

Operational Framework for Mutual Aid Requests (OFMAR)

Regulatory, Operations and Emergency Management Branch Public Health Agency of Canada

What is the Operational Framework for Mutual Aid Requests (OFMAR)?

The OFMAR is a non-binding mechanism that can be activated by provinces/territories to identify and share healthcare professionals and health assets inter-jurisdictionally during events. Although originally created for physicians and nurses, the tool is flexible and can expand to identify other healthcare professionals.

How does OFMAR work?

The OFMAR can be summarized by the following eight steps:

Notification: A request for health care professionals and/or health assets is made to the Health Portfolio Operations Centre (HPOC) by a federal/provincial/territorial (F/P/T) jurisdiction looking to identify potential surge capacity during an event.

OFMAR Activation + Call Out: Once the request is made, the Public Health Agency of Canada activates the OFMAR by initiating a call out to all potential sending jurisdictions.

Consolidate Responses + Relay Summary: PHAC consolidates all the potential offers of assistance received and provides this to the requesting jurisdiction. It is then the role of the requesting jurisdiction to decide if they will select and accept an offer(s) of assistance.

Coordination: If an offer of assistance is accepted, jurisdictions involved will enter into a negotiation phase whereby they will agree on a Mutual Aid Agreement (MAA) that outlines items such as cost recovery, workplace health, licensure, etc.



Standby: While the MAA is being negotiated, regulatory bodies in the sending and receiving jurisdictions will validate the licensure of the identified regulated health professionals and where necessary, seek emergency licensure. In parallel with this, logistics/planning will also be undertaken.

OFMAR Deactivation: PHAC remains available to provide additional support if requested. The OFMAR is deactivated at the end of an event or at the request of the affected jurisdiction.

Background

In 2009, all F/P/T Ministers of Health signed a *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the provision of mutual aid in relation to health resources during an emergency affecting the health of the public*. Following this, OFMAR was created as a resource to operationalize the MOU and was approved by the Pan-Canadian Public Health Network Council in December 2013.

Examples of OFMAR activation

Alberta Floods 2013

In June 2013, major flooding in several areas of Alberta resulted in 100,000 individuals displaced, and 32 states of emergency declared. Processes within OFMAR enabled 80 Environmental Health Officers certified in public health inspections from across Canada to be identified within 24 hours as a potential surge resource to assist Alberta Health.

Fort McMurray Fires 2016

In May 2016, forest fires in the Fort McMurray region resulted in the evacuation of 88,000 individuals and damage to 24,000 structures. The province of Alberta activated the OFMAR to identify surge capacity in the following four specialties: mental health professionals, environmental health officers, public health nurses, and paramedics. In one week, using the OFMAR processes, 389 individuals were identified as possible resources to support the Alberta response.

COVID-19 2020

In March 2020 the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic. Multiple provinces activated the OFMAR to identify surge support capacity in the following specialties: Nurses with various specialties, Medical laboratory technologists, respiratory therapists, and physicians.

Questions?

Contact the Health Portfolio Operations Centre
hpoc-cops@phac-aspc.gc.ca