

Incident Debriefing Guide

Continuing Care Operators

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Introduction

This Guide provides a framework for organizational debriefing that can be used by anybody within Continuing Care in the aftermath of an incident or exercise.

The Site Administrator/Manager should serve as the point of contact for post-incident debriefing and is responsible for the administration of documents, follow-up activities and reporting. The Site Administrator/Manager may be responsible for the following:

- Request, and be ultimately accountable for, the debriefing process
- Plan the debriefing session
- Facilitate the debriefing session
- Act as a participant

Purpose

The overarching aim of organizational debriefing is to encourage continual quality improvement and learning through a formal structure in which those involved may communicate their experiences, and identify potential strengths or areas for improvement. Subsequently, plans, training, logistical support needs and mitigation strategies can be reviewed and modified to reflect these lessons learned, thereby improving the organization's ability to respond to similar incidents in future. In particular, well-structured and facilitated debriefings ensure that:

- Strengths are built upon and consistently reinforced
- Areas for improvement are identified
- Where effective policies, systems, competencies and facilities already exist but potential for further improvement is revealed, they are developed to their optimum
- Best Practices are identified and efforts are made to incorporate
- Risks are identified and addressed through risk management processes
- Responsibility for addressing learnings and areas for improvement is assigned
- Those involved in the response to an incident, become further connected and have a better understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities

Types of Organizational Debriefing

There are three types of organizational debriefing each of which can be held at different times (e.g. at the end of each shift, following the end of the response, after the transition from response to recovery, throughout the recovery activity (such as at three-monthly intervals) and following the exit strategy.)

The hot (or immediate post-event) debriefing:

- Is held immediately as safely possible after the incident response or shift or exercise
- Involves all staff directly involved in the incident
- Allows people to unburden themselves of issues and concerns
- Should address key health and safety issues
- Provides an opportunity to thank staff and provide positive feedback
- May be held simultaneously within an organization following an incident; each department/unit/service may hold their own 'hot debrief' to identify local issues

The internal organizational debriefing:

- Should be held within two weeks of the incident; if the incident continues to be managed over the medium to long-term it may be necessary to hold regular internal organizational debriefs at key milestones
- Involves the key players involved in the response to, or impacted by, the incident
- Addresses organizational, and not personal or psychological, issues
- Identifies strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for future learning
- Provides an opportunity to thank staff and provide positive feedback
- May be facilitated by a range of people within the organization

The multi-agency debriefing:

- Should be held within four weeks of the incident; if the incident continues to be managed over the medium to long-term it may be necessary to hold regular multiagency debriefs at key milestones
- Involves representatives from all involved agencies, organizations and stakeholders
- Focuses on the effectiveness of inter-agency coordination
- Addresses multi-agency organizational issues not personal or psychological issues
- Identifies strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for future learning
- Provides an opportunity to thank staff and provide positive feedback
- May be facilitated by a range of organizations such as Police Service, Fire Service, Local Authority, Alberta Health or Alberta Health Services

It is important to remember that participants external to the organization may have been involved in the incident being debriefed. Organizations such as Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, municipalities and industry are sometimes involved in incidents and the input of their staffs should be sought. However, while they should be invited to contribute their thoughts, the debriefing leader should exercise discretion when inviting them to participate in the debriefing meeting at which weaknesses in processes and responses may be discussed.

Occasionally, external agency representatives may attend an internal debriefing. If so, they should be invited to provide their comments first and then excused prior to the start of the staff debriefing. If this sort of 'mixed' debriefing is held by teleconference, the debriefing leader should be sure external agency representatives have hung up their phones before proceeding. If the debriefing leader is in any doubt, and if practical to do so, they should stop the debriefing, immediately email a new teleconference number (to staff only) and reconvene the debriefing as soon as everybody has reconnected.

Legal and Privacy Implications

Debriefings may be subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP) legislation, the Health Information Act (HIA) legislation. As such, those who conduct debriefings must be familiar with:

- The principle that all documents related to the debriefing may be requested to be disclosed to the public
- Any information in documents that identify individuals must be protected in accordance with Information and Security Policies.

Participants must be made aware that their views, and any other information contained in documents may be made public pursuant to an official information request under FOIP.

Where information identifies individuals, debriefing participants should be aware that FOIP and other privacy legislation applies and protects the individuals' privacy.

Planning an Organizational Debriefing

Before arranging an organizational debriefing (which should take as much time as needed based on the complexity of the situation and the needs of those impacted), the debriefing leader should consider the 'Pre-Debriefing Issues and Questions for Consideration' at [Appendix A](#).

The organizational debriefing should include a 3rd party not involved in the event to take comprehensive notes and will focus on the following key questions:

- What happened (establish a timeline)?
- What worked well?
- What didn't work well?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What parts of your plan were not implemented and why?

To ensure participants are prepared for the debriefing, they should give some thought to these questions beforehand; accordingly, the debriefing leader should distribute [Appendix B](#) to all participants several days before the debriefing is scheduled. Although participants should be encouraged to bring the completed forms to the debriefing, there is no requirement for the debriefing leader to collect them; they are simply a tool for use by participants.

Debriefing Participants

Participants may be invited at the discretion of the debriefing leader, who should endeavor to balance meeting practicality with ensuring all key stakeholders are invited. Participants are responsible for gathering the views of those they represent beforehand.

Conducting the Organizational Debriefing

Format. Once the issues and questions at [Appendix A](#) have been considered, the debriefing format can be developed; an example is at [Appendix C](#). The debriefing leader should ensure that, whatever format is followed, the admin support is provided with an identical template to ensure ease and consistency of note taking.

Subject Levels. Debriefing can be undertaken a several levels depending on the scale and scope of the incident. The debriefing leader should focus on the level most appropriate to the incident:

- *Task Subjects* which relate to the team's performance with regards to 'task functions'. For example, triage, reception, transport, treatment etc.

- *Tactical Subjects* which relate to Command and Control issues. These include pre-planning, assessing, resource estimation, communications etc.
- *Strategic Subjects* which investigate the wider issues including those having an impact upon the site or organization as a whole; these may include, but are not necessarily limited to, political aspects, working with external agencies, wider implications for the public and so on.

A detailed list of possible topics for discussion within each of the debriefing levels is at [Appendix D](#). This appendix should be circulated to all debriefing participants beforehand with those areas the debriefing leader particularly wants to address highlighted to enable participants to prepare accordingly.

Considerations. The time required for debriefing will depend on the number of participants attending. A list of key considerations and tips for best practice when conducting a debriefing session is at [Appendix E](#).

Documentation and Reporting

Post Incident Report. Following the debriefing, the collection of comments should be compiled into a single **internal** document under the heading of each of the key questions used in the debriefing. It is this post-incident report that provides the basis for identifying lessons from the event.

The purpose of reporting is to maintain accountability and transparency, to keep the wider community informed, to gain support and assistance and to record an account of response/recovery efforts including lessons identified. A post-incident report should be completed after the hot debriefing and organizational debriefing have been completed. It should:

Remain factual, concise, objective and blame-free

- Summarize the sequence of events
- Describe the actions of staff
- Provide an accurate timeline
- Detail where and why the response was effective and where it was not
- Recommend ways to improve future responses

An example of a post-incident report is at [Appendix F](#).

Developing a RACI Matrix. Post-incident report Actions for Consideration (the term 'recommendation' is rarely used) are detailed in a RACI Matrix which identifies, by name, the person or people:

- **R**esponsible for ensuring the Action for Consideration is taken forward
- **A**ccountable for ensuring the Action for Consideration is taken forward i.e. the person to whom the person listed as 'Responsible' reports
- Who need to be part of the **C**onsultation process as the Action for Consideration is taken forward (usually members of corporate and organizational support programs)
- Who need to be kept **I**nformed of process/policy changes as the Action for Consideration is taken forward (usually senior members of staff)

A RACI Matrix is shown as part of the post-incident report at [Appendix F](#). Actions for Consideration arising from a post-incident report should be followed to conclusion by the debriefing leader. This process may take months with the organizer prompting progress reports from those **R**esponsible for Actions for Consideration at periodic intervals. Status updates of Actions for Consideration progress should be recorded on the RACI Matrix in a separate line below the relevant Action for Consideration.

Report Distribution

Draft Report. The draft report should be sent to all those who contributed to the debriefing to ensure that their comments and Actions for Consideration have been captured accurately and for them to complete the RACI matrix columns with appropriate names and dates.

Final Report. Distribution of the final report will depend on the nature and geographic scope of the incident. However, it should be distributed sufficiently widely to ensure that every site service area affected by the incident has an opportunity to absorb the learnings. In addition, reports should be presented to respective committees who will be able to assist in facilitating follow-up activities and implementing any changes required to site processes. Reports for significant incidents should be presented to the Site Administrator and/or company Senior Leadership which, where required, will facilitate any recommended changes to organizational policy.

Report Retention

Only one official copy of the report should be kept; all other copies are considered to be transitory documents and should be destroyed once the approved final report is circulated. The official copy of the debriefing report should be forwarded to the respective Site Administrator and/or company Senior Leadership for retention.

Community Debriefing

As well as providing organizational debriefing opportunities internally and for other agencies involved, consider the community's need for debriefing. This may take the form of public meetings, focus groups or other community meetings to learn what community leaders / members have identified as learnings from an event. Where appropriate, feedback from the community should be factored into the organization's debriefings. Such a process may also highlight areas of further work to be done to build community resilience and to resolve underlying, health related, recovery issues. A guide to community debriefing is at [Appendix G](#).

Appendices

- A. Pre-Briefing Issues and Questions for Consideration.
- B. Organizational Debriefing Preparation Form.
- C. Sample Debriefing Format.
- D. Possible Topics for Discussion.
- E. Best Practice Considerations and Tips.
- F. Sample Post-Incident Report.
- G. Guide to Community Debriefing.

Appendix A - Pre Debriefing Issues and Questions for Consideration

Purpose

- What incident is being reviewed?
- What is the purpose (aim) of the debriefing session?
- What period of time is to be covered?

Authority

- Will anyone in a senior leadership position be taking part or wish to be present?
- Confirm the level of disclosure or confidentiality of debriefing material required by the organization.

Participants

- Are the participants aware of the debriefing?
- Are they all willing to take part?
- What experience have they had with debriefing?
- Consider questions they may ask.

Numbers

- How many people were involved in the event?
- How many people are keen to take part in the debriefing?

Time

- What is the minimum and maximum time available for the debriefing?
- When does the debriefing have to be completed?
- Is some sort of social gathering (if appropriate) planned at the end of the debriefing (e.g. morning coffee, BBQ etc)?

Location.

- Where is the best place to hold the debriefing?

Leader

- Who will lead the debriefing?
- What experience does the organizer have of debriefing?

Resources

- What maps, charts, photos, reports etc should the organizer and/or participants have access to both before and during the debriefing?

Appendix B - Organization Debriefing Preparation Form

Aim. The aim of a debriefing is to encourage continual quality improvement and learning in which those involved in an incident have the opportunity to communicate their experiences and identify potential strengths or areas for improvement. Debriefings ensure that:

- Strengths are built upon and consistently reinforced
- Areas for improvement are identified
- Best practices are identified and efforts are made to incorporate them
- Risks are identified and addressed

Discussion Topics. Although a comprehensive list of possible topics for discussion during a debriefing is included at Appendix D to the Incident Debriefing Guide, the following are the most common for the majority of incidents:

- Leadership & Management
- Communications
- Team Working
- Health, Safety & Welfare
- Equipment & Resources
- Facility Issues

Task. For each of the discussion topics above (or others you believe are more relevant to the particular incident), insert bullets into the following table related to your observations, experiences and factual occurrences. Do this several days before the debriefing is scheduled to ensure you are as prepared as possible. Although you should bring the completed form to the debriefing, there is no requirement for the debriefing leader to collect it; it is simply a tool to help you arrange your thoughts.

In addition, always ask yourself whether you were personally prepared to respond to the incident in terms of your awareness and knowledge of:

- The Incident Management System
- The respective incident response plan in the Emergency Response Manual

Question 1 – What worked well?

Question 2 – What didn't work well?

Question 3 – What would you / your team do differently next time?

Question 4 – What parts of your plan were not implemented and why?

General Comments/Actions for Consideration

Appendix C - Sample Debriefing Format

Introduction

- Welcome the participants
- Provide an overview of the reason for the debriefing e.g. following a flood, train derailment etc
- Clarify the aim of the debrief
- Provide an overview of the method for debriefing, including potential actions following the debrief i.e. notes will be written up and given to the Initiator and a process developed for addressing lessons identified
- Provide an opportunity for participants to introduce themselves and their role in the incident
- Ask participants to use their completed preparation forms as a prompt

Objectives

- Determine who did what, where, when and why
- Record the discussion under the headings of the 4 key questions
- Determine what mitigation strategies can be put in place to reduce the potential of a reoccurrence

Description of the Event

- What was the event?
- When the concern was first noticed – date, time?
- Who first noticed there was a concern – name, position/occupation?
- Who alerted other people of the concern – name, position?
- Who did they alert to the concern – name, position?
- How was the alert communicated?

Analysis of Incident Management

- Which departments responded?
- Which department managed the event?
- Where was command and control established?
- Who was in charge – name, position?
- What emergency management plans were relevant to this situation and were they implemented?
- What worked, did not work well in relation to the plans?
- Were there any regulatory/legislated requirements relative to this event?
- How was communication established and maintained with responding services?
- How was communication established and maintained with impacted services?
- What actions were taken by responders?
- What actions were taken by impacted services?
- What materials, equipment and other resources were used to respond to this event?

- Was media involved in this event? If so, how were they supported/managed and by whom? How was event portrayed?

Post Event Follow up

- What were the estimated costs of responding to the incident – staff hours, supplies, equipment, etc.?
- Were any of the costs covered by insurance or other forms of cost recovery?
- Who/which departments were responsible for recovery/restoration – name, positions?
- What additional mitigation strategies have been, or can be put in place to reduce the probability of a reoccurrence?
- Do existing plans have gaps or limitations that need to be addressed?
- Who is assuming responsibility for action on these matters – names, positions, time lines?
- Are these applicable to other sites and, if so, how have those sites been engaged?

Appendix D - Possible Topics For Discussion

The topics below are not exhaustive and should not be used as a definitive checklist.

Task Subjects

Pre-planning
 Response to Event
 Site/Scene Safety
 Equipment Handling
 Procedures & Techniques
 Patient Handling
 Communications
 Team Working
 Dealing with the Public
 Health & Safety
 Knowledge of Policies
 Technical Information
 Identified Training Needs
 Identified Policy Issues
 Equipment/Facility Issues
 Dealing with the Press
 General Comments

Tactical Subjects

Pre-planning
 Appropriate Resources
 Command & Control
 Preparation
 Assessing
 Planning
 Resources
 Implementation
 Controlling
 Evaluation
 Communications
 Public Relations
 Health/Safety & Welfare
 Supervision
 Systems of Work & Methodology
 Liaison with Other Agencies
 Identified Training & Needs
 Identified Procedure Concerns
 Identified Policy Issues

Strategic Subjects

Corporate Strategic Issues
 Corporate Policy Issues
 Provincial/Federal Policy Issues
 Financial Implication & Cost Recovery
 Legal Implications
 Inter-AHS Co-operation & Liaison
 Inter Agency Co-operation
 Police
 Fire Department
 AEMA
 Alberta Health Services
 Alberta Health
 Provincial Agencies
 Municipalities
 Support Agencies / Others

Health & Safety Issues
 Impact on Public
 Environmental Issues
 Media & PR (Corporate Image)
 Communications
 Equipment, Resources & Facility Issues
 Identified Training Needs
 General Comments

Appendix E - Best Practice Consideration and Tips

- Keep the aim in view
- Explain the overall approach and the time the debrief should finish
- Explain the ground rules of organizational debriefing. It is vital that debriefing is carried out in a manner conducive to promoting organizational learning and encouraging a no-blame culture. Debriefing should:
 - Be conducted openly and honestly
 - Pursue personal, group or organizational understanding and learning
 - Be consistent with professional responsibilities
 - Respect the rights of individuals
 - Value equally all those concerned.
- Ensure all participants have relevant notes and materials
- Check understanding and clarify
- Keep control of the time
- Ask one person to speak at a time and control any side conversations
- Deal with the negative views first
- Move on to positive views for the second half of the period
- Ensure everybody has an equal opportunity to speak and share their thoughts
- Ask facilitative questions to bring out/develop points made
- Encourage discussion between individuals
- Remember to remain neutral during feedback and provide encouragement and thanks
- Be concise and do not try to evaluate what has been raised
- Remind the group that there will be no further structured opportunity for discussion (if that is the case)
- Summarize the lessons learned, recommendations and suggested responsibility/accountability for follow up action
- Thank all for their participation
- Say what you intend doing with the debrief output

Throughout the debriefing session, remain alert for signs of post-incident stress or mental fatigue among the participants. If you suspect somebody is suffering, either direct them to your corporate employee assistance program or liaise with their manager accordingly.

Appendix F - Sample Post Incident Report

Incident Background

- Explain what the incident was and when it started and finished.
- Give an overview of what happened and what sites or program areas were affected.

Debriefing Process

- Detail when and where the debriefing was conducted.
- List the participants at Appendix 1 of the report.
- List the areas debriefed at Appendix 2 of the report.

Incident Chronology

- Include a short sentence indicating the incident chronology is at Appendix 3 of the report.

What Worked Well

- Discuss everything that worked well.

What Could be Improved

- Discuss everything that could be improved.

Other Incident Issues/Related Learnings/Observations

- Discuss other issues that don't fit comfortably into either of the above 2 sections i.e. that were not part of the incident but which were highlighted as a result of it.
- Discuss what would be done differently next time.
- Highlight which parts of the relevant incident response plan (e.g. Emergency Response Code Plan) were not implemented and why.
- Highlight any other general learnings or observations.

Action for Considerations

- List the recommendations at Appendix 4 of the report using a RACI matrix.

Appendix 1 - DEBRIEF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Position
Complete for each debriefing participant e.g.:	Complete for each debriefing participant e.g.:
John Smith	Site Manager
Mary Jones	Nurse

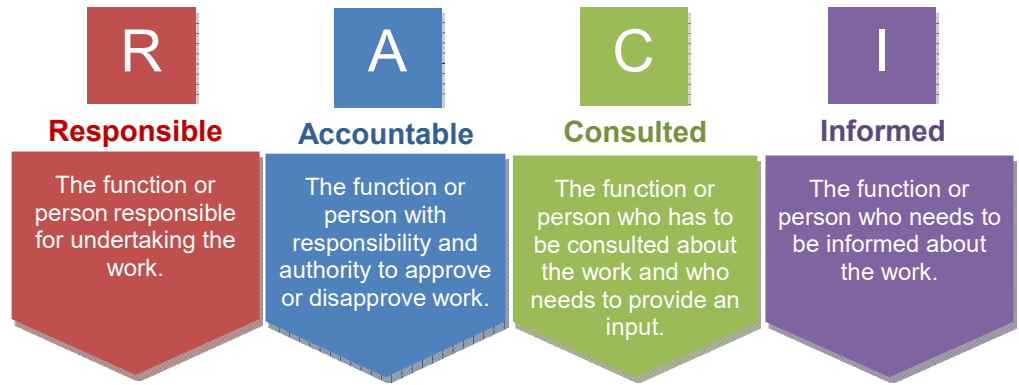
Appendix 2 - AREAS DEBRIEFED (following used for example only)

- Command, Control and Communications
- Site: Clinical Operations, Registration, Facility and Maintenance, Support Services, WHS, Volunteers
- Other affected sites

Appendix 3 - INCIDENT CHRONOLOGY

Date/Time	Activities
Complete as required e.g.:	Complete as required for significant events. Single line bullet points are sufficient e.g.:
Aug 12, 0600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood discovered in storeroom by Facility and Maintenance
0635	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site Command Post activated • Water has spread to South Wing of Long Term Care Centre
0640	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Services notified

Appendix 4 - RACI MATRIX



NOTES

1. Please indicate “people” in the RACI that will be responsible, accountable, etc. rather than a program name. If you must use a program name, try to indicate the appropriate position i.e. ICU Manager etc.
2. Informed column: also consider the various E/DM site, zone, and Provincial committees and other groups
3. Below each Topic beside “Status” enter up to date notes and status on progress of Item. Use font color **green** if item is complete and **red** if item is still ongoing.
 Eg. *Complete – Item is complete as of 24-Jun-2014.*
 Eg. *Ongoing – As of 24-Jun-2014, issue will be discussed at.*

Item	Topic	Due Date	R	A	C	I
1						
	Status:					
2						
	Status:					
3						
	Status:					
4						
	Status:					
5						
	Status:					
6						
	Status:					
7						
	Status:					
8						
	Status:					
9						
	Status:					
10						
	Status:					

Appendix G - Guide to Community Debriefing

Subsequent to an emergency/disaster affecting a community (e.g. flooding), a municipality may elect to hold a debriefing meeting with those affected by the incident to which representatives from the organization may be invited to attend. If invited to speak at this type of debriefing, be aware of your audience; in particular, bear in mind the socio-economic status of the affected community. For instance, after a poorer neighborhood has been flooded do not assume that people own their own, or can afford to rent, carpet cleaners.

Representatives attending a community debriefing are also advised to engage community leaders beforehand to identify potential issues and other risks to health.