

2025 Physician Health and Safety Summit Summary Report





Overview

This year's annual Physician Health and Safety Summit brought together front-line physicians, health and safety leaders, and staff from organizations across the province. The two-day event promoted collaboration on physician wellness, safety strategies, and support for various practice environments. Keynote speaker Dr Gabor Maté offered expert insights into trauma, emotional health, and the importance of vulnerability in leadership. Breakout sessions allowed attendees to work together on cross-regional solutions, focusing on psychological safety, standardized processes, and peer support mechanisms.

Who attended

PRIMARY ROLE	# OF ATTENDEES
PHYSICIANS	20
PHYSICIAN HEALTH PROGRAM	3
HEALTH AUTHORITY – OHS REPRESENTATIVES	25
HEALTH AUTHORITY – MEDICAL AFFAIRS	12
DOCTORS OF BC STAFF	20
SWITCH BC STAFF	6
RESIDENT DOCTORS BC STAFF	2
CMA STAFF	2
CONSULTANTS / FACILITATORS / PRESENTERS	4
OTHER	8
TOTAL	104

Presentation highlights

INCIDENT REPORTING AND SAFETY APPLICATIONS

The importance of improving how workplace incidents are reported and resolved was a key theme throughout the summit. Health authorities are piloting new tools—such as a 24/7 self-reporting platform for contract medical staff and real-time violence tracking in emergency departments—to fill reporting gaps and ensure timely follow-up. There are also ongoing safety assessments in community clinics to help physicians develop tailored health and safety programs.

VCH: Violence Incidents and Tracking Aggression Live – In the Emergency Department (VITAL-ED) Pilot Project

Fraser Health and PHSA: [Medical Staff Incident Reporting Tool](#)

Community Physician Health and Safety Program (CPHS) through Safety, Wellbeing, Innovation, Training, and Collaboration in Healthcare (SWITCH BC): [Health and Safety Web Portal](#), [Clinic Assessments](#), and [Reference Guide](#).

PRIORITIZING MENTAL HEALTH

Ensuring physicians have access to confidential, timely support remains a consistent priority. Programs such as the Physician Health Program (PHP) continue to provide critical mental health and counselling services. Health authorities have introduced targeted initiatives—such as the Office for Medical Staff Safety and Wellbeing (OSWELL)—to foster more psychologically safe environments. Staff-informed wellness actions, including improving orientations, are being implemented to promote resilience across care settings.

Physician Health Program (PHP): [Counselling, specialized coaches, peer-to-peer support, Primary Care Provider matching service, return to work supports](#).

Office for Medical Staff Safety and Wellbeing (OSWELL – PHSA): [Developed in response to the 2023 Medical Staff Wellness Survey](#).

CULTURE CHANGE

Presenters emphasized the need for broader cultural shifts that normalize seeking help and prioritizing physician wellness to change current cultural expectations. Nationally, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) is leading with a physician safety framework focused on physical and psychological safety. Locally, efforts are underway to strengthen coordination across health authorities and promote leadership involvement, signalling a move toward holding health authorities accountable for physician wellness.

Canadian Medical Association: [CMA's Impact Strategy](#)

Key themes

Participants emphasized the need for coordinated and compassionate responses to support physician wellness following safety incidents and health-related absences.

- Proactive and trauma-informed approach: Build clear, well-communicated protocols before incidents occur. Include trauma-informed debriefs, wellness assessments, and closing-the-loop communications.
- Improved navigation and awareness of resources: Ensure awareness of available supports, such as the Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA), the Office for Medical Staff Safety and Wellbeing (OSWELL), and the Patient Safety and Learning System (PSLS), and establish rapid-response wellness teams.
- Coordinated supports: Develop clear pathways with designated HR (Human Resources)/OHS (Occupational Health and Safety) contacts and occupational physicians to navigate accommodations. Align expectations, policy standards, and funding for accommodations province-wide.
- Culture change: Normalize asking for mental health support, self-care, and de-stigmatize help-seeking. Encourage leadership to model vulnerability.
- Customized wellness approaches: Offer tailored mental health options (e.g., meditation retreats, Schwartz Rounds, peer story-sharing).
- Processes and accountability: Improve access to incident reporting systems and track post-incident organizational change.



Challenges and Opportunities

FOCUS AREA: PHYSICIAN ONBOARDING ACROSS HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

Challenges:

- Inconsistency across regions: Onboarding can be fragmented with unclear expectations.
- Access barriers: There are delays in system logins, email, and facility access.
- Lack of navigation support: Physicians are unsure where to get help or who to talk to.
- Uncompensated time: Physicians often onboard using personal time, especially in contracted roles.

Recommendations – Provincial:

- Define minimum standards and core modules, including:
 - Cultural safety
 - Incident reporting
 - Infection control
- Create a centralized onboarding hub and unified tracking system.

Recommendations – Regional:

- Provide person-centred experiences: buddy systems, site tours, and local contacts.
- Customize orientation based on departmental or role-specific needs.
- Use gamified or flexible onboarding strategies to improve engagement.



Community Physician Health and Safety (CPHS) Session

Over the past year, the Community Physician Health and Safety Oversight Group has continued to advance efforts to improve workplace safety for community-based physicians. The group provided space for reflection, case review, and solution-focused dialogue to ensure the programs remain responsive to physicians' evolving needs.

CPHS HIGHLIGHTS

- Clinic engagement: As of April 2025, the CPHS Program had completed 34 clinic assessments, with growing interest across the province.
- Pilot Project Launched: In August 2025, a de-escalation toolkit for medical office staff was launched that offers practical tools to manage escalating situations safely.
- Case Studies: Real-world case examples illustrated common hazards—such as needlestick injuries—and facilitated discussions about enhancing workplace safety protocols.





Keynote Speakers: Dr Gabor Maté and Dr John Hwang

Dr Gabor Maté, a renowned physician, author, and speaker, delivered a profound keynote on the mind-body connection and how emotional stress can manifest as physical illness. He spoke about the need for a more holistic and compassionate approach to health and wellness that considers the influence of lived experience, especially in health care and caregiving settings. He emphasized:

“Emotional repression and unresolved trauma are among the most significant risk factors for chronic illness.”

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Dr Maté believes emotional stress is a root cause of many physical illnesses, including cancer and autoimmune diseases.
- He highlighted how the systems that process emotion are intimately tied to the immune system, nervous system, and hormonal networks.
- He shared how healing requires both compassionate self-inquiry and systemic changes that prioritize emotional processing and safety.

Dr John Hwang, Chair of the Board at Doctors of BC, shared his residency journey, including personal and professional challenges he encountered. His vulnerability and leadership created space for others to reflect on the often-unspoken psychological health and safety challenges facing physicians.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Dr Hwang emphasized the need for vulnerability in medical culture.
- He advocated for normalizing mental health dialogue among residents and physicians.
- His story underscored the importance of organizational support and early intervention.

Evaluation Summary

NUMBER OF RESPONSES

43

SATISFACTION METRICS



Overall Satisfaction: 4.6/5



Relevance of Content: 4.7/5



Quality of Speakers: 4.8/5



Opportunities to Connect with Peers: 4.5/5

POSITIVE FEEDBACK QUOTES

“Gabor Maté was transformative – I’ll be processing that keynote for weeks.”

“I finally feel seen as a physician navigating burnout.”

“The regional sessions helped us build real-world solutions we can take back.”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT SHARED BY ATTENDEES:

- More structured networking time would be beneficial.
- Attendees suggested a pre-summit onboarding session for new participants.
- Organizers heard requests for additional follow-up and continuity post-summit.
- Attendees called for improved accessibility of breakout room technology.

You can see the [2024 PHS Summary Report here](#).

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