

Community Safety Department Mental Health Programs Update

Presented To:	Emergency Services Committee
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Meeting Date:	October 20, 2021
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Type:	Correspondence for Information Only
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Recommended by:	General Manager of Community Safety
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Report Summary

This report provides information regarding the mental health and wellness strategies that have been implemented within Community Safety.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report refers to the mental health and wellness strategies to support all Community Safety Members, having a direct connection with our values - "Actions speak louder than words. We do what is right, always". There is no relationship to the CEEP.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Background

This report provides information to the Emergency Services Committee on the mental health and wellness strategies that have been implemented within the Community Safety (CS) Department. These strategies are to support all members in developing resiliency against Occupational Stress Injuries (OSI) and to promote wellness in the workplace. Mental health and wellness strategies have many benefits – an engaged, resilient, and productive workforce, a workplace free of stigma and a positive workplace culture.

Community Safety has implemented a number of strategies to assist our front line staff in developing their personal resiliency against OSI to support their mental health and wellness and to create a positive workplace culture. These strategies include wellness policies, mental health education, physical fitness, rapid access to mental health treatment services, the implementation of a Peer Support Network, Paramedic/Fire PeerConnect app and the Employee Wellness Committee.

Over the past two years WSIB costs related to psychological claims by CS staff has accumulated in excess of over \$1 million. CS continues to explore programs to provide preventative mental health and wellness programs to reduce the impact of OSI, reduce WSIB costs, and create a positive working environment.

Peer Support Network

One of the strategies that was implemented in May 2016 to support our staff was the Peer Support Network (PSN). The goal of the Peer Support Network (PSN) is to provide proactive education for all Community Safety members regarding critical incident stress and other stress-related issues. The PSN Team endeavors to minimize the harmful effects of stress during or following a crisis, emergency, or personal situation through reactive interventions when personnel request assistance.

Through individual peer-to-peer support and/or group defusing(s), the team provides paramedic/fire personnel with assistance in alleviating potential stress-related symptoms. The PSN's role is not to provide clinical services, psychotherapy, or professional counseling, but to provide immediate crisis intervention, support and referral information. Participation during any service provided by the team or its members is voluntary.

Currently there are 18 members within the PSN team. Members consist of paramedics, career and volunteer firefighters and managers from both Paramedic and Fire Services. In early June 2021, the PSN team conducted a three day training session at Lionel E. Lalonde Centre. The focus of the training included on-boarding of six new team members and to provide additional training and skills for the existing 12 members. Dr. Ethier, along with her colleagues from Breakwater Institute, delivered the training. Feedback from the PSN team after this session was very positive and PSN members indicated that they feel more prepared to assist all Community Safety members. Our PSN team will continue to participate in professional development sessions with a local clinical psychologist throughout the year. These sessions are instrumental to provide on-going development of our PSN team.

Since being established in May 2016, the PSN team has been contacted a total of 945 times to provide support to CS members. The PSN team plays an integral role in supporting all CS members and all staff. Everyone is routinely reminded to reach out to any member of PSN if they require additional support.

Paramedic/Fire PeerConnect App:

Recently, the Ministry of the Solicitor General (SolGen) reached out to the Ministry of Health (MOH) inviting Paramedic Services to participate in a mental health wellness program, providing first responders across the Province access to the First Response Mental Health's (FRMH) PeerConnect app; a proactive peer support and wellness online tool.

The PeerConnect app will support existing programs we currently have in place, such as wellness tools, self-assessments, mental health programming, and peer support programs while also allowing for easier 24/7 access to our peer supporters.

This tool is an Ontario-based solution that is already in use among several emergency medical services and first responder agencies in Ontario and across North America. The MOH covered the initial startup cost and registering of all paramedic staff into the app until March 31, 2022. Fire personnel were not included in the one-time funding model, but the General Manager of Community Safety instructed the Deputy Chiefs of Paramedic and Fire Services to provide all CS members have access to the PeerConnect app.

Arrangements were made and all CS members have access to the app.

After March 31, 2022, the app will be evaluated and if the decision is to continue with the app the registration fee for all CS members will be inquired by the CS Department.

With the implementation of this PeerConnect app our goal is to provide communication and support for every Community Safety member, working towards the ultimate goal of a safe and supported work environment. PeerConnect is designed to increase access to mental health services and to provide the resources needed to take care of our members. The app ensures member privacy, security of information, and organization controlled permissions.

Prior to the launch date on June 14, 2021, the General Manager of Community Safety introduced the Sudbury Paramedic/Fire PeerConnect app to all Community Safety Members, providing an overview of the app and the benefits to support their health and wellness.

Employee Wellness Committee

In March 2021, the Employee Wellness Committee for Paramedic Services was established. The purpose of the Employee Wellness Committee is to assess, plan and implement activities that will help our members to be more aware, motivated, and skilled around life decisions to increase their own and others' wellbeing. The committee's role is also to build a workplace environment that is supportive of living a healthy lifestyle. This committee provides staff with suggested ideas, reference materials and activities to help support employee health and wellness. The goal of this Committee is to cultivate an organizational culture of healthy living. "Progress, not perfection. The mind is a powerful thing. When you fill it with positive thoughts, the world starts to change. Everyday might not be good but there is something good in every day" by Faye Howard.

This Committee consists of paramedics, support staff, managers and CGS Human Resources representatives. The Committee has established monthly themes throughout the year such as Nutrition, Mind Body and Nature, Self-Care, and Month of Giving. The Committee plans to post the reference materials that are provided to paramedic staff onto the PeerConnect app to allow access for all Community Safety members to review.

Mental Health Program Benefits

Having mental health and wellness programs within an organization provides benefits to both the employee and the employer. Some of these benefits include improved employee health behaviors, reduced elevated health risks, reduced health care costs, improved productivity, and decreased absenteeism. As well, the programs help to improve employee recruitment and retention and build and help sustain high employee morale. Measuring the benefits of wellness programs are challenging for an organization, as there are many financial and operational variables that are impacted for every OSI.

Within CS it has been identified that there has been an increase of Psychological Health Care Claims, but a reduction in Psychological Lost Time Claims since 2015. An increase in Psychological Health Care Claims indicates that the employees are seeking assistance, while at the same time being able to remain working in their current role. A Psychological Lost Time Claim is created when a worker suffers a work-related injury/disease, which results in being off work past the day of accident, loss of wages/earnings, or a permanent disability/impairment. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of CS members that have returned to work after a Psychological Lost Time Claim (Table 1 and 2). Having an increase in Psychological Health Care Claims, a reduction in Psychological Lost Time Claims and an increase in the number of CS members returning to work after a Lost Time Claim indicates that the mental health wellness programs and other initiatives that have been implemented to assist CS members are being effective in supporting our staff to return to work. These programs also have a long-term financial benefit for the employer by helping to reducing WSIB costs.

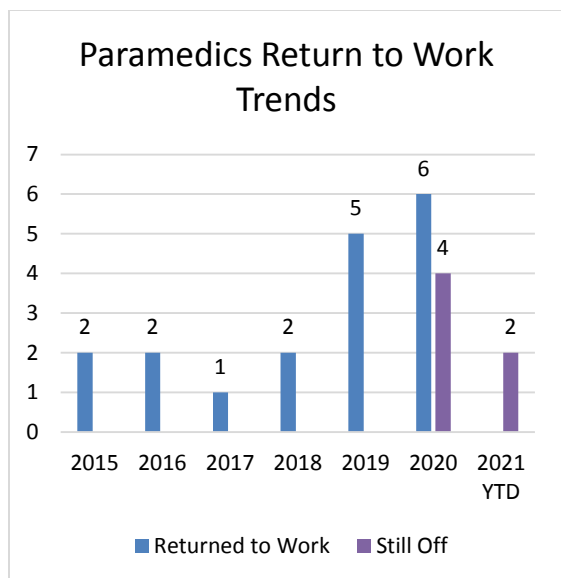


Table 1: Paramedic Return to Work Trends

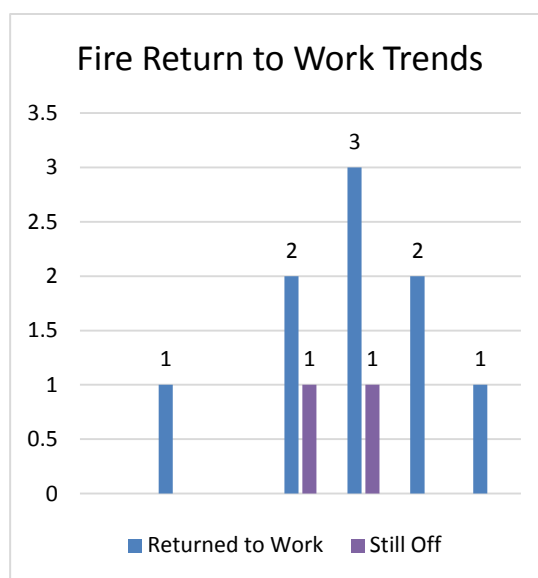


Table 2: Fire Return to Work Trends

Financial Information

Over the past two years WSIB costs related to psychological claims by CS staff has accumulated in excess of over \$1 million. One of the long-term goals of establishing mental health and wellness programs is to reduce WSIB costs. The PSN, PeerConnect app, and Employee Wellness Committee have annual operating costs.

The annual cost to maintain the PSN team is approximately \$25,000. This cost includes the wages of the PSN members to attend monthly training sessions and a local clinical psychologist to deliver the training. In addition, when on-boarding of new members is required, the approximate cost is \$10,000 for the initial training plus \$600 per member for the Personality Assessment.

Since 2016 when the PSN was established there has been two on-boarding sessions. The next on-boarding session for new PSN members is projected to take place in 2024.

The Annual cost for the Paramedic/Fire PeerConnect app is approximately \$20,000. This cost covers the \$3.00/month app license for every CS member.

The annual cost for the Employee Wellness Committee is approximately \$6,000. This cost covers Committee members' wages to attend training and to develop the information that are provided to CS members.

Conclusion

A mental health and wellness strategy has been developed for all CS members. Some of these strategies include a Peer Support Network (PSN) team, Paramedic/Fire PeerConnect app and the Employee Wellness Committee. The goal of these strategies is for all CS members to develop resiliency strategies against occupational stress injuries, promote wellness in the workplace, reduce WSIB costs, and create a positive working environment. Over the past 5 years there has been an increase in the number of CS members that have returned to work after being off from an occupational stress injury indicating that the strategies that have been put in place to support CS members is being effective.