

UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE AND PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL



First responders and other public safety personnel (PSP) face several unique **occupational risk factors** that have the potential to impact their mental health and their risk for death by suicide, including: frequent exposure to trauma encountered on the job; the tendency to prioritize others rather than attending to personal needs; access to weapons and other lethal means; and stigmas around mental health issues within PSP work environments.

If you are in immediate distress **call or text 988**. Canada's Suicide Crisis Helpline is available **24 hours a day, every day of the year**. If your safety is at risk, call 911.



Suicide prevention and PSP – What researchers think can help

- Improving identification and treatment of depression and other mental health disorders within primary care (your family physician, for instance)
- Training 'gatekeepers', such as peer supporters, in suicide intervention – empowering individuals that people in distress are likely to be in contact with at work
- Non-judgmental listening, and collaboration – empowering individuals to direct their own support needs
- Sharing stories of coping and survival – examples of individuals working through suicidality and mental health challenges
- Involving family, friends, and coworkers in mental health intervention and suicide prevention efforts, and providing them with their own supports
- Addressing structural factors contributing to suicidality – within the workplace, and wider society
- Mental health intervention that is culturally relevant and meaningful

There is no one size fits all approach to suicide prevention. Individuals have unique identities, needs and challenges. PSP sectors have unique cultures and pressures.

Increasing awareness and decreasing stigma

The pressure to maintain an image of strength and stoicism can be strong within PSP professions, and stigmas around mental health persist. **Self-stigmas**, and negative beliefs around one's own mental health challenges can make help-seeking particularly difficult for PSP.

We can confront stigma through open and non-judgemental conversations about suicide and by normalizing discussion about mental health. We can also lobby our unions and professional organizations to participate in awareness raising and mental health programming efforts.

REFERENCES

- CIPSRT (2024, September 26) Starting the conversation: Discussing suicide in relation to first responders and other public safety personnel. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6Sk87xkyQ8>
- CIPSRT (2023, September 6) Suicide prevention in public safety personnel in Canada: What would that look like and who should be involved? Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_j1DE73BNk

CIPSRT gratefully acknowledges the contributions of: Dr. Allison Crawford, Dr. Jonathan Douglas, Dr. Christine Genest, Laura Kloosterman, and Dr. Simon Hatcher. Infographic by Kara Vincent.

