What is Trauma-Informed Care?

Trauma-informed care shifts the focus from *"What's wrong with you?"* to *"What happened to you?"*

A trauma-informed approach to care acknowledges that health care organizations and care teams need to have a complete picture of a patient's life situation — past and present — in order to provide effective health care services with a healing orientation. Adopting trauma-informed practices can potentially improve patient engagement, treatment adherence, and health outcomes, as well as provider and staff wellness. It can also help reduce avoidable care and excess costs for both the health care and social service sectors.

Trauma-informed care seeks to: (1) **realize the widespread impact of trauma** and understand paths for recovery; (2) **recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma** in patients, families, and staff; (3) **integrate knowledge about trauma** into policies, procedures, and practices; and (4) **actively avoid re-traumatization**.

(Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's ["Trauma-Informed Approach."](#))

A comprehensive approach to trauma-informed care must be adopted at both the **clinical *and* organizational** levels. Too frequently, providers and health systems attempt to implement trauma-informed care at the clinical level without the supports needed for broad organizational culture change. This can lead to uneven, and unsustainable, shifts in operations. This narrow focus also fails to recognize how non-clinical staff, such as front desk workers and security personnel, often have significant interactions with patients and can be critical to ensuring that patients feel safe.

What are the principles of trauma-informed care?

Following are [recognized principles](#) of a trauma-informed approach that are needed to transform a health care setting:

Safety
Throughout the organization, patients and staff feel physically and psychologically safe

Trustworthiness + Transparency
Decisions are made with transparency, and with the goal of building and maintaining trust

Peer Support
Individuals with shared experiences are integrated into the organization and viewed as integral to service delivery

Collaboration
Power differences — between staff and clients and among organizational staff — are leveled to support shared decision-making

Empowerment
Patient and staff strengths are recognized, built on, and validated — this includes a belief in resilience and the ability to heal from trauma

Humility + Responsiveness
Biases and stereotypes (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, geography) and historical trauma are recognized and addressed

(Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's ["Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Care."](#))

What are the benefits of providing trauma-informed care?

There are a number of benefits to using a trauma-informed approach, not only for patients but also for providers and staff. Many patients with trauma have difficulty maintaining healthy, open relationships with a health care provider. For patients, trauma-informed care offers the opportunity to engage more fully in their health care, develop a trusting relationship with their provider, and improve long-term health outcomes. Trauma-informed care can also help reduce burnout among health care providers, potentially reducing staff turnover.

How can health care providers help patients address trauma?

Individuals can build trauma-informed health care organizations that create safe, caring, inclusive environments for all patients. There are a number of trauma-informed strategies that organizations can adopt to help people overcome the effects of trauma, ranging from organizational changes in the culture and atmosphere of a health care setting to full adoption of practices to address trauma at the clinical level.

For more details, see **Get Started with Trauma-Informed Care**.

What are the steps to becoming a trauma-informed organization?

There are many ways to become a trauma-informed organization and the process does not have to be a burden to adopt. Foundational steps organizations can take to move toward fully adopting a trauma-informed approach to care include:

1. Building awareness and generating buy-in for a trauma-informed approach;
2. Supporting a culture of staff wellness;
3. Hiring a workforce that embodies the values of trauma-informed care; and
4. Creating a safe physical, social, and emotional environment.

For more details, see a brief on **Laying the Groundwork for Trauma-Informed Care**.

Learn More

Learn about how to treat trauma by integrating a trauma-informed approach to care into your organization. Visit that *Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center* at **TraumaInformedCare.chcs.org**.