

# **A FRAMEWORK** **for mental health and** **psychosocial support** **in radiological and** **nuclear emergencies**



**World Health  
Organization**



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# FOREWORD

**P**roviding policy advice and assisting Member States in strengthening their national capacities for preparedness, response and recovery after radiological and nuclear emergencies is an integral part of the World Health Organization's (WHO's) work towards implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005). Monitoring of the IHR implementation through annual reporting and Joint External Evaluation (JEE) missions indicate that half of WHO's Member States are still lacking essential elements of preparedness pertaining to radiation emergencies.

The lessons learned from nuclear accidents such as in Chernobyl in 1986 and in Fukushima in 2011 clearly demonstrate that in addition to direct risks to human health and the environment from radiological hazards, the impact of such accidents is linked with subsequent protective actions and negative socioeconomic changes. Similar to other disasters and emergency situations, nuclear accidents have a profound impact on mental health, psychological and social standing, which in turn affect people's well-being, mental and physical health. Radiation emergencies, however, carry substantial and unique stressors.

International radiation safety standards make provisions for the inclusion of measures to mitigate such health impacts in emergency response and recovery plans, but they are limited in detail and practical guidance. Furthermore, there are few practical tools for integrating mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for response to radiation emergencies. International radiation safety standards make provisions for the inclusion of measures to mitigate such health impacts in emergency response and recovery plans, but they are limited in detail and practical guidance. Furthermore, there are few practical tools for integrating mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) within response to radiation emergencies.

***A framework for mental health and psychosocial support in radiological and nuclear emergencies*** is the first of its kind to bring together existing knowledge at the intersection of mental health and radiation protection. The framework was developed as an initial step towards supporting the integration of these fields, through a straightforward discussion of the mental health and psychosocial impacts exerted by radiation emergencies, as well as actions that can be taken to mitigate these effects across the emergency cycle.

This publication was produced through considerable interdisciplinary collaboration. It would not have been possible without invaluable contributions from a global network of experts and partners. We would like to thank them for their important efforts towards making mental health and well-being an imperative focus, thereby helping to reduce suffering and increase resilience following radiological and nuclear emergencies.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

ERC	emergency risk communication
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRP	International Commission for Radiological Protection
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IHR	International Health Regulations
ITB	Iodine Thyroid Blocking
IHR	International Health Regulations
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
mhGAP-HIG	Mental Health Global Action Programme Humanitarian Intervention Guide
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NGO	nongovernmental Organization
NPP	Nuclear Power Plant
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PFA	Psychological First Aid
PHC	primary health care

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