



## **Research Summary: Chronic Pain among Public Safety Personnel in Canada**

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Chronic pain is characterized by pain lasting longer than the typical three-month duration for healing damaged tissue. Chronic pain is very common in the general population, with approximately one in four Canadians reporting having experienced chronic pain in the past month. The annual cost of chronic pain in Canada is estimated to exceed 6 billion dollars. Public safety personnel report regular exposures to periods of substantial physical stress and potentially traumatic events. Researchers have previously identified an important link between trauma and chronic pain in the general population; however, despite the substantial costs of chronic pain, the potential physical stressors, and the potentially problematic links between trauma and pain, the available information on chronic pain among Canadian public safety personnel remains very limited.

The current study was designed to provide initial estimates of the frequency, location, severity, and duration of chronic pain among Canadian public safety personnel. As part of the study, we asked public safety personnel across the country, through their union, association, executive, and Ministry of Public Safety leaders, to share their personal experiences in dealing with chronic pain. The study focused primarily on chronic pain severity, frequency, and duration in different parts of the body. Over 5,000 public safety personnel participated in an anonymous, web-based survey for the study.

A substantial proportion of participating public safety personnel across all categories reported significant difficulties with chronic pain (i.e., approximately 40%). The most commonly reported pain location was the lower back, with public safety personnel reporting their average length of time in pain was more than three years. There were several differences between the public safety personnel categories with respect to prevalence, location, and severity of chronic pain. For example, firefighters and municipal/provincial police reported lower prevalence than some other public safety personnel categories for some pain locations. Over half of RCMP and paramedics who reported chronic pain indicated their pain was associated with an injury related to active duty. The results suggest additional research and resources are necessary to better manage the development and maintenance of distressing or disabling chronic pain for Canadian public safety personnel. Overall, the results suggest that many public safety personnel may be experiencing chronic pain. Given the historical overlap between trauma, mental disorders, and chronic pain, the results suggest the need for both additional research and additional resources to support a National Action Plan for the mental and physical health of all public safety personnel.