Post-traumatic Stress Disorder & Suicide Prevention
Mental Health Support for First Responders

Date: February 13, 2017
To: Executive Committee
From: City Manager and Executive Director, Human Resources
Wards: All

SUMMARY

As directed by City Council, this report provides a summary of ongoing initiatives and planned actions for the prevention of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among the City's first responders in Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Paramedic Services and Toronto Police Service, as well as actions taken and planned to ensure compliance with new Provincial legislation.

The Ministry of Labour estimates that first responders are at least twice as likely as the general population to suffer from PTSD due to the risk of frequent exposure to traumatic stressors in the course of their duties. This is consistent with the information in the November 2014 Suicide Prevention in Toronto report from the Medical Officer of Health. That report highlighted that occupational groups whose members are subject to frequent traumatic events and critical incidents are vulnerable to poor mental health including anxiety, depression, PTSD, substance abuse and suicide risk.

On April 6, 2016 the Ontario Government passed the Supporting Ontario’s First Responders Act. This new legislation creates a presumption that PTSD, diagnosed in first responders, is work-related. The Act requires the development of PTSD prevention plans by employers of workers who are covered by the presumption.

Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Paramedic Services and Toronto Police Service were consulted in the preparation of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Manager and the Executive Director, Human Resources recommends that:

1. Executive Committee receive this report for information.
FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts to this report.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact statement.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of February 10, 2015, in considering the Suicide Prevention in Toronto report from the Board of Health, City Council adopted the recommendation, with amendments, that the City Manager, in consultation with the Fire Chief and General Manager, Fire Services, the Chief and General Manager, Toronto Paramedic Services and the Toronto Police Services Board report to the Executive Committee on adjustments to existing training programs and services to support suicide prevention among first responders, including but not limited to building awareness, treating and reducing the stigma of mental illness and help-seeking for PTSD without impacting operating budgets.


COMMENTS

The November 2014 Suicide Prevention in Toronto report from the Medical Officer of Health references studies showing that occupational groups whose members are subject to frequent traumatic events and critical incidents are vulnerable to poor mental health including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and suicide risk. This is consistent with the more recent information from the Ministry of Labour (MOL). The MOL estimates that first responders are at least twice as likely as the general population to suffer PTSD and that is due to the risk of frequent on-duty exposure to traumatic stressors. The human and economic costs associated with traumatic stress are significant and include increased absenteeism, increased use of medical services, health deterioration and even suicide. Research suggests that PTSD results in more suicide attempts than all other anxiety disorders.

On April 6, 2016 the Ontario Government amended the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (WSIA) with the passage of Bill 163 titled Supporting Ontario’s first Responders Act. The legislation creates a presumption that PTSD diagnosed in first responders is work-related. Once a first responder is diagnosed with PTSD by either a psychiatrist or psychologist, the claims process to be eligible for WSIB benefits is expedited, without the need to prove a causal link between PTSD and a workplace event. The presumption allows for faster access to WSIB benefits, resources and timely treatment.
Employers, labour groups and mental health experts share the view that prevention is critical. There is general agreement that PTSD can be prevented or mitigated given appropriate proactive training, supports and timely treatment.

Employers of workers covered under the PTSD presumption are directed to provide the Minister of Labour with information on their workplace post-traumatic stress disorder prevention plans by April 23, 2017. The MOL, through its Public Services Health and Safety Association has developed an employer's resource guide consistent with comprehensive mental health strategies that include actions for prevention, intervention and recovery, and return-to-work.

Elements for prevention include recognizing, assessing and controlling the hazard, developing policies and procedures, outlining roles and responsibilities and incident reporting procedures.

The goal is to integrate PTSD prevention and proactive resiliency training into the overarching health and safety strategy that actively works to prevent harm to a worker’s mental health. Intervention focuses on actions that can be taken to improve a situation. This includes ensuring that workers know how to report psychological injuries when they occur and that supports are in place.

Finally, recovery and return-to-work are important aspects of preventing further injury. Clearly established roles and responsibilities are required to support workers through this process, including an understanding of how to accommodate a worker who is recovering from PTSD.

The recommended framework is in keeping with the City’s Psychological Health and Safety Policy and includes the following key elements:

- A statement of commitment to promote mental health and psychological well-being actions to prevent harm to a worker’s psychological health
- Actions to enhance mental health knowledge at all levels and eliminate stigma
- Actions aimed at primary prevention in which changes are made to conditions that may contribute to psychological health problems
- Actions aimed at intervention in which psychological health problems are identified and addressed at an early stage through training and provision of Employee Assistance and Employee Health and Rehabilitation
- Actions to support access to psychological treatment and accommodations to stay at work or return-to-work.

Each of Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Paramedic Services and Toronto Police Services have programs and supports in place aimed at preventing PTSD. Within each organization recent efforts have focused on reviewing best practices as well as identifying and addressing any gaps identified as a result of assessments and reviews. The key program elements to support mental health for first responders are common among Police, Fire and Paramedics, however customized and implemented to respond to their particular organizational needs.
Below is a summary of prevention and intervention programs, training and support initiatives under the categories of Leadership and Commitment, Employee Assistance Programs, Training and Other Supports and Next Steps/Planned Actions.

**Toronto Fire Services**

**Leadership and Commitment Statement**

- Toronto Fire Services (TFS) Fire Chief and Toronto Professional Firefighters’ Association (TPFFA) President issued a joint statement in February 2015 committing support to TFS staff who may be in personal crisis. Resources include professional assistance and crisis counselling services.
- Employee wellness (physical and mental) is imbedded in the TFS 2015-2019 Master Fire Plan and will be operationalized in the Transformational Plan with a detailed action plan on key objectives to be developed and implemented.

**Employee Assistance and other Programs/Procedures**

- **TPFFA/TFS Employee Assistance Program Critical Incident Stress Team (EAP/CIS)**
  - The program is staffed by a volunteer committee of active and retired Toronto Fire Services' employees. The program exists to anticipate, recognize and respond to the concerns and needs of staff (active or retired) and their families in the areas of health, welfare and quality of life. The program is independent of both Management and the Association while maintaining a respectful working relationship with both organizations.
  - Through peer counselling and referral consulting, the Employee Assistance Program addresses physical, emotional, financial, legal and spiritual concerns at the request of an individual. The program recognizes the individual's right to self-determination, respect and their ultimate personal responsibility.
  - When initiated through the chain-of-command, a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team will activate the appropriate structured group intervention, twenty-four hours per day, three-hundred-and-sixty-five days per year.

- **Corporate Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**
  - The City's EAP offers confidential short-term counselling, information and referral services to members of the Toronto Public Service and eligible family members. The program is designed to provide direct access to experienced professionals who can help to resolve problems before they affect employee health, personal life or job performance including personal, relationships, legal and financial counselling.

- **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)**
  - TFS has a fee for service agreement with CAMH. This provides TFS employees suffering from acute distress with direct and immediate access to CAMH interventions, supports and counselling. This program is aimed at providing emergency intervention for suicide risks and has been very successful to date.

- **TFS Chaplains**
  - Chaplaincy service is a key component in managing Critical Incident Stress and employee assistance programs. Chaplains provide TFS personnel with a foundation of emotional, physical and social health and regularly provide onsite services and one-on-one counselling and support.
Four chaplains are on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days per week and offer on-scene support, particularly at major incidents. They have an in-depth knowledge of the stresses created by working the emergency services environment.

**Education/Training and Additional Supports**

- Training includes:
  - Annual mental health and wellness seminars with a focus on physical fitness, mental health and nutrition.
  - Annual *Stand Down for Safety Week* provides training and education to staff regarding various wellness topics for example "Movement Matters" addressing the importance of movement for injury prevention and long-term health and "No firefighter Stands Alone" providing awareness of mental health and the support programs available to staff.

- Additional supports include:
  - Comprehensive benefits packages
  - Internal Health and Safety reviews
  - Mental Health Working Group

**Next Steps/Planned Actions**

- Key objectives in the Transformational Plan include:
  - Development and implementation of a comprehensive mental health and PTSD prevention plan.
  - Explore the introduction of the IAFF/IAFC Wellness Fitness Initiative.
  - Identify and secure the funding required to roll-out Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) Training to all staff and provide reference materials in all TFS work locations.
  - In 2015, an employee mental health needs assessment was conducted with CAMH. The CAMH Needs Assessment will be used to develop and implement a comprehensive wellness program. Key focus areas include:
    - Staff Selection and Training: Mental health assessments/screening, ongoing mental health check-ups, education delivered by qualified professionals, family education
    - Supervisor Education: Supervisor education in mental health and wellness, prevention and management
    - Peer Support: Peer support model with defined roles, dedicated resources/personnel for peer support, thorough training for peer support workers
    - Facilitate Administration Supports (TFS): Sick leave policies that support mental health needs, 24hr follow up and check-in after significant calls, team debriefs
    - Systems Supports (beyond TFS): Crisis teams available for onsite response, 24 hr hotline, Corporate EAP staff; Collection and monitoring of data related to traumatic events, feedback from staff, monitoring WSIB claims related to mental health.

**Toronto Paramedic Services**

**Leadership and Commitment Statement**

- In July 2015, the Chief of Toronto Paramedic Services committed to all staff his active support for a review by the Office of the Ombudsman on how the Division
handles operational stress injuries and PTSD. The Chief encouraged paramedic staff who might be suffering from operational stress injuries to take advantage of the wide-range of existing support programs available.

- In November 2015, the Ombudsman issued her report Making the Strong Stronger, and identified that Toronto Paramedic Services had all the components of a strong plan but those components needed to be coordinated.
- The Chief wrote to all staff and outlined the Division's commitment to implementing the Ombudsman's recommendations. A series of "next steps", including training and consultation were provided.
- In November 2016, the Chief communicated to all staff about the upcoming implementation of the Psychological Health & Wellness Plan and providing an update on the status of Division's response to the Ombudsman's recommendations.
- In February 2017, the Chief and Deputy Chiefs formally announced the launch of the comprehensive, Toronto Paramedic Services' Psychological Health and Wellness Plan committing to work with all staff to provide a work environment that was psychologically and physically healthy and safe.
- The Plan is focused on prevention, reduction of stigma, timely intervention, post-incident support and available resources.
- The Plan was endorsed by the Ombudsman, the Unions and Divisional Health and Safety Advisory Committee members.
- A number of procedures in the Plan focus attention on the psychological health and wellness of employees, including:
  - Procedure for Notification of the Peer Resource Team and Staff Psychologist
  - Procedure for Notification of Peer Resource Team for Stress Related Absences
  - Protocol for Maintaining Contact with Absent Employees.

**Employee Assistance and Other Programs/Procedures**

- Toronto Paramedic Services has had an in-house, volunteer, Peer Resource Team (PRT) since the late 1980s and a dedicated in-house Staff Psychologist position since 1986.
  - The 31-member volunteer Peer Resource Team is made up of paramedics, dispatchers, support and management staff who are available to respond to critical incidents or provide general support to other employees.
  - The Staff Psychologist’s role includes education, program consultation and staff referrals.
- The City's Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) are also available to assist staff and their families.
- In 2016, observation shifts were arranged for all City EAP counsellors to increase their knowledge of Paramedic and Emergency Medical Dispatcher (EMD) work to better understand their psychological stressors.
- An extensive list of additional resources was developed for staff, including on-line access to self-assessing/monitoring tools as well as listings of mental health resources in employees' own communities.
- Protocols were developed for pre-emptive Peer Support notifications based on types of calls attended to by frontline responding staff (i.e., Paramedics and EMDs).
- In-house Chaplains are available upon request by any staff.
• A Divisional mental health webpage containing the full Psychological Health and Wellness Plan, and links to its many resources, was set up for staff in support of the existing Wellness webpage.
• Access to psychological support resources was simplified and communicated to staff to ensure widespread awareness.
• Toronto Paramedic Services continues to work with Human Resources Disability Management staff to ensure that:
  • All employees who are absent due to stress are contacted regularly, and
  • Leadership staff routinely receive reports of staff who are off on long-term illness to ensure organizational contact is maintained and support offered when absent from work due to physical or stress related factors.

Education/Training and Additional Supports
• All management staff have been updated on the City’s Mental Health and Wellness policy through continuing education sessions.
• In 2016, peer-led Psychological First Aid training was provided for all staff as part of continuing education sessions.
• Additional crisis training was provided to Peer Resource Team members.
• In 2016, 24 frontline and management staff were trained as trainers for delivery of the industry-specific Road to Mental Readiness program. These trainers delivered the Road to Mental Readiness and anti-stigma training for all management staff.
• All new Paramedic and EMD recruits now receive peer-led Psychological First Aid training, Road to Mental Readiness and anti-stigma training.
• In 2017, all staff, eligible family members and retirees were given access to FeelingBetterNow®, an on-line tool for wellness assessment and monitoring that was customized for Paramedic Services.

Next Steps/Planned Actions
• Peer-led, Road to Mental Readiness and anti-stigma training is being provided to all other staff during continuing education sessions in early 2017.
• Building on the prior training, peer-led suicide intervention training is scheduled for inclusion in all staff continuing education sessions in 2018. This suicide prevention training has also been added to the curriculum for all new Paramedics and EMDs.
• Processes are underway to acquire third party, best-practice enhanced training programs (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training and suicideTALK) for PRT members with plans for delivery to additional key staff.

Toronto Police Services

Leadership and Commitment Statement
• The Chief of the Toronto Police Service (TPS/Service) and the Chair of the Toronto Police Services Board have signed a joint "Statement of Commitment to the Psychological Wellness of Toronto Police Service Members". This statement has been approved and endorsed by the Toronto Police Services Board and is displayed prominently in all TPS units and facilities.
Employee Assistance and other Programs/Procedures

- The TPS has developed a number of procedures designed to ensure attention to the psychological health and wellness of members in the TPS workplace including:
  - Injured on Duty, Workplace Accommodation and Central Sick Bank
  - Substance Abuse, Bereavement and Employee and Family Assistance Program
  - Members involved in traumatic critical incidents; this procedure includes two appendices that provide information regarding the impact of involvement in critical incident events and guidelines for family regarding how to support affected members.

- Peer Support Volunteers/Critical Incident Response Team
  - A team of 88 peer support volunteers (both uniform and civilian) are embedded throughout the Service
  - Peers have been trained to provide peer support both on a day-to-day basis and after the occurrence of traumatic critical incidents, with specific training in the identification of suicide risk and effective response.

- Critical Incident Response
  In conjunction with response from the peer support team, psychological debriefings with a mental health professional are conducted after critical incident events, with follow-up support and intervention provided.

- Employee and Family Assistance Programs (EFAP)
  - Free counselling available 24/7, every day of the year
  - Available to all Service members and their dependents, as well as retired members.

- Consultation with Service Psychologist
  - All members are welcome to attend a consultation visit (or visits) with an in-house psychologist
  - Visits are used to provide direct clinical interventions to members during periods of emotional or psychological crisis, including addressing issues related to suicide risk and the provision of linkages to appropriate care and support
  - Consultation also is provided to Unit Commanders/Supervisors on issues relating to the psychological health of members, including the determination of suicide risk and effective response.

- Extended Healthcare Benefits provide coverage for the reimbursement of counselling and other psychological services provided by community care-providers.

- Medical Advisory Services, Occupational Health and Safety
  The Medical Advisory Service provides disability management and return to work supports for members who have sustained occupational stress injuries related to the demands of the job.

- Mobile Crisis Intervention Teams
  Members of the Mobile Crisis Intervention Teams receive training on a variety of mental health issues, including mental health dynamics within the work environment and suicide prevention training.

- Inter-Faith Volunteer Chaplaincy Program
  Clergy members representing the Toronto Faith Community are assigned to Service divisions and are available to provide support and intervention to members from a faith-based perspective.

- Psychological Wellness Program
The Psychological Wellness Program is a pro-active initiative designed to improve and sustain psychological health by fostering the development of effective strategies for coping with stress through the enhancement of members’ psychological strength and resilience. Wellness visits are scheduled at least annually with members of teams who engage in activities that place them at risk for the development of operational stress injury, including suicidal ideation

- During 2015, over 500 uniform and civilian members were eligible to attend a wellness visit
- In 2015/2016, the Psychological Wellness Program was expanded to include a pilot project involving police officers from three divisions who are new to the job and learning to cope with its emotional demands.

Internal Support Networks
Volunteer self-support networks have been established to help specific, self-identified groups share information and experiences and to provide mentoring and guidance to assist members in their personal and professional development.

Education/Training and Additional Supports

- All new recruits and their families attend a Family Day at the Toronto Police College prior to graduation. The agenda includes a Wellness talk regarding the psychological impact of the job and resources for support to officers and their families
- Mental health awareness and suicide prevention training is provided to all newly promoted supervisors
- Members of the Critical Incident/Peer Support Team have been provided with formal suicide prevention/intervention training including safe TALK (LivingWorks) and Mental Health First Aid (Mental Health Commission of Canada)
- Regular training is provided to Communication (9-1-1-) Operators and new Peer Support/Critical Incident Response team members regarding topics related to mental health, including suicide risk identification and response.

Next Steps/Planned Action

- In 2017, the annual mandatory in-service training provided to all police officers will include a Wellness lecture focused on suicide risk identification and response, and linkage to Service resources
- TPS is moving forward with the delivery of the Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) anti-stigma training program developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. This training will be provided to all Service members, both uniform and civilian. Members attending the primary level of the R2MR program will also receive safeTALK, a suicide intervention skills program developed by LivingWorks.

CONTACT

Alison Anderson, Director, Occupational Health and Safety, Human Resources Division
416 392-5028, Alison.Anderson@toronto.ca

Matthew Pegg, Fire Chief, Toronto Fire Services
416-338-9919, Matthew.Pegg@toronto.ca
Mark Toman, Commander Business Services, Toronto Paramedic Services
416-392-2052, Mark.Toman@toronto.ca

Tony Veneziano, Chief Administrative Officer, Toronto Police Service
416-808-8005, Tony.Veneziano@torontopolice.ca

SIGNATURE

Kerry Pond
Executive Director of Human Resources

Peter Wallace
City Manager