

To view an archived recording of this presentation please click the following link:

<https://youtu.be/7uXBn0CCI2A>

Please scroll down this file to view a copy of the slides from the session.

#### Disclaimer

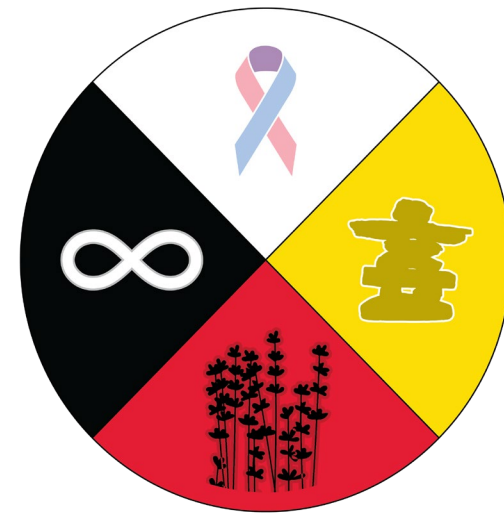
**This document was created by its author and/or external organization. It has been published on the Public Health Ontario (PHO) website for public use as outlined in our Website Terms of Use. PHO is not the owner of this content. Any application or use of the information in this document is the responsibility of the user. PHO assumes no liability resulting from any such application or use.**



# Pregnancy and Infant Loss: How your support can make a difference

Michelle La Fontaine, Regional Program Manager

Megan Fockler, Manager



May 14, 2025  
PHN-PREP



# Disclaimer

This presentation was created by its author and/or external organization. It will be published on the Public Health Ontario (PHO) website for public use as outlined in our Website Terms of Use. PHO is not the owner of this content. Any application or use of the information in this document is the responsibility of the user. PHO assumes no liability resulting from any such application or use.



# Learning Objectives

**By the end of this session, participants will be able to:**

- Understand the emotional and psychological impacts of perinatal loss on families.
- Identify appropriate communication strategies for supporting families experiencing perinatal loss.
- Discuss professional boundaries around perinatal loss.
- Apply practical guidance on supporting and re-engaging clients in subsequent pregnancies following infant loss.



# Pregnancy and Infant Loss (PAIL) Network: Who are We?

Peer-led support at no cost for any family in Ontario

Education for healthcare and service professionals

Awareness and Advocacy





# Canadian Statistics



- As many as 1 in 4 pregnancies end in loss
- Between April 1 2016 and March 31 2017, there were 38,665 recorded visits to ER departments in Ontario related to early pregnancy losses and their associated complications, including:
  - Missed abortions (6954)
  - Complete or incomplete spontaneous abortions (15,335)
  - Ectopic pregnancies (4788)

This represents approximately 106 visits to ER depts every day, or one family every 14 minutes.



# Canadian Statistics cont'd

In Canada:

- **Approximately 8 babies are stillborn every day** (Statistics Canada, 2013, Table 102-4516)
- **Approximately 5 babies die within the first year after birth every day** (Statistics Canada, 2013, Table 2)

That's one baby, one family, every 2 hours.



# What About Ontario?

- Unique opportunity to engage with families and healthcare professionals
- No information about what was needed to make a difference
- Mandate to expand support and education from the Ministry of Health



# Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network: Results of a Provincial Research Study

We asked 596 parents and families:

*“What was your experience at the time of your pregnancy or infant loss?”*

53% did not feel they were treated with kindness and respect

45% were not told of available supports

72% did not receive the information they needed from health care professionals

69% felt their health-care provider didn't have the skills to respond to their needs

65% did not feel supported and cared for

51% experienced stigma from a health-care provider



# What we know

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Depression, anxiety	Having a living child
Posttraumatic stress	Access to specialized support
Previous loss	Satisfaction with health services
Conflict in a relationship	Connecting with others who have similar experiences
Pressure to have another baby	Social support (partner, community, spirituality)



# The Difference You Make

You can make a positive difference with the care you provide.

- Interactions have long-term implications on well-being (positive & negative)
- You may be an important source of support
- You are part of their story

*Bereaved parents never forget the understanding, respect, and genuine warmth they received from caregivers, which can become as lasting and important as any other memories of their lost pregnancy or their baby's brief life - I.G. Leon*



# Attachment



We Tell You First™ ...  
6 Days Sooner Than  
Your Missed Period!



<https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/>





# What can be done?





# 2017 Provincial Survey

- **Smooth transitions**, for example information being shared amongst teams
- Options for timely care (including follow-up)
- Access to knowledgeable, skilled, and empathetic caregivers who listen to them and acknowledge all dimensions of their well-being, including physical and emotional
- **To be told honestly what to expect and what to do next**
- **To be provided with guidance and information to help them understand the process**



# 2017 Provincial Survey

- Ongoing supports as needed – hospital is a moment in time
- Care providers to use **sensitive language** (i.e. baby instead of fetus or products of conception; acknowledgment of loss by saying, “I’m sorry for your loss” or “I’m sorry we are meeting under these circumstances”)
- To be treated as individuals
- **To have their baby, loss, and grief acknowledged**



# Pregnancy after loss: paradox

After perinatal loss, the majority of families become pregnant again.

(50% within a year of the loss; 80% within 18 months)

(DeBackere, Hill, and Kavanaugh, 2008; Mills et al., 2014; Hughes, Turton, & Evans, 1999)

- High levels of perceived stress
- Symptoms of depression & anxiety
- “Guarded” emotions
- Need to have assurances frequently





# Supportive Considerations

## **Guilt & Shame:**

- Be specific and repetitive
- Focus on strengths
- Privacy

## **Language**

- Sensitive language
- Mirror language
- Avoid the use of jargon or ambiguous terms

## **Acknowledgement**

- What is happening
- What is not ideal
- Baby/pregnancy
- Impact of previous loss (i.e. child emergency)
- Physical (lactation, bleeding, etc.)

## **Loss of Control and Safety**

- Timely access/updates
- Clear instructions
- Reassurance (but not promises)
- Supports at family's pace

## **Connection**

- Honest and open communication
- Clear information
- Family support
- Connect with next steps/ongoing care



# Communication: Presence, not perfection

What is Said	Intended Message	Received Message
<b>Everything happens for a reason.</b>	I want you to find meaning in this.	I'm being punished.
<b>You aren't given more in life than you can handle.</b>	You have the strength to survive this tragedy.	You don't want to hear how vulnerable and scared I am.
<b>You're young. You can have more children.</b>	There is nothing to prevent you from future pregnancies.	You think I can replace this baby with another baby.
<b>Everything will be okay.</b>	I want you to be okay.	I need to be okay to make you comfortable.
<b>Your child is in a better place.</b>	My faith tells me that your baby is in a good place.	You think there is a better place for my baby than in my arms.
<b>Go out and have fun. You'll feel better soon.</b>	Take care of yourself.	Grieving should be avoided.
<b>Be grateful you have other children.</b>	You may actually love and cherish your children more now.	The child that died is less important than my other children.
<b>It's better you miscarried because the fetus was probably abnormal.</b>	It's not your fault.	You don't think I could parent a child with a disability.
<b>At least...</b>	I think there may be something good in this. I want you to feel better.	You are minimizing this loss. You think you know better. I should not be this upset about this.
<b>I understand.</b>	I've been through this too.	You don't want to listen to me. You think your loss is the same as mine.
<b>Nothing.</b>	I don't want to make this worse. I don't know what to say. I feel awkward. Your loss is too painful for me.	I am alone. People don't care.

# Communication: Connection, not perfection

- I'm sorry/I'm sorry for your loss
- I'm sorry we are meeting under these circumstances
- Take all the time you need
- I will answer your questions, or find someone who can
- Is there anyone you want to contact now? Is there anyone who can come to be with you (or meet you)?
- It's ok to cry
- Did you name your baby? What is your baby's name?
- I received a notice from the hospital about [baby's name]. I am so sorry to hear that he died. I wanted to call to check in on you today.
- How are you today? (in this moment)?
- How did it feel coming in today?





# What families want you to know...

Even if I have living children, or if I have another baby in the future, this baby is irreplaceable.

Using my baby's name acknowledges to me that you know they were here, they mattered.

Parenting my baby means making decisions, ensuring they are treated with respect and care, and knowing where they are at all times.

My non-birthing partner may have a very different set of memories, and needs to have attention paid to them, too.

The experience of pregnancy and infant loss is chaotic, disorienting, traumatic. I need to understand what this is so I can start to make sense of what I am feeling.

Support can be really hard to find- and really hard to look for.





# Family Support Program

## Loss Specific Support

### ONLINE

- First trimester loss (0-13 weeks)
- Second trimester loss (14-27 weeks)
- Third trimester loss (28-40+ weeks)
- Infant/neonatal death (1-12 months)
- Infant death due to SIDS/SUIDS (1-12 months)
- Termination of pregnancy
- Elective abortion
- Indigenous Circle of Support (Online Group)

### IN PERSON

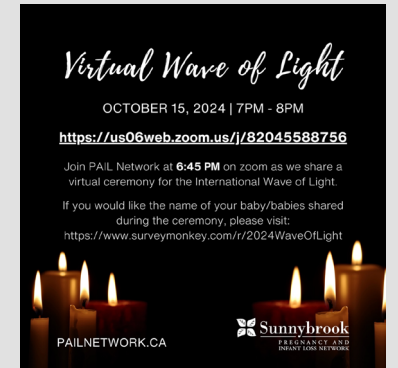
- Circles of Support (various communities)

## Other Groups & Types of Support

- Pregnancy After Loss
- Parenting Through Loss
- Partners in Grief
- Trying to Conceive After Loss
- Support for Grandparents
- Loss of a Multiple

- 1:1 Phone Support
- Closed Facebook Group

### Memorial Events & Advocacy





# Printed Resources

## Available now:

PAIL Network brochures- no cost

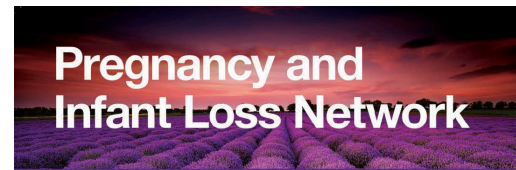
**NEW!** PAIL Network posters- no cost

**NEW** languages added including Anishnaabemowin (Ojibwe), Oji-Cree and Omushkego (Swampy) Cree

- Miscarriage: Loss Before 20 weeks
- Loss of a Multiple
- Pregnancy After Loss
- Supporting Siblings
- Stillbirth
- Infant Death
- Termination of pregnancy

## Languages Available:

- English
- Arabic
- Chinese
- French
- Punjabi
- Spanish
- Tagalog



### Have you experienced pregnancy or infant loss?

We are here for you.

Pregnancy and Infant Loss (PAIL) Network is a provincially funded organization with a mandate to provide bereavement support at no cost to families in Ontario who have experienced the loss of a pregnancy at any stage, or the death of their baby, up to 12 months of age. We welcome any families who have experienced a pregnancy loss or infant death to join with others who share in their grief.

We offer specific peer support for all types of pregnancy and infant loss in a confidential environment.

PAIL Network is very grateful to the many volunteers around the province who share their hearts with bereaved families, like their own.

Please visit our website at [pailnetwork.ca](http://pailnetwork.ca) to learn more about how we can support you and your family. You don't have to grieve alone.



Scan this QR code to request peer support from PAIL Network.





# Web Resources for Families

**Helping Others Understand Your Grief**



PAIL NETWORK Resources for Bereaved Families

***WHAT FAMILY MEMBERS CAN DO  
TO SUPPORT THE GRIEVING PARENTS***

**Support for Grandparents**



PAIL NETWORK Resources for Bereaved Families

***How to Offer Care & Support***

**What should we be working on?**





# Healthcare and Service Professionals: Education



- Compassionate Care Workshops
- Videos
- User friendly section of the website for professionals
- Interprofessional education for students
- Simulation
- Webinars



# NEW! E-learning

Presented by Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network

## COMMUNICATION

A learning module for health and service professionals about skilled and compassionate communication when a family experiences a pregnancy loss or infant death

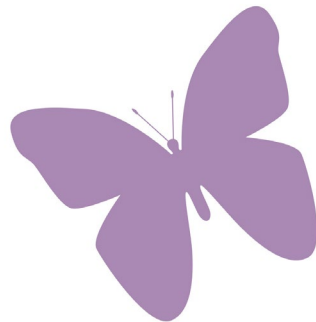
**START COURSE**

Self directed  
online learning

Includes case  
studies, videos,  
and will generate  
a certificate of  
completion

# Early Pregnancy Loss Provider Toolkit

- **Staff resources** (care checklist, communication tool, fetal remains management tools)
- **Patient resources** (discharge information packages, resource guide)
- **Coordinator checklist**
- Supportive **workplace changes**
- Butterfly image



A promotional graphic for the Early Pregnancy Loss Provider Toolkit. The background is a soft, purple and white watercolor wash. At the top, the text reads "CALLING ALL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS" in bold, followed by "Did you know that PAIL Network has an Early Pregnancy Loss Toolkit?". Below this, three devices are shown: a laptop displaying the toolkit's website with a purple header and "Introduction" text; a tablet showing a "Butterfly Image" resource with a purple butterfly illustration and "Large Medium Small" options; and another laptop showing a "Resource Example Video" with a potted plant. At the bottom, the Sunnybrook Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network logo is displayed.

All documents are editable and adaptable and can be found at :  
<https://pailnetwork.sunnybrook.ca/early-pregnancy-loss-provider-toolkit/>

# Stillbirth Package

## Stillbirth Commemorative Package

For families that have experienced a stillbirth, the Ontario government offers a commemorative package to acknowledge the loss of a loved one.

The Stillbirth Commemorative Package contains four documents, at no cost to families:

- Commemorative document of stillbirth
- Certified copy of stillbirth registration
- Certified copy of stillbirth registration with medical information
- Search letter for stillbirth registration

For more information and to apply, visit [Ontario.ca/StillbirthPackage](https://Ontario.ca/StillbirthPackage)



Pregnancy and Infant Loss (PAIL) Network offers peer support, at no cost to families, to people in Ontario who have been impacted by stillbirth, or any other type of pregnancy or infant loss.

To connect, please visit [pailnetwork.sunnybrook.ca](https://pailnetwork.sunnybrook.ca)

Families who have experienced stillbirth can request documents from the Ontario government, including:

- Certified copy of the stillbirth registration
- Certified copy of the stillbirth registration with medical information (includes signatures and cause of death)
- Search letter for the stillbirth registration, dating back to 1944
- Commemorative document of stillbirth

Postcards can be ordered from PAIL Network



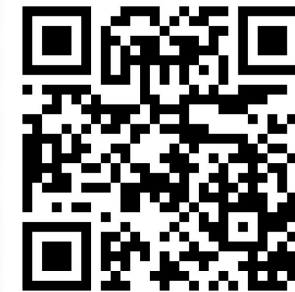


You are not alone- we are here for you.





*like  
& follow*



 **Sunnybrook**  
PREGNANCY AND  
INFANT LOSS NETWORK



# Additional Resources

- Lancet Series: Miscarriage Matters (<https://www.thelancet.com/series/miscarriage>)
- Miscarriage Foundation (<https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/information/for-health-professionals/e-learning/resources-and-references/>)
- PAIL Network Provincial Survey: <https://bmcpregnancychildbirth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12884-019-2270-2>
- Quality Health Ontario: Early Pregnancy Loss Guidelines (<https://www.hqontario.ca/evidence-to-improve-care/quality-standards/view-all-quality-standards/early-pregnancy-complications-and-loss>)
- Tend Academy: Self-Care Resources and Information (<https://www.tendacademy.ca/>)



# Additional Resources – cont'd

- Paras, A. (2016). *'We need to see miscarriage as an emotional emergency', says nurse. CBC Radio.* Retrieved 28 January 2018, from <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-april-7-2016-1.3524638/we-need-to-see-miscarriage-as-an-emotional-emergency-says-nurse-1.3524665>
- SANDS UK – Resources for Professionals  
<https://www.sands.org.uk/professionals>
- PAIL Network 2017 Ontario Needs Assessment:  
<https://pailnetwork.sunnybrook.ca/assessments-research/2017-needs-assessment/>



# Additional Resources – cont'd

- Miscarriage Association – Resources for Ambulance Crews and First Responders:  
<https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/information/for-health-professionals/e-learning/resources-and-references/>

- PAIL Network – Resources for Professionals:  
<https://pailnetwork.sunnybrook.ca/healthcare-professionals/>

- SIDS Calgary Society Video – First Response, Helping the Victims of SIDS <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asvSuu4V8JE>



# References

IntelliHEALTH ONTARIO. (2018). *Conditions related to Threatened / Missed / Spontaneous / Social Abortion cases (CIHI case mix groupings 548-551) in Ontario* from April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: Northwest Health Alliance; May 2018.

Statistics Canada. (2013). Table 102-4516. Retrieved June 17, 2015 from: <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/pick-choisir?lang=eng&p2=33&id=102456>.

Statistics Canada. (2013). Table 2. Retrieved June 17, 2015 from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-209-x/2013001/article/11867/tbl/tbl2-eng.htm>.

Statistics Canada. (2013). Table 102-0562. Retrieved January 28, 2018 from: <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&id=1020562>

Watson, J., Simmonds, A., La Fontaine, M. *et al.* Pregnancy and infant loss: a survey of families' experiences in Ontario Canada. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* **19**, 129 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-019-2270-2>