

# Supporting the Mental Health of Rural Alberta First Responders and their Families

## Dealing with the Impacts of Trauma



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## Innovative Program Helps Rural Alberta First Responders and Family Members Deal with Post-Traumatic Stress

First responders are subjected to upsetting, disturbing, difficult and sometimes traumatic incidents on a regular basis. That's why a **FREE, comprehensive, evidence-based mental health services program** is now available to fire and rescue, paramedics, emergency health care workers, and police services personnel working in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in Alberta. The program can also be accessed by family members of first responders who have participated in the program.

### Vital Resources for Rural First Responders

The program provides Alberta rural firefighters, emergency health care workers, police, and paramedical personnel living with or at risk of post-traumatic stress injuries (PTSI) with access to FREE Mental Health Commission of Canada training and PTSI resources. The program can be delivered in either virtual or in-person format, with support from Espri by TELUS Health, the downloadable mobile app that provides booster training and supplementary PTSI content.

### Indigenous First Responders

The program includes customized content for Alberta's Indigenous first responders from Alberta First Nations Reserves, Metis Settlements, and Municipal Affairs-recognized townsites. Virtually delivered and in-person sessions are available, as well as tools and content on Espri by TELUS Health for self-directed booster training.

### A First for Family Members of First Responders

The program is the first of its kind to extend FREE mental health training and PTSI resources to family members of Alberta rural firefighters, emergency health care workers, police, and paramedical personnel. Once a first responder has participated in the training, an of-age family member is eligible to access virtual delivery of the program. (Note: Indigenous peoples attending the training may select an of-age community member to be an authorized family member delegate.)

### The Impacts of Trauma Can't Be Ignored

Alberta first responders are critical to the protection of communities by saving lives, protecting resources, and maintaining order – often at risk to self. First responders can, at increasing frequency and severity to other members of the general public, be repeatedly exposed to traumatic experiences in stressful situations which can take a significant toll on their mental health and that of their families.

The program provides self-awareness training and access to resources to help cope with occupational stress, and is vital to their health and wellbeing. The program also promotes mental wellness, increases resilience, and reduces the stigma associated with mental illness. It provides a positive, supportive environment for first responders to access and participate in.

### Evidence-based, Alberta-specific, Rural-focused

While several programs are available to support first responder mental health, AMHSA offers the only comprehensive evidence-based program that includes content specific to Alberta rural first responders. In addition to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) Working Mind First Responders instructor-led training course, the AMHSA program features Alberta-based support resources, post-course booster training, and self-management tools accessed through Espri by TELUS Health.

Alberta Municipal Health and Safety Association

# AMHSA

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amhsa.net 1-800-267-9764

Available **FREE** to First Responders in Alberta's rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, including small cities with less than 500,000 residents.

## Psychological Injuries Among First Responders are at an All-time High

Data from WCB-Alberta shows that over the past decade, the number of psychological injury claims in first response categories has increased dramatically. Between 2015 and 2019, WCB-Alberta recorded 685 claims for first responders related to post-traumatic stress injuries, totaling \$104 million worth of treatment and compensation. The number of claims soared during the pandemic and in 2021 WCB-Alberta accepted 565 claims for psychological injuries from first responders.

## The Organizational Impacts of PTSD are Significant

The toll on individual mental health caused by long-term exposure to traumatic events can be financially significant for organizations. Resulting impacts for organizations can include: An increase in absences, staffing shortages, costs of benefits, insurance premiums, departmental overtime, and employee turnover; A decrease in employee engagement and morale.

## Family Members Feel the Distress Too

Family members see the distress that the first responder may experience, and often experience mental health concerns themselves. In a 2019 survey of 2,691 family members of first responders in Ontario, more than 43 per cent of family members were at least "somewhat" concerned that the first responder role had a negative effect on their family relationships. Just over 50 per cent of family members were "somewhat" interested to receive support for their own resilience or well-being.

## PTSD Education, Prevention and Support

The updated AMHSA program will provide 450 Alberta First Responders with FREE access to 25 virtually delivered sessions of TWMFR as well as tools and content on Espri by TELUS Health for self-directed TWMFR 'booster' training. The program will provide 300 Alberta First Responders with FREE access to 25 in-person sessions of TWMFR. The program will also provide 750 Family Members of Alberta First Responders with FREE access to 63 family package sessions. This innovative combination of evidence-based mental health content is specifically related to prevention and recovery from PTSD.

The program is offered by the Alberta Municipal Health and Safety Association (AMHSA) in consultation with Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), the University of Calgary Department of Clinical Psychology, and TELUS Health, and is supported by funding from the Government of Alberta.

**Programs are running throughout 2024. Enroll today!**

Visit [ruralfirstresponder.ca](http://ruralfirstresponder.ca) to learn more.

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## PROGRAM SPONSOR

The **Alberta Municipal Health and Safety Association (AMHSA)** is an educational non-profit organization that promotes health and safety and injury/illness prevention in the workplace. Every town, village, municipal district, city, and specialized municipality in Alberta is a member of AMHSA – inclusive of all municipal first responders. Visit our website for more information on upcoming training, events, programs, and resources.

[AMHSA.net](http://AMHSA.net)

## PROGRAM PARTNERS

The **Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC)** provides The Working Mind First Responders (TWMFR) training, customized for rural Alberta participants. MHCC collaborates with hundreds of partners to change the attitudes of Canadians toward mental health problems and to improve services and support. The organization's goal is to help people who live with mental health problems and illnesses lead meaningful and productive lives. Together they create change. MHCC is funded by Health Canada.

[mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://mentalhealthcommission.ca)

The **University of Calgary** is a partner in the program, with a focus on program evaluation. Independent examination of the benefits and challenges of the program allows for more clear statements about the value of the program, and to also provide directions for possible improvements.

**Espr** by **TELUS Health** provides program participants with post-course booster training, and self-management tools that can be confidentially accessed through Espr by TELUS Health. TELUS Health is a leader in digital health technology. By leveraging the power of technology to deliver connected solutions and services, TELUS Health is improving access to care and revolutionizing the flow of information while facilitating collaboration, efficiency and productivity for physicians, pharmacists, health authorities, allied healthcare professionals, insurers, employers and citizens, to progress its vision of transforming healthcare and empowering people to live healthier lives.

[www.telushealth.com](http://www.telushealth.com)



Supported by funding from the Government of Alberta

