



Victoria Fire Department Tackles Mental Health

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC – Due to increased exposure to distressing situations and repetitive traumatic events, more and more first responders are experiencing symptoms of mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. In an effort to address this worrisome trend, the Victoria Fire Department is partnering with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) to provide resiliency training and support for first responders. 13 Victoria Fire Department members have become certified as instructors through CMHA and can deliver programs to firefighters throughout the Capital Region.

Since 2014, 183 first responders and military personnel have committed suicide in Canada, including 48 first responders in 2016. The Victoria Fire Department has seen an enormous surge in exposure to traumatic calls as the province-wide overdose crisis continues to be an issue. In 2015, the Victoria Fire Department was responding to an average of 6-7 overdoses per month. That number has since increased tenfold to 60-70 calls per month, taking a severe toll on first responders.

The trained instructors work with a local mental health professional to lead first responders through skill building workshops, which provide comprehensive information on trauma, mental health problems, and resiliency. The goal is to give first responders a personal toolkit to increase mental health literacy, encourage early access to care, and strengthen the psychological health of first responders. The training benefits both personal and workplace relationships and encourages discussion on mental and physical wellbeing.

“By providing this training early and prior to the possible development of a mental injury, first responders are better prepared to face traumatic events, better serve the public, and recover more quickly if faced with a mental injury,” said Daniel Atkinson, Deputy Fire Chief.

All members of the Victoria Fire department will receive the first round of training by the end of 2017. The training will take place every year to build and maintain mental health resiliency.

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