

Working to reduce stigma and to provide timely, accessible, and affordable mental health interventions to police.

Background and Concerns

Psychologists* play an active role within the OPP and some regional police departments to address mental health and addictions issues. There is, however, no standardized, province-wide system and this results in some police officers, departmental staff, and family members receiving timely intervention, while others have access issues.

Despite the development of some good programming in particular regions, stigma remains a significant issue. Many police officers seek treatment outside of the force, out of fear of being ostracized. Still others keep their difficulties to themselves. The dire results of this can be seen in significant rates of time lost from work and a suicide rate that is higher than the number of police officers killed in the line of duty.

Recent highly publicized incidents involving police use of force with the mentally ill has resulted in public outrage, and this has negatively impacted those who serve. In addition, WSIB claims move too slowly for officers to receive timely intervention.

Psychology and the Police

Psychologists could provide the following services to police:

- De-escalation training
- Education in PTSD, depression, anxiety and addictions
- Psychological Assessment, diagnosis and treatment to officers, staff, and family members
- Fitness for Duty assessments
- Screening for hiring purposes

OPA Recommendations to Ontario's Government

- The OPP and regional police forces should work collaboratively with the OPA to develop standardized assessment, treatment, and educational programming - as well as to hire staff Psychologists or consultants to provide necessary services to ensure timely intervention.
- Brief psychological treatment should be mandatory for officers involved in traumatic incidents.
- Ongoing efforts are required to reduce stigma.
- All forces should have access to psychologists to assist in defusing situations involving the mentally ill.
- Significant changes to WSIB protocol are required to ensure timely handling of claims, reduce the wait time to tribunal, and ensure funding for assessment even while consideration of claims is ongoing. A review and expansion of WSIB's traumatic mental health policy is required.

For additional information, contact:

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*The term "Psychologist" in this document refers both to doctoral-level Psychologists and masters-level "Psychological Associates". For information on the extensive training required to become a registered Psychologist or Psychological Associate, please see: www.cpo.on.ca