

## THIRD QUARTER 2022 – Update

# Statewide High-Level Analysis of Forecasted Behavioral Health Impacts from COVID-19

### Purpose

This document provides a brief overview of the potential statewide behavioral health impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. The intent of this document is to communicate potential behavioral health impacts to response planners and organizations, or individuals who are responding to or helping to mitigate the behavioral health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Bottom Line Up Front

- The COVID-19 pandemic has strongly influenced behavioral health signs and symptoms of individuals across the state due to far-reaching medical, economic, social, and political consequences. This forecast is informed by disaster research, and the latest data and findings specific to this pandemic. Updates will be made monthly to reflect changes in baseline data.
- The current economic conditions being experienced across the state have significant implications for the mental health of individuals, families, and communities. Costs of goods and services have increased significantly, and supply chain shortages have threatened access to some for needed medications, supplies, or other necessary staples.
- High-intensity social issues such as the overturn of Roe v Wade, gun safety and control, climate change, and the war in Ukraine have increased social division and intensified stressors for many individuals and families.
- Issues related to emergencies, violence, and safety are at the forefront of people’s minds right now. Mass shootings and gun violence are at an all-time high as we enter the summer months of 2022.<sup>1</sup> Working together to understand and reduce risks related to impulsive, aggressive, and potentially violent behaviors is essential. Being prepared for emergencies of all kinds can help reduce behavioral health symptoms and experiences of distress in any number of emergencies or critical incidents, and helps with “active coping.”

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- Based on current research and ongoing experiential outcomes, in addition to clinical reports from providers, there are three behavioral health areas of focus this month.
  1. **Economics: inflation, gas prices, and cost-of-living**
  2. **High-intensity social issues: Roe v. Wade, climate change, gun control, and war in Ukraine**
  3. **Emergencies, violence, and safety**

Please see the sections that follow for more details on each of these areas of focus.

## Areas of Focus for Third Quarter 2022

### General Trends

Long-term outcomes for large-scale disasters typically are characterized by resilience. There are groups and individuals, however, who experience cascade effects, including increased behavioral health symptoms and substance use, chronic dysfunction, and other problematic long-term effects.

#### 1. **Economics- Inflation, Gas prices and Cost-of-Living**

Current prices and supply chain issues may be preventing people from accessing basic nutrition, life-saving medications, or other interventions such as specific prescription baby formulas or medically necessary dietary components. Physical responses from this type of stressor may build up significantly over time, and impact sleep, diet, and overall health. Gas prices are influencing choices and options about work, travel, and how families can meet expenses by making different transportation choices. For some people, difficult financial conditions may also make it harder or impossible to leave an unsafe or unhealthy living environment in cases of abuse or domestic violence. In addition to those daily considerations, many families may have to make decisions about how to take time off from work and working overtime which influence levels of burnout as well as family vacations and recreational activities during the summer months. Families and communities may be affected by these issues in different ways. It is important to recognize that systemic factors of marginalization and socio-economic status also intensify the effect of these economic concerns for children, adults, and families who may already be at higher risk for behavioral health issues.

#### 2. **High-Intensity Social Issues: Gun Control, Roe v Wade, Climate Change, and War in Ukraine**

Most recently, increased mass shootings and the subsequent discussions about gun control and responsibility, as well as the overturning of Roe v. Wade and other US Supreme Court decisions, may weigh heavily on the minds of some, or cause disruptions to daily functioning for others. Gaining further understanding about how these stressors may impact physical and mental health and functioning is a way to empower active coping skills. Identifying personal responses to stressors can help fine-tune interventions that may be useful. Creating and using a coping plan when faced with distressing circumstances and understanding how to connect with and support others may also be helpful. Please also see our tip sheet on [coping with civil disturbance](#), which provides information on how to reduce personal behavioral health impacts from protests or demonstrations.

Current events that affect the global population also add additional layers of concern to our collective recovery from the COVID pandemic. The recently released [UN climate report](#) may contribute to a sense of foreboding, additional grief, or even acute distress for individuals as well as communities and

regions who have been more directly affected by climate related disasters (fires, floods, etc.) over the last two years. In addition to climate related anxiety and distress, the current war in the Ukraine may also be a significant source of concern for many in our state. Many Washingtonians have close family or professional ties to Ukraine and Russia, and may be experiencing additional trauma related concerns for the safety of loved ones, or the war related images and stories that are flooding the media.

Focusing on control over the *process we use* to engage with the world around us is one active coping technique that may be helpful during this time. Looking for ways to ***express compassion for others, lend a helping hand in our own communities, and respond with empathy*** when possible are all examples of how we can engage with personal empowerment right now. In addition to focusing on empowerment with our process of engagement in our local community, it may also be beneficial to establish and maintain healthy boundaries around personal exposure to media (including social media) and news generally.

#### 4. Violence, Aggression, and Safety

It is recommended that families and workplaces openly discuss and plan for any number of emergencies or critical incidents. Creating communication and contingency plans to be used in emergencies also helps reduce psychological distress that may arise from the “what ifs” of responding to and recovering from critical incidents. With gun violence at an all-time high, and the risk of natural and other human-caused disasters also a possibility, making and practicing contingency plans at home and at work is a way to reduce anxiety and increase a sense of empowerment over emergencies when they happen. Acknowledging and planning around emergencies tends to help people have a sense of calm because they have a better understanding of what options they have “just in case.”

Consider the creation of a “get home bag,” which can be kept in the trunk of a car, or in an office, so that you have what is needed to get home if roads are impassible for any reason. See this link for ideas about what to include in a “[get home bag](#)”<sup>a</sup>. A “get home bag” can be an old backpack or other container which you always keep in your car or place of work, and update from time to time. Ask yourself what you’d want to have on hand if you were unable to drive home, and might have a lengthy walk or a need to shelter in place in your car. Keep in mind what you may need for children and pets as well. Common items might include:

- Shelf-stable food like granola bars, peanut butter, dried fruit, crackers, nuts, and hard candies
- Hydrating fluids such as water or juice
- A “life straw” or other water purifying device in case the water you have access to may be unsafe to drink
- “Emergency blankets for warmth and plastic ponchos to keep rain off
- Flashlight, headlamps, and extra batteries for both
- First aid kit with a variety of bandage sizes, antibiotic ointment, tweezers, Over the Counter (OTC) pain medications, sunscreen, extra contact lenses or glasses, and any prescription medications you need. It can also be helpful to include moleskin for blisters.
- Comfortable walking shoes and an extra pair of socks.

For more information and a complete list, see <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Go-Bag>.

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<sup>a</sup> <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Go-Bag>

Discuss communication plans with your friends and family members so that you know what process to follow to reach people in case of emergency. You can see an example of a family emergency communication plan [here](#).<sup>b</sup>

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<sup>b</sup> <https://www.ready.gov/collection/family-communication-plan>

In general, when it comes to personal safety, keep the following in mind:

- Be aware of your surroundings. Avoid distracted behaviors, such as walking while looking at your phone, or texting and driving.
- Trust your instincts. If things start to feel “off” or dangerous in a crowd or large group of people, leave as soon as you can.
- Be aware of exits and resources in enclosed spaces, such as your workplace or other public settings. Consider who you could go to for help if needed, or what procedure you would need to follow in case of an emergency event, such as an active shooter situation, or an earthquake.

There are also risks specific to this time of year (through the summer months) related to societal norms of “having fun,” “blowing off steam,” and “just having a good time.” Impulsive and neurochemically-motivated choices that may increase during this timeframe can include, but are not limited to substance use, reckless driving, illegal behaviors (vandalism and theft), and risky sexual behaviors. It is important for parents and caregivers to work with youth, teens, and young adults on how to have fun and “let loose” without doing things likely to have long-term or negative consequences. Please see our [“Safe Summer”<sup>c</sup>](#) tip sheet for more information about how to reduce risks for teens and young adults during the late spring and summer months, as well as the guidance document for parents and caregivers about things to keep in mind for facilitating a [“Safe Summer”<sup>d</sup>](#) for children, teens, and young adults.

Additional risks to children and youth are also reflected in recent increases in online predation of minors. Due to long-term and large-scale upheaval in children’s lives over the past 25 months, more children and youth were online and unsupervised than usual. Predators sexually interested in children used this opportunity to entice minors into producing sexually explicit material (i.e., online enticement).<sup>2</sup> There has also been a significant increase in National CyberTipline reports (i.e., reports of distribution of child pornography and child sexual abuse material). According to Seattle Police Department’s Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Unit, which processes all statewide data of this nature, Washington CyberTips and online enticement reports are following the same trends as national-level data. For Washington State, year-over-year comparisons showed a 124% increase in March CyberTips (from 736 in 2021 to 1652 in 2022) and a 70% increase in April CyberTips (from 325 in 2021 to 553 in 2022).

### Depression and Suicide for Children, Youth, and Young Adults

Mental well-being for children, youth, teens, and young adults needs to be a top priority to reduce risks related to crisis. The most recent reporting from hospitals in Washington that admit pediatric patients indicates that the surge of youth presenting to emergency departments for suicidal ideation and suspected suicide attempts remains an ongoing issue. Lack of outpatient behavioral health services and inpatient psychiatric beds have led to increasing numbers of youth “boarding” in emergency rooms and med/surge beds, sometimes for extended periods of time, and without treatment while waiting. Youth and young adults with additional complexities, such as autism with aggressive behaviors or significant developmental delay, have even more restricted access to appropriate treatment, and some

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<sup>c</sup> <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/611-026-SummerSAFETipsheetForTeen%26amp%3BYoungAdult.pdf?uid=6269a329ad45f>

<sup>d</sup> <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/821184-SAFESummerTipSheetForParentsCaregivers.pdf>

have boarded for months awaiting placement. Other adolescents are boarding for extended periods of time not because of ongoing mental health needs, but because exhausted parents are refusing to bring them home, citing safety concerns, and agencies that might take them into care are unable to find placement for them.<sup>3</sup>

Active suicide prevention should be promoted through sharing information on recognizing [warning signs](#)<sup>e</sup> and other related resources, and checking in with colleagues, friends, family members, and neighbors. When someone is expressing thoughts of self-harm, [access to dangerous means of harm should be removed](#),<sup>f</sup> and medications, poisons, and firearms should be stored safely. Suicides consistently account for approximately 75% of all firearm-related fatalities in Washington.<sup>g</sup> [Storing firearms safely](#) and [temporarily removing them from the home](#) of an at-risk person during a crisis can save lives.

**Behavioral health symptoms will continue to present in phases.**<sup>h,i</sup> The unique characteristics of this pandemic trend towards anxiety and depression as significant behavioral health outcomes for many in Washington. These outcomes have been shown throughout the Behavioral Health Impact Situation Reports published by DOH, which are available on the [Behavioral Health Resources & Recommendations webpage](#)<sup>j</sup> under the “Situation Reports” dropdown. Behavioral health symptoms of anxiety, impulsivity, reduced frustration tolerance, anger, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are likely to increase with any significant increases in infection and hospitalization rates.<sup>k,l</sup>

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e.

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention/SuicidePrevention/HelpSomeoneElse#common>

f. <https://www.seattlechildrens.org/health-safety/keeping-kids-healthy/prevention/home-checklist/>

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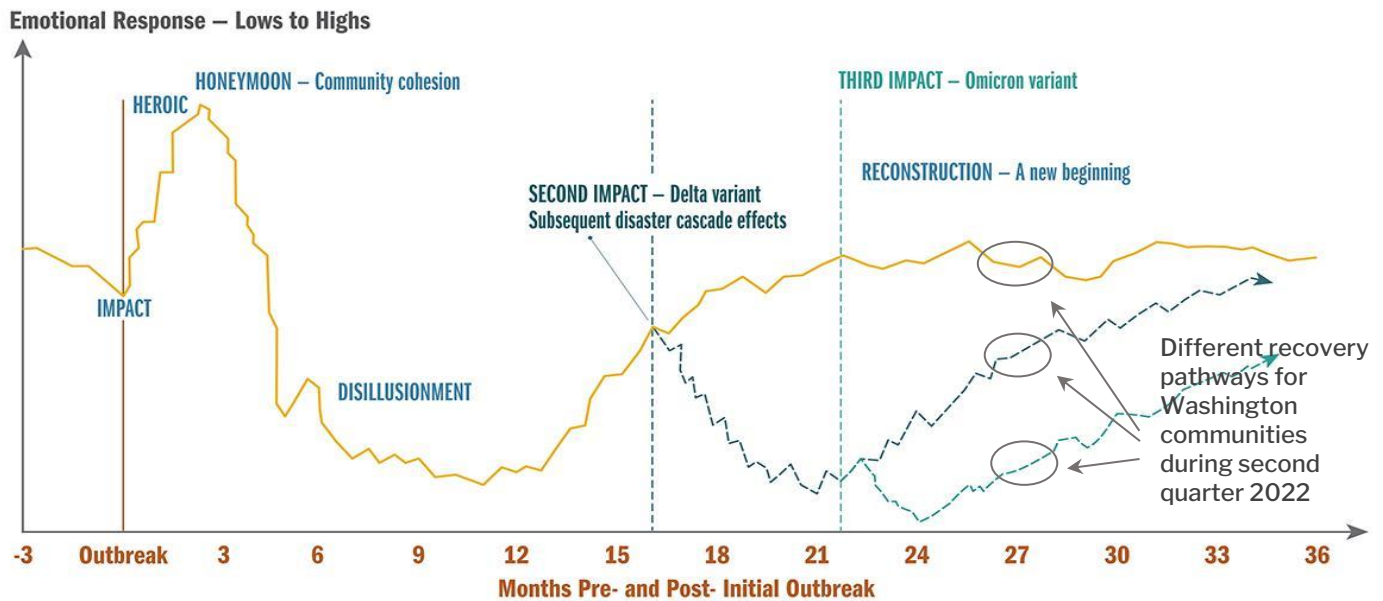
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## Reactions and Behavioral Health Symptoms in Disasters – COVID-19



**Figure 1: Phases of reactions and behavioral health symptoms in disasters.** The dotted graph line represents the response and recovery pattern that may occur if the full force of a disaster cascade is experienced by a majority of the population (i.e., the disaster cascade pathway). Protective factors are characteristics, conditions, or behaviors that reduce the effects of stressful life events. They also increase a person’s ability to avoid risks or hazards, recover, and grow stronger. Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).<sup>m</sup>

### Additional Resources

- Anyone concerned about depression or other behavioral health symptoms should talk with their **healthcare provider**.
- [Washington Listens](https://www.walistsens.org/)<sup>n</sup>: Call 833-681-0211 to talk to a support specialist who will listen and help you cope with the stress of COVID-19.
- **Health Care Authority: [Mental health crisis lines](https://www.hca.wa.gov/health-care-services-supports/behavioral-health-recovery/mental-health-crisis-lines)**<sup>o</sup>
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/):<sup>p</sup> Call 800-273-8255 (English) or 1-888-628-9454 (Español).
- [Crisis Connections](https://www.crisisconnections.org/24-hour-crisis-line/):<sup>q</sup> Call 866-427-4747.
- [Crisis Text Line](https://www.crisistextline.org/):<sup>r</sup> Text HEAL to 741741.

<sup>m</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2020). *Phases of Disaster*.  
<https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-behavioral-health-resources>  
[https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA\\_Digital\\_Download/pep21-02-01-001.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/pep21-02-01-001.pdf)

<sup>n</sup> <https://www.walistsens.org/>

<sup>o</sup> <https://www.hca.wa.gov/health-care-services-supports/behavioral-health-recovery/mental-health-crisis-lines>

<sup>p</sup> <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

<sup>q</sup> <https://www.crisisconnections.org/24-hour-crisis-line/>

<sup>r</sup> <https://www.crisistextline.org/>



- Department of Health: [Crisis lines for specific groups](#)<sup>s</sup>
- [TeenLink](#):<sup>t</sup> Call or text 866-833-6546
- A Mindful State<sup>u</sup>: <https://amindfulstate.org/>
- [Washington Warm Line](#):<sup>v</sup> Call 877-500-9276
- Washington State COVID-19 Response: [Mental and emotional well-being webpage](#)<sup>w</sup>

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<sup>s</sup>

[https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention/SuicidePrevention/HotlinesT  
extendChatResources](https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention/SuicidePrevention/HotlinesT<br/>extendChatResources)

<sup>t</sup> <https://www.crisisconnections.org/teen-link/>

<sup>u</sup> <https://amindfulstate.org/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.crisisconnections.org/wa-warm-line/>

<sup>w</sup> [coronavirus.wa.gov/wellbeing](https://coronavirus.wa.gov/wellbeing)

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