



EMS Natural Allies:

A Culturally-Driven Approach to Suicide Prevention



Reflection

Think of 1-2 words to describe first responder culture when it comes to mental health and/or suicide.



Why Suicide Prevention Training?

More people die
by suicide
annually in
Alberta than in
motor vehicle
collisions

3 in 10 in Public
Safety
Professionals
think about
suicide in their
lifetime

Losses in our
EMS family

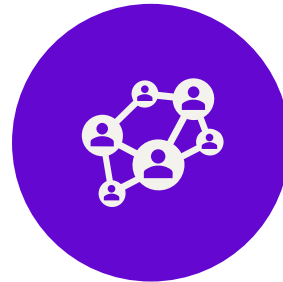
Stigma remains a
major barrier to
receiving help



Origin Story



Developed by the Provincial Injury Prevention Team for all healthcare staff in Alberta



Goal to support personal connections (family, friends, co-workers)



How to have meaningful, supportive conversations; respond appropriately; connect to help; and to take care of our own well-being



Skills translate to all conversations about mental health



Together, we can prevent suicide.

R

Recognize potential risk factors, signs of suicidal thoughts, and my own readiness to help.

E

Engage in conversation and listen with empathy.

A

Ask directly about suicidal thoughts and feelings, with care and calm.

C

Connect them to supports, resources, strengths and coping strategies

H

Heal ourselves: Help our own mental health and wellbeing.



Cultural Relevance & Changing Culture

- It's okay that this job affects you.
- It's okay to say I'm not okay.
- Each one of us has the power to affect change.
- We need to come together to change our culture.



April



Deanna



Jamie



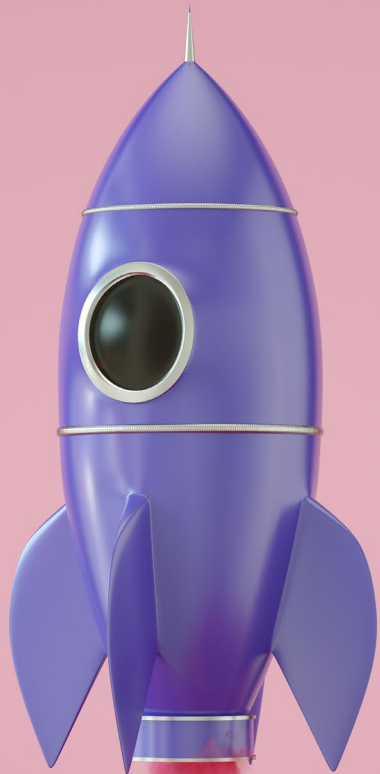
Nathan



Philip



Thai



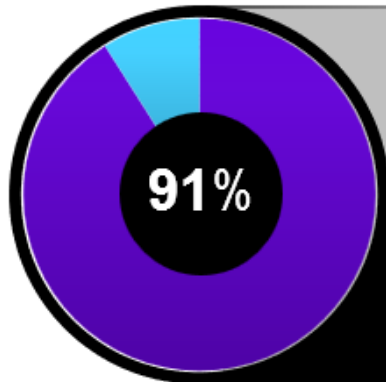
The Launch

- Train-the trainer sessions Feb 2025
 - 15 trainers across EHS
- Peer Support Team Training March 2025
 - 104 peer team members from across the Province
- Staff Rollout May 2025 - present
 - Open to all EHS staff & Contracted Service Partners
 - Mandatory for all levels of EHS Leaders
 - Open to any paramedic registered with Alberta College of Paramedics (ACP)
 - 18 Continuing Education credits
 - Separate Leadership and Staff sessions to protect psychological safety.



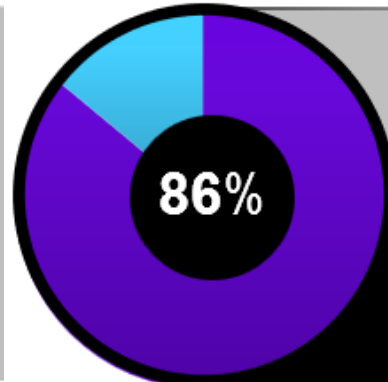
Training Data & Feedback

“10 out of 10.
Amazing
content”

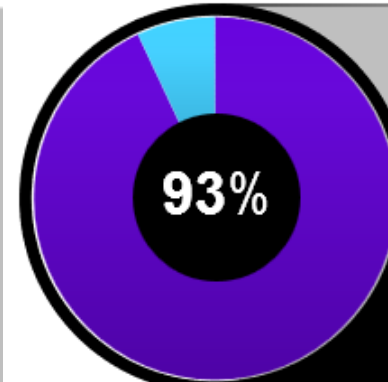


Would recommend this training to colleagues.

Worthwhile use of time and resources.



Gained new knowledge about suicide prevention from this training.



The training content effectively addresses first responder culture.

“Great course! This training should be mandatory if not already”

“Incredibly EMS specific and culturally relevant – phenomenal training!”

Total trained: $N = 698$. Percentages from $n = 399$ (57% response rate)



Emergency Health Services - Alberta

Top 6 Lessons Learned



1. Cultural relevancy isn't an enhancement but the foundation.



2. Who delivers the message matters. Impact comes from within. (Peer delivery)



3. Acknowledging the realities of suicide undoes isolation and fear.



Top 6 Lessons Learned



4. Suicide prevention is a collective responsibility, not an individual burden.



5. Safely talking about suicide at work reduces mental health stigma and transforms workplace culture.



6. We honour those we have lost by caring better for those who remain.



Thank you & Questions



- EMSEmployeeWellness@emergencyhealthservices.ca
- Shelley.Fahlman@emergencyhealthservices.ca
- Kathy.Bartel@emergencyhealthservices.ca



References

- AHS Injury Surveillance Dashboard, 2024
- Carleton RN, Afifi TO, Turner S, et al. Mental Disorder Symptoms among Public Safety Personnel in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. 2018;63(1):54-64.
doi:[10.1177/0706743717723825](https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743717723825)
- Carleton, R. N., et al. (2021). Suicidal ideation, plans, and attempts among public safety personnel in Canada. *BMC Psychiatry*, 21(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-021-03216-2>

