

**Power of humanity**

Council of Delegates of the International  
Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

8 December 2019, Geneva



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**CD/19/XX**

**Original: English  
For information**

**COUNCIL OF DELEGATES  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS  
AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT**

Geneva, Switzerland  
8 December 2019

**International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Policy on  
Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs**

**Background document**

**Document prepared by  
the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Project on Addressing  
Mental Health and Psychosocial Consequences of Armed Conflicts, Natural Disasters  
and other Emergencies Working Group (MOMENT)**

Geneva, July 2019

## **Executive summary**

The purpose of this background report is to provide key contextual information to the Council of Delegates to support the adoption of the Movement Policy on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs through a resolution.

The 2017 Council of Delegates resolution “Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs” called for the development of a Movement Policy on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs to be presented for adoption at the Council of Delegates in 2019, thus providing the basis for the development of the policy.

Extensive unmet mental health and psychosocial needs have far-reaching and long-term human, social and economic impacts. These needs remain unmet for different reasons, including the strong stigma around mental health, the lack of protection of affected people, limited access to services, lack of capacity of the professional workforce and insufficient resources for, and prioritization of, mental health and psychosocial needs. Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs is a central part of the Movement’s broader objectives to prevent and alleviate human suffering, to protect life, health and dignity and to promote health and social welfare among individuals, families and communities. Of particular concern are the mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies. The Movement sees an urgent need to increase efforts to address them.

The purpose of this policy is to contribute to an enhanced Movement response by providing overall guidance to the components of the Movement on how to build a more harmonized, integrated, contextually appropriate and holistic response to mental health and psychosocial needs, whilst being cognizant of the respective and complementary capacities and mandates of different Movement components.

It is recommended that the Council of Delegates:

- I. Adopts the Movement Policy on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs and requests all components of the Movement to implement the policy and apply it in their work to address mental health and psychosocial needs;
- II. Calls on the components of the Movement to continue working to increase the resources allocated to addressing this humanitarian issue, with a view to strengthening the Movement’s collective capacity and capability to address mental health and psychosocial needs;
- III. Requests the ICRC and the IFRC to monitor and document progress, including learnings and challenges, and report to the Council of Delegates in 2021 on the implementation of this policy.

### **1) Introduction**

Extensive unmet mental health and psychosocial needs have far-reaching and long-term human, social and economic impacts. These needs remain unmet for different reasons, including the strong stigma around mental health, the lack of protection of affected people, limited access to services, lack of capacity of the professional workforce and insufficient resources for, and prioritization of, mental health and psychosocial needs. While recognizing that there are mental health and psychosocial needs in every community and society across the world and the important work that the different components of the Movement do to address those needs, the mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies, including migration, are of particular concern to the Movement. These emergency situations exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and give rise to specific protection concerns that are likely to increase mental health and psychosocial needs in a given context. In armed conflicts, natural disasters and other

emergencies, mental health and psychosocial needs greatly exceed response capacity. Rates of mental health conditions tend to double after emergencies. The World Health Organization estimates that after a conflict, more than one in five people will have a mental health condition. Even when mental health services are in place, they tend to be limited in scope. Skilled practitioners able to provide comprehensive and effective mental health services are few and far between. In low- and middle-income countries, where the majority of armed conflicts and other emergencies occur, three-quarters of people with severe mental health conditions do not receive any treatment, according to WHO. Volunteers and staff are often affected in the course of their work as they are exposed to traumatic events, loss, devastation, injury and death while responding to the needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies. In addition, they may work long hours under extremely challenging conditions.

Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs is a central part of the Movement's broader objectives to prevent and alleviate human suffering, to protect life, health and dignity and to promote health and social welfare among individuals and communities. Every day, volunteers and staff support communities and individuals by providing psychological and psychosocial support, promoting existing individual and community coping mechanisms, building resilience and referring people to, or providing, mental health services when needed.

The Movement recognizes an urgent need to increase its efforts to address these mental health and psychosocial needs and is committed to enhancing its global response to them.

## **2) Background (description of past activities and current status of implementation)**

The purpose of this background report is to provide key contextual information to the Council of Delegates to support the adoption of the Movement Policy on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs through a resolution.

The 2017 Council of Delegates adopted Resolution 7 "Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs", the first Movement-wide decision devoted exclusively to mental health and psychosocial needs. In this resolution, the Council of Delegates expresses deep concern about mental health and psychosocial needs that arise as a consequence of armed conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies, including those arising as a result of migration, and it recognizes the urgent need to increase efforts to address them. While there is a clear focus on the mental health and psychosocial needs of populations affected by armed conflicts and other emergencies, the wide variety of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services and programmes provided by National Societies are also recognized, including those addressing needs resulting from situations such as marginalization, isolation and extreme poverty. National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC were requested to specifically address the mental health and psychosocial needs of volunteers and staff.

To contribute to the harmonization of different Movement responses, the Movement was requested to formulate a policy on addressing mental health and psychosocial needs that builds on common approaches, developed through a collaborative process, actively engaging National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC. This proposed Movement policy shall be submitted for adoption by the 2019 Council of Delegates.

The development of the policy presented for adoption through this resolution is the result of an inclusive drafting process. The IFRC and the ICRC, together with the Danish Red Cross and the Swedish Red Cross, initiated a project to support the process – the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Project on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Consequences of Armed Conflicts, Natural Disasters and other Emergencies (MOMENT). A working group with technical expertise from the IFRC Secretariat, the IFRC Reference

Centre for Psychosocial Support, the ICRC and National Societies, along with a Movement Reference Group bringing together more than 25 National Societies, have been involved in the process.

### **3) Analysis**

This resolution contains the formal decision of the Movement to adopt the Policy on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs.

The proposed policy is expected to provide overall guidance to the components of the Movement on how to build a more harmonized, integrated, contextually appropriate and holistic Movement response to mental health and psychosocial needs, whilst being cognizant of the respective capacities and mandates of different Movement components. It states the minimum standards, obligations and positions framing the Movement's approach to addressing mental health and psychosocial needs across a continuum of care. It should help to further strengthen coherence and collaboration within the Movement and, in turn, lead to a stronger International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement with an improved position to influence global policy-making in this area. This will ultimately lead to improved prevention, assistance and protection work for affected populations worldwide and enhanced care and support for staff and volunteers. Thus, this policy will contribute to strengthening the Movement's collective capacity and capability to address mental health and psychosocial needs.

The policy recognizes that addressing mental health and psychosocial needs is a central part of the Movement's broader objectives to prevent and alleviate human suffering, to protect life, health and dignity and to promote health and social welfare among individuals, families and communities. These objectives will be achieved by providing contextually appropriate assistance and support, engaging in activities to promote mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, ensuring protection and strengthening the normative, institutional and ethical environment necessary to address mental health and psychosocial needs in terms of protection, prevention, mitigation and treatment.

The Movement Policy on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs replaces the IFRC Policy on Psychological Support (2003).

### **4) Resource implications**

Through the adoption of this policy, the Movement intends to strengthen its collective work to respond to mental and psychosocial needs. This may have resource implications for individual components of the Movement, depending on their existing programmes, activities and human resources devoted to this issue. The proposed policy suggests that all components of the Movement should ensure basic mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), as relevant, in a stand-alone or integrated manner within their humanitarian services and programmes and have staff, volunteers and/or community members trained in the provision of MHPSS.

Further, the resolution reiterates the 2017 Council of Delegates' call to increase the resources allocated to addressing this humanitarian issue, with a view to strengthening the Movement's collective capacity and capability to address mental health and psychosocial needs.

**5) Implementation and monitoring (i.e. how this issue will be reported to the Council of Delegates and/or International Conference)**

The success of this policy relies on its effective implementation and coherent application by the components of the Movement. All components of the Movement are expected to implement the policy and apply it in their work aimed at addressing mental health and psychosocial needs. They shall also apply this policy when cooperating with or supporting other components in responding to mental health and psychosocial needs. The ICRC and the IFRC are requested to monitor implementation and report back to the 2021 Council of Delegates.

**6) Conclusion and recommendations**

It is recommended that the Council of Delegates:

- I. Adopts the Movement Policy on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs and requests all components of the Movement to implement the policy and apply it in their work to address mental health and psychosocial needs;
- II. Calls on the components of the Movement to continue working to increase the resources allocated to addressing this humanitarian issue, with a view to strengthening the Movement's collective capacity and capability to address mental health and psychosocial needs;
- III. Requests the ICRC and the IFRC to monitor and document progress, including learnings and challenges, and report to the Council of Delegates in 2021 on the implementation of this policy.