

**Opening Remarks for  
the Honourable Patty Hajdu  
Minister of Health**

**SOCI study on the implementation of the Federal  
Framework for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

**April 21, 2021 (4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.)  
Ottawa, ON**

Allotted speaking time: 5 minutes  
Speech length: 756 words (6 minutes)

*Check against delivery*

## **Introduction**

Madam Chair and Honourable Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to provide an update on the implementation of the *Federal Framework on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*.

Let me begin with some background.

As you know, in June 2018, the *Federal Framework on PTSD Act* became law. The Act led to a National Conference on PTSD in April 2019, where experts from across the country, including people with lived experience, shared their knowledge and views. With their involvement, we developed Canada's first *Federal Framework on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*.

### **COVID-19 pandemic context**

The Framework was released in February 2020, just before COVID-19 was declared a worldwide pandemic.

In the context of COVID-19, many essential workers are facing increased risks that have made them more susceptible to trauma and posttraumatic stress.

The full impact of the pandemic on the mental health of Canadians may not be known for some time, as symptoms of PTSD may take months, or even years to develop.

Understanding PTSD, its prevalence in Canada, and helping people get effective help early, are urgent priorities.

The Public Health Agency of Canada and other federal partners pivoted quickly to COVID-19 response efforts, including addressing the mental health impacts of the pandemic.

However, the key themes of data and tracking, guidelines and best practices, education and collaboration — that were explored at the Conference and through the development of the Framework — are also pertinent in the current context.

## **Current initiatives**

Now, I would like to turn our attention to some of the activities that are helping us better understand the impacts of PTSD across the country.

At this time, the Public Health Agency of Canada, in collaboration with Statistics Canada, are undertaking two national surveys to improve tracking the rate of PTSD in diverse Canadians.

The first is the **Survey on COVID-19 and Mental Health**, which aims to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health and well-being of Canadians. It also includes questions on symptoms of PTSD.

Results from the first data collection indicate that 6% of Canadians screened positive for PTSD (and reported moderate to severe symptoms of PTSD).

The prevalence was twice as high among women (8%) than among men (4%), and particularly high among women aged 18 to 34 (12%), as well as frontline workers (such as first responders, nurses and doctors) (10%).

A second data collection of this survey is currently underway and results are expected for the fall.

In addition, PHAC has also developed a more PTSD-specific survey with Statistics Canada (the Survey on Stressful Events and Mental Health). Data collection is currently underway and results are also expected for the fall.

And finally, the **Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) COVID-19 and Mental Health Initiative** is gathering timely evidence to support decision making on the mental health response to the pandemic.

Guided by an Expert Advisory Panel, this activity is informing CIHR, Health Canada and PHAC on how to access and mobilize the best evidence to effectively support mental health systems and services in Canada.

The information and data collected from all of these activities will provide important evidence to inform the

design and delivery of mental health services and supports across the country.

I would like to add that Budget 2021 proposes new, strategic funding to the Health portfolio and Veterans Affairs Canada that will support PTSD and mental health programming.

The Budget proposes to provide \$50 million over two years to Health Canada to support a trauma and PTSD stream of mental health programming. This funding would help populations at high risk of experiencing COVID-19-related trauma.

The Public Health Agency of Canada would receive \$100 million over three years for mental health interventions for those disproportionately affected by COVID-19, including healthcare workers, front-line workers, seniors, Indigenous people, youth, and racialized and Black Canadians.

The Budget also proposes that the Health Portfolio receive \$45 million over two years to help develop national mental health service standards. These standards would be developed with provinces and territories, health organizations and key stakeholders.

As well, the Budget proposes \$62 million, for the Wellness Together Canada portal so that it can continue to provide Canadians with tools and services to support mental health and well-being.

## Conclusion

In closing, we recognize that PTSD has a significant and continued impact on individuals, families, colleagues and communities.

While we are a little over one year since the *Federal Framework on PTSD* was announced, we continue to respond to both the legislated requirements of the *Federal Framework* and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through concerted efforts, the Government of Canada is working with our partners to improve the lives of Canadians and people affected by PTSD.

I look forward to the outcome of this Committee's study of PTSD and the role of the Federal Framework to inform our implementation of initiatives.

Thank you.

### Key Messages:

- Our Government recognizes the tremendous impact that posttraumatic stress disorder has on individuals, families, communities and workplaces.
- The *Federal Framework on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Act* came into force on June 21, 2018.
- In April 2019, we held a National Conference as one of our primary engagement activities. The event involved 200 participants, including people with lived experience.
- We released Canada's first Federal Framework on PTSD in January 2020 (announced on Feb 13, 2020). We are now looking to strengthen knowledge and collaboration with partners and stakeholders on PTSD and its impacts through the implementation of the Framework.

We are in early days of developing an implementation plan for the Framework. Lessons learned from the pandemic, including best and promising practices to address the mental health concerns of Canadians, including frontline and essential workers, and improving access to mental health supports, are informing our implementation priorities.

- As required under the legislation, we will report on the effectiveness of the Framework within five years of its release, i.e., in January 2025.

### BACKGROUND

- PHAC consulted stakeholder groups and other experts in the field of PTSD and mental health, as well as Indigenous organizations throughout the development of the Framework.
- The Framework sets out the Government of Canada's vision, guiding principles and actions in addressing occupation-related PTSD, and identifies four priority areas for action: data and tracking; guidelines and best practices; educational materials; and strengthened collaboration. It also acknowledges people affected by PTSD outside of the occupational setting and that broad application will be considered in the implementation of federal actions.
- The Framework builds on existing federal initiatives, such as *Supporting Canada's Public Safety Personnel: An Action Plan on Post-Traumatic Stress Injuries*, which focuses on supporting the mental health of public safety personnel, and the recently created Centre of Excellence on PTSD and Related Mental Health Conditions, funded by Veterans Affairs Canada.
- Prior to the release of the Framework, the Government of Canada made investments that have contributed to addressing PTSD (e.g., to improve access to mental health services and research.)
- As required under the legislation, we will report on the effectiveness of the Framework within five years of its release, i.e., in January 2025.

## FEDERAL FRAMEWORK ON PTSD—AT A GLANCE

### SCOPE

The focus of the Framework is on occupation-related PTSD. The Framework also acknowledges people affected by non-occupation-related PTSD and broad applicability will be considered in the implementation of federal actions.

### PURPOSE

Strengthen knowledge creation, knowledge exchange and collaboration across the federal government, and with partners and stakeholders, to inform practical, evidence-based public health actions, programs and policies, to reduce stigma and improve recognition of the symptoms and impacts of PTSD.

### VISION

A Canada where people living with PTSD, those close to them, and those at risk of developing PTSD, are recognized and supported along their path toward healing, resilience, and thriving.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Complement current initiatives and leverage partnerships
- ▶ Advance compassionate, non-judgemental and strengths-based approaches
- ▶ Base initiatives on evidence of what works or shows promise of working
- ▶ Understand and respond to equity, diversity and inclusion
- ▶ Apply a public health approach

### PRIORITY AREAS

### FEDERAL ACTIONS

<b>DATA AND TRACKING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Explore strategies to support national surveillance activities and examine the feasibility of using health administrative data and enhanced data linkages to capture and report on PTSD.</li> <li>▶ Continue supporting data collection on PTSD.</li> </ul>
<b>GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Work with partners and engage experts to compile existing guidance on PTSD and identify where gaps may exist.</li> <li>▶ Continue to support research to bridge PTSD-related information gaps, inform effective guidance for health care providers, and advance evidence-based decision making.</li> </ul>
<b>EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Work with partners and engage health care providers to identify current PTSD educational materials, understand the educational gaps, and seek advice on best practices for the dissemination, adaptation, and uptake of educational materials.</li> </ul>
<b>STRENGTHENED COLLABORATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Work with partners and stakeholders to identify the best mechanism(s) to increase collaboration among key departments, partners and stakeholders, as well as for ongoing sharing of information, including uptake of common and culturally appropriate terminology, definitions, and safe language about PTSD and trauma.</li> </ul>