



TRAUMA-INFORMED

When someone mentions "trauma," most of us understand that trauma occurs due to an extreme event or series of events that overwhelm our capacity to cope. We may know that trauma causes emotional and physical harm that is long-lasting and may be severe.

"Trauma-informed" refers to how a service system understands trauma and how it is modified to respond to the impact of traumatic stress."

It may also be "caused or magnified by discrimination, marginalization, and historical and generational trauma." Given the widespread impact of trauma, with studies indicating that 60-70% of people have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, it stands to reason that to meet the needs of survivors, our systems of care, education, and commerce need to be trauma-informed.

Still, we may have the question, "why?" - why is it essential to be trauma-informed? Our individuals, families, and communities overall health is at stake.

Maine is experiencing a youth mental health crisis in our youth, with 20% of middle school youth and 18.5% of high school youth reporting serious thoughts of suicide in 2021. Maine also ranks number one in the country for youth anxiety.

Impacts from trauma are expensive - ["The total lifetime economic burden resulting from...child maltreatment in the United States in 2018 is \\$592 billion."](#)

Trauma impacts physical and mental health and well-being. Relationships can help heal and promote wellness by recognizing and responding to trauma. Trauma-informed care promotes effective, efficient care across the continuum of services. While we often hear the term used in health care, public health, education, and social service settings, it applies in our workplaces and communities.

Trauma-informed care recognizes the pervasive nature of trauma and the "potential paths for recovery" and integrates knowledge of trauma into policies, procedures, and practices. Finally, it actively seeks to resist re-traumatizing environments, dynamics, and relationships.

Shifting culture in organizations takes time and intention, but systems must take on the challenge of doing so. The process of being trauma-informed is ongoing.

Individuals and organizations must learn about trauma and its impacts, assess policies, procedures, and practices to discover opportunities to shift the experience to incorporate new knowledge, and then commit to reflective practices to continually evaluate ways to maintain trauma responsiveness. "Creating a trauma-informed organization is a fluid, ongoing process; it has no completion date.

Consumer demographics change over time, exposure to specific types of trauma may become more prevalent, and knowledge of best and evidence-based practices (EBPs) will continue to advance. A trauma-informed organization continues to demonstrate a commitment to compassionate and effective practices and organizational reassessments, and it changes to meet the needs of consumers with trauma histories."

Organizations that are not trauma-informed also risk diminished staff stability and sustainability. Those who serve vulnerable populations with high rates of adversity may be more likely to see staff impacted by their work, which can lead to burnout and higher turnover rates.

Staff experience trauma at the same rates as in the community; thus, we must consider that 60-70% of staff members have also experienced trauma in their own life experiences. High turnover rates due to exhaustion or impact have financial and service delivery implications for all organizations.

Being a trauma-informed organization must begin with leadership. It is a culture shift as much as in individual practice, and leaders must demonstrate their buy-in and commit to changing policy and practice.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "desirable organizational change doesn't occur by accident. It comes from steadfast leadership, a compelling message that change is necessary and beneficial for staff and consumers, and resources that support change." However, becoming trauma-informed does not stop with leadership; it incorporates every single staff member, volunteer, board member, and any other contributor. It's a system shift that allows all organizational members to participate.

To learn more or to request technical assistance, please get in touch with training@maineresilience.org.