

BC's SAR Peer CISM Program - 19 years old and lessons learned

BC Search and Rescue Association
(BCSARA) CISM Program

May 6, 2026





Land Acknowledgment

As SAR volunteers serving communities across British Columbia, we acknowledge with gratitude that our work takes place on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the many Indigenous Nations who have cared for these lands since time immemorial.

We recognize their stewardship and pay our respects to elders past and present.

Agenda

- **Introductions**
- **SAR in BC**
- **BCSARA CISM Program**
- **Lessons Learned**
- **Questions**



Who Are We?

Greg Miller

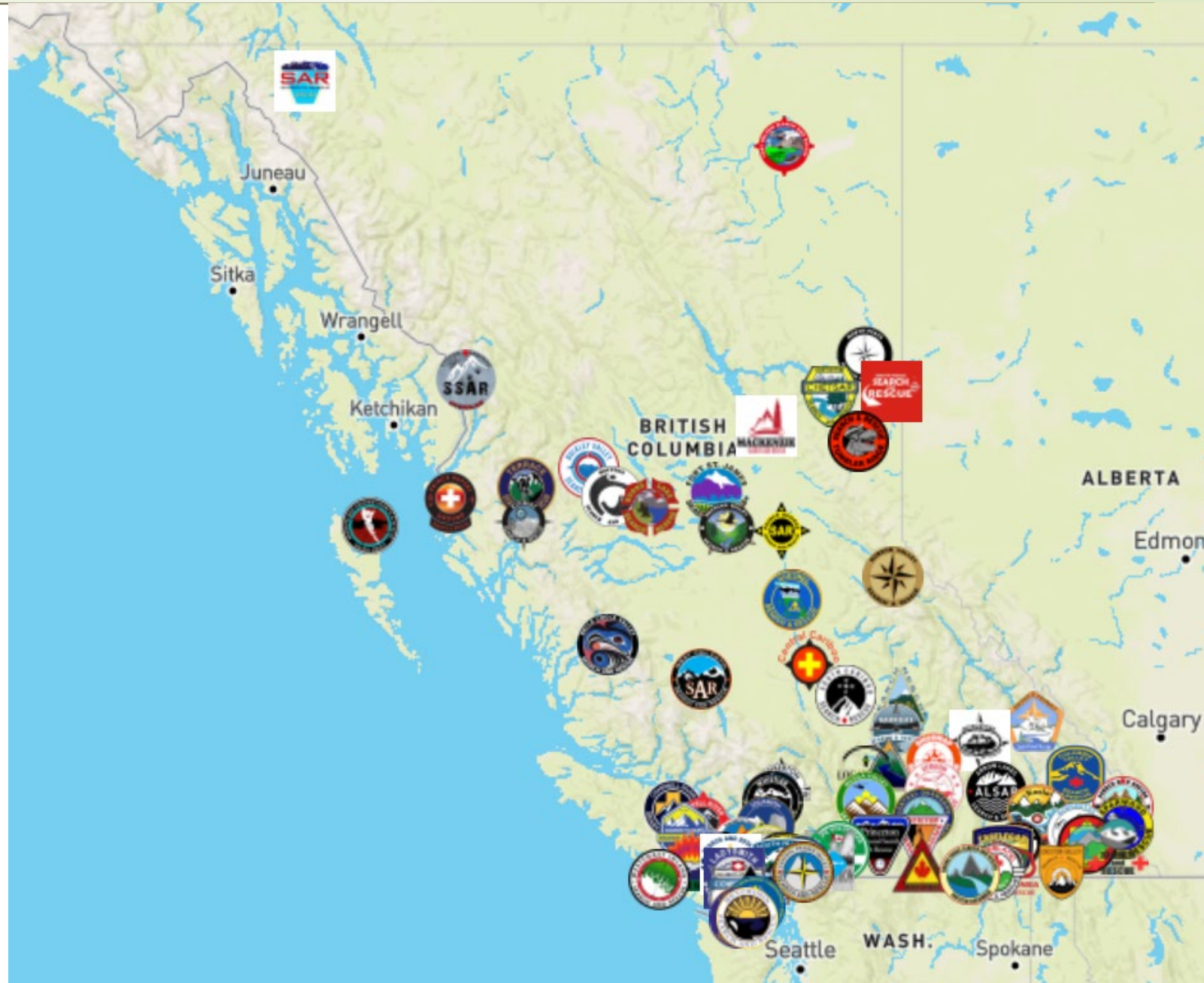
- Volunteer member of North Shore Rescue in North Vancouver, BC
- Chair of the Steering Committee for the BCSARA CISM team
- CISM peer for 19 years

Chris Mushumanski

- Volunteer member of Central Okanagan SAR in Kelowna, BC
- CISM Peer for 13 years
- Past President BC Search and Rescue Association

Search & Rescue in BC

In B.C. there are 78 Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) groups, supported by over 3,200 volunteers.



The BCSARA CISM Team

The Team was started in 2007 in response to significant numbers of volunteer SAR members leaving their Teams due to “burnout.”

We are all SAR volunteers and currently have 23 members and 6 new Members in Training

We provide CISM Debriefings, Defusings, On-Site Support and Education & Awareness to BC SAR teams.

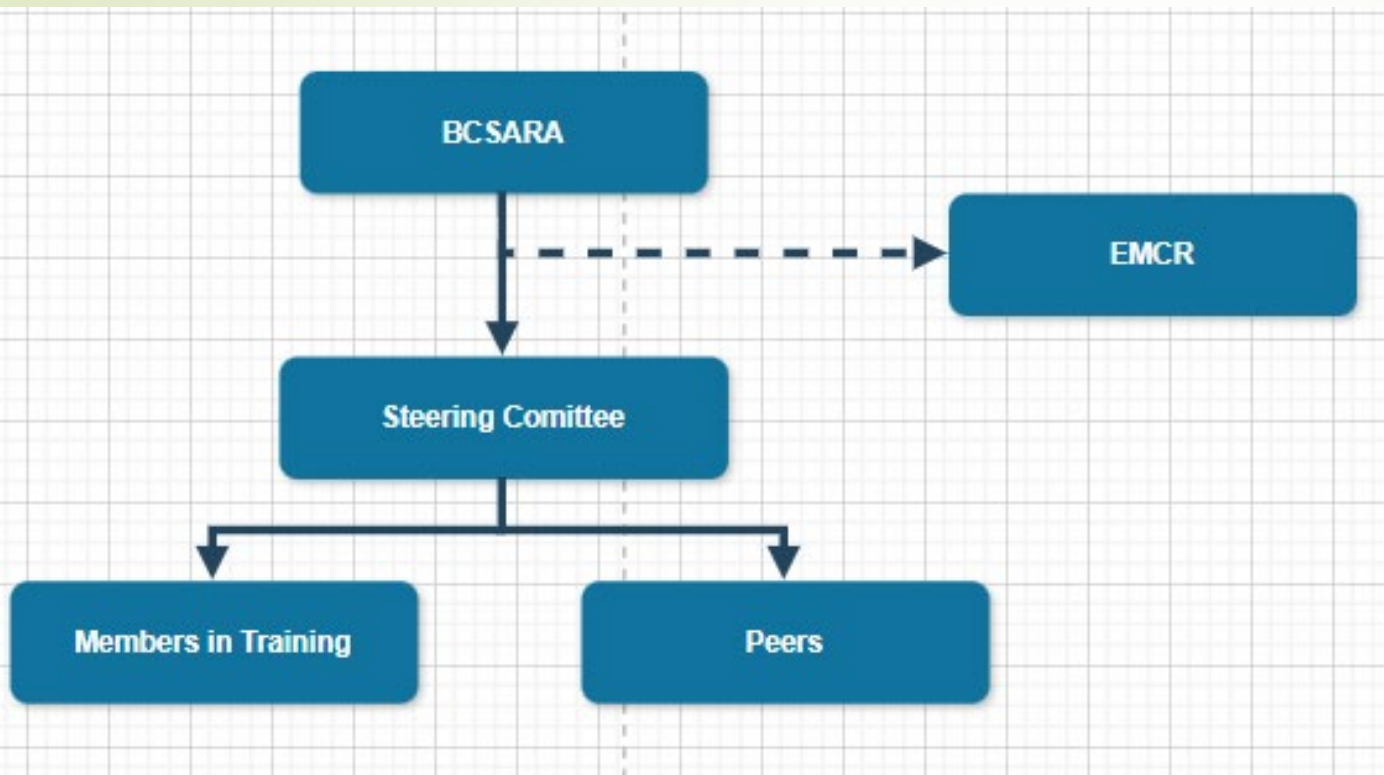
All our members are certified with the ICISF (International Critical Incident Stress Foundation)

The Mechanics

- We can be deployed through a call from a SAR Manager or Team member
- The costs to provide Interventions are covered by the Emergency Management & Climate Readiness (EMCR) Ministry of the Province of BC
- All other costs such as training and travel, etc such as delivering Education & Awareness sessions are covered by an annual grant from BCSARA



Team Organization



- The Steering Committee is made up of :
- Program Coordinator
- HR Coordinator, Training Coordinator, Education & Awareness Coordinator, Dispatch Coordinator, Administrative Coordinator and the BCSARA Board rep.
- Currently we have 6 MIT's and 22 volunteer peers
- RCMSAR mutual aid – 11 peers



Interventions

Group CIS Debrief (7 step)

1 on 1

Group CIS Defusing

On Scene support

Education & Awareness

CISM 101 – Introduction to CISM - For Members in Training and teams that have not had a presentation

CISM 201 – Growing Resilience

CISM 301 – Anatomy of a SAR Call -The Neuroscience of CIS

Specific Supports

Grief/ Bereavement Intervention

BCSARA YouTube Channel

CISM 101 – SAR is a Family Affair

CISM 102 How Does Critical Incident Stress Affect Us

CISM 201 Resilience

Post Task, wise practices

Support for application to WorkSafe

Referral to mental health supports



Interventions and supports offered

2017 – 2025 Statistics



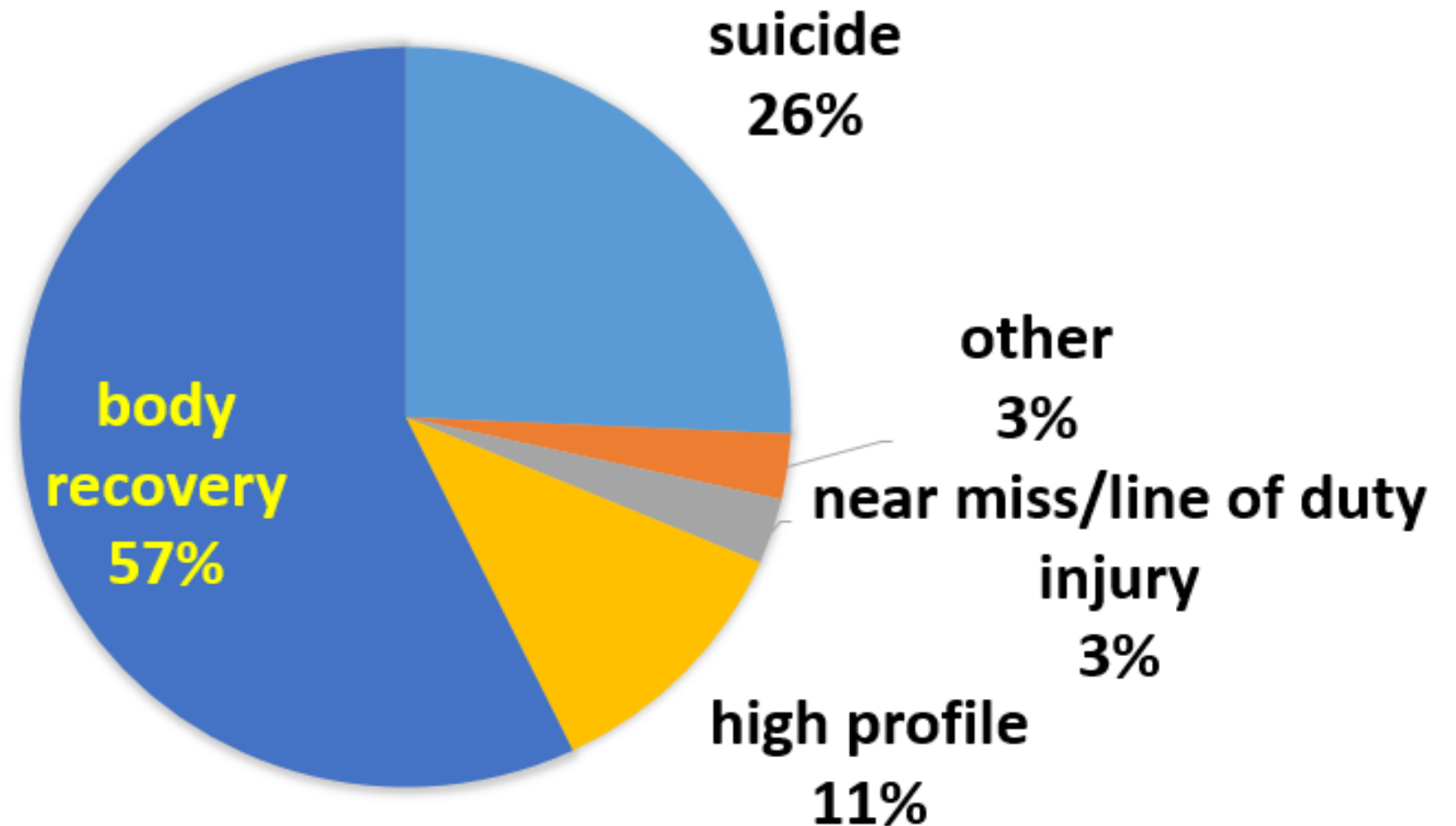
2025

CIS Debrief
– 50 teams
– 525 SAR
members

CIS Defusing – 1
One on One
– 24 individuals
Education &
Awareness
– 25 teams

Statistics – breakdown of callouts

TYPES OF SAR CALLOUTS THAT RESULT IN A CISM PROGRAM REQUEST



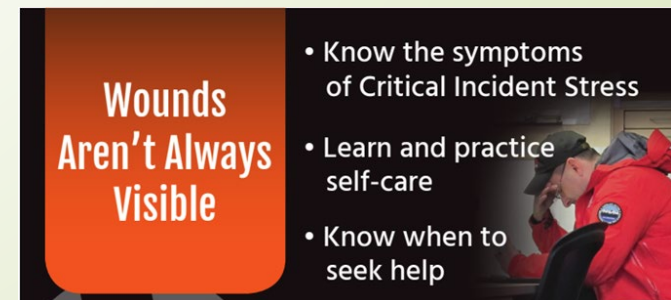
2020-25 Observable Trends

- SAR tasks where significant subject trauma or death are factors
- SAR members in a high-risk environment
- Prolonged or high stakes civil emergencies
- Large scale tasks
- Internal conflict on teams causing stress/ affecting team cohesion



Learnings

- Initially we had offered both Defusing and Debriefings
 - Defusing's are best offered when Teams come out of the field or within 8-12 hours.
 - Given the distances that may need to be travelled it was often not possible for our members to attend in time.
 - We have now moved almost exclusively to 7 Step Debriefings.
- How we connect with the SAR volunteers
 - CISM Saturday on social media,
 - E&A's – a valuable way of both educating volunteers to CIS and to our program, spouses invited, contracts, videos
 - Regional BCSARA conferences
 - BCSARA Newsletter
 - Fridge magnets and brochures



Learnings

- Responses through the pandemic
 - Provided interventions and Education via Zoom
- Tracking data and responding to it
 - Eg: Evacuation notice delivery, increase in suicide stats
- Other types of support
 - Grief interventions, support for members families, support for other 1st responders who are involved in talks, support for referral to WorkSafe
- Professional development
 - Beyond the Assisting Individuals in Crisis and Group Crisis Intervention we have offered Advanced Group Crisis Intervention, CISM Refresher: CISD

Learnings

➤ Team Fundamentals:

- Peers operate using clearly defined roles, boundaries, and explicit adherence to a scope of support – eg Do not provide interventions to their own teams.
- The two face to face training sessions each year are for professional development and team building.
- Team member selection is always done by a committee of senior members, Part of the interview process involves demonstrating active listening. They must have a minimum of 2 years SAR experience to be a “peer”.

A person wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and blue pants is holding a golf club. They are standing on a grassy area, likely a golf course. In the foreground, there are several golf balls, one of which is white with a grid pattern. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the grassy area.

Questions?

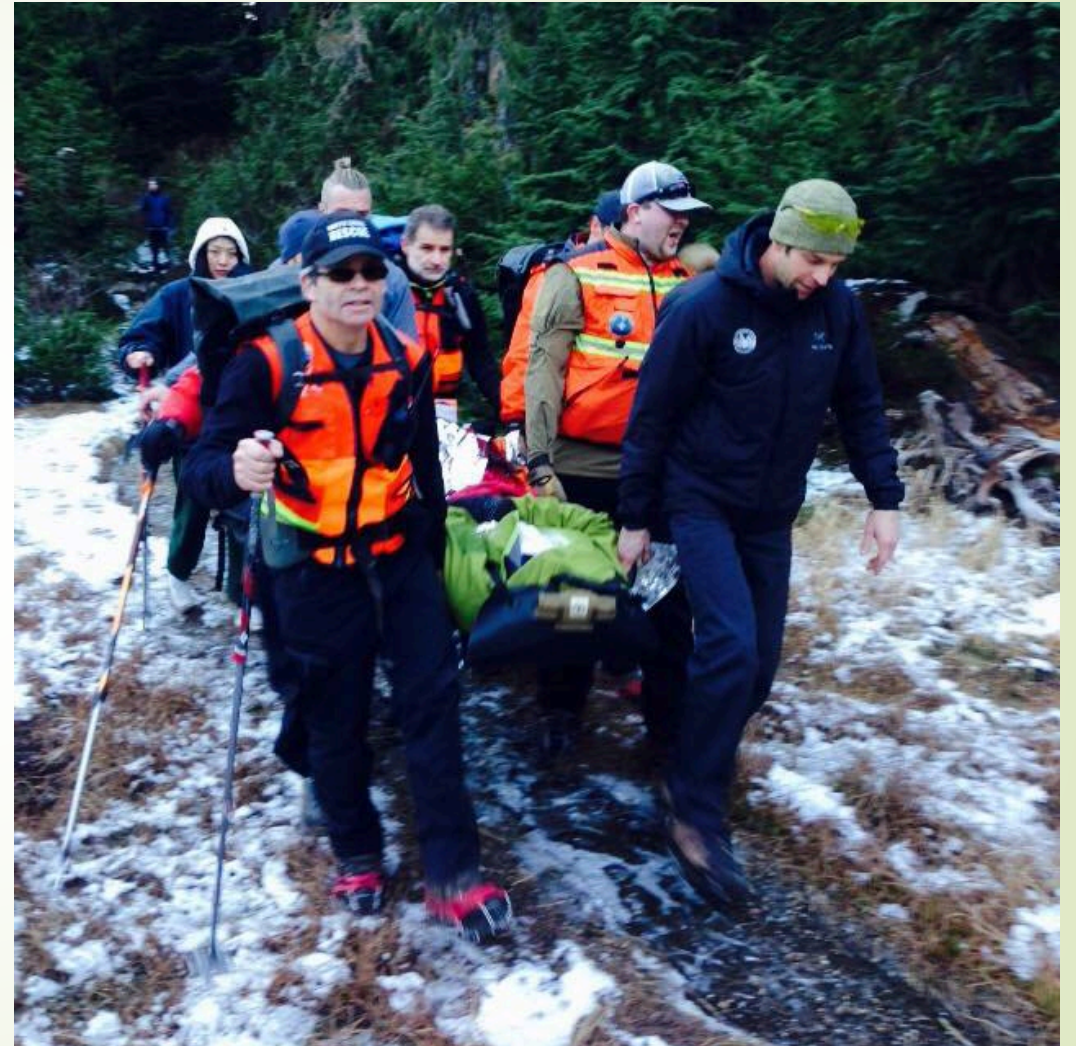
BCSARA Dispute Resolution and HR Support Programs

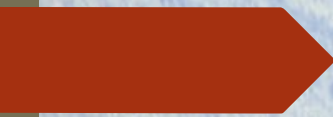
Program Overview

BCSARA now has two programs to assist SAR Teams in dealing with internal disputes and to share best practices in managing their human resources.

Key Features

BCSARA Dispute Resolution Program
HR Support Program





Thank You

