Capital & Coast DHB will work with Welfare Groups and others to use this information as the basis for a more comprehensive regional plan.

6. Recommendations

That the CEG:

- 1. Receives the report.*
- 2. Notes the contents.*

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