



How to Become a Champion for Mental Health





What is a Champion of Mental Health?

Every day across Canada, people in public safety organizations are working to improve the mental health of their co-workers. Some do this through formal peer support, organizational training, and reintegration or critical incident programs. Others act behind the scenes by supporting individual co-workers or directing people to mental health resources.

In 2021, the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT) announced its 20 inaugural Champions of Mental Health to formally recognize the important work of individuals making an impact toward improved mental health for Public Safety Personnel (PSP). Drawing on the years of experience of this incredible group, CIPSRT asked them what it took for them to become champions in their organizations. This guide is an opportunity for CIPSRT to share the insights from our champions.

Characteristics that are important in a **Champion of Mental Health**

- A champion must be willing to make a difference not just for the public but for peers.
- A champion leads by example and must be ready to be a role model and advance the mental health cause.
- A champion is a good listener.
- A champion must be open-minded and non-judgmental.
- A champion must be genuine and show compassion.
- A champion must be willing to be vulnerable and move past their self-stigma to share their experiences and put themselves 'out there' for others.
- A champion must be willing to educate themselves about mental health and continue their education as new information becomes available.
- A champion should have an altruistic attitude.

How do you become a **Champion of Mental Health**?

- Be willing to educate yourself on mental health and trauma and take any training offered. Education is critical.
- Be fearless - you'll get pushback, but you must be persistent and tenacious.
- Be aware of any trauma you might have experienced so that you are not a "wounded healer". Making sure you are in a good place mentally is essential before you start to be a champion.
- Be willing to create a plan for improving mental health in your organization and have solutions for leadership when they ask for the next steps.
- Be ready to talk to your co-workers informally; be authentic and listen to their concerns so you can understand what they need for support.
- Be ready to combat the stigma around mental health.
- Be innovative and look for opportunities to share information about mental health with others.

How can you get your organization to support better **mental health**?

- Be prepared to promote the cost efficiencies of having mental health support.
- Gather data and evidence to support prioritizing mental health in your organization.
- Be innovative with stretching the resources you are given.
- Be ready to network with other organizations to increase access to mental health tools in your organization.
- Get your union involved in advocating for better resources and helping to move ideas forward.
- Build relationships with co-workers and leaders in your organization who are also interested in improving mental health.
- Be ready to be persistent and innovative to keep people engaged in improving their mental health.

Challenges to being a **Champion of Mental Health**

- **Staying impartial:** As a champion, you want to advocate for people, but you have to remember that all levels of the organization need support, so it is important to stay impartial so you can help everyone.
- **Gaining trust:** There can be distrust among PSP about mental health supports. It is essential to maintain privacy and confidentiality when helping people, so they feel safe sharing their concerns.
- **Changing the norm:** Culture change can be difficult and time-consuming, so it is essential to be patient and do what you can.
- **Large Organizations:** Different units can move at their own pace to improve mental health. If you see a team in another area doing something that works, bring it forward as an option for your unit to try.
- **Limited access to PSP-informed resources:** There is a lack of service providers that understand the needs and experiences of PSP. It is vital to push for training and supports provided by those that know PSP well or who are themselves PSP. Providing such support can be achieved by networking with other organizations.
- **Maintaining your mental health:** Helping others and championing the cause of improved mental health can impact your own mental health. It is essential to know your limits and be mindful of your capacity to provide support.