



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Vancouver-Fraser
Mental health for all



BC MUNICIPAL
SAFETY Association

MEDIA RELEASE

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BUILDING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STRENGTH OF FIREFIGHTERS

(Vancouver, BC) The Canadian Mental Health Association Vancouver-Fraser Branch (CMHA VF) and the British Columbia Municipal Safety Association (BCMSA) have partnered to engage and inform firefighters in four areas crucial to their work: building psychological resiliency, trauma, psychological distress, and trauma-informed responses. This will be achieved through BCMSA offering CMHA's program *Resilient Minds: Building the Psychological Strength of Firefighters* to both volunteer and career municipal firefighters across the province starting in January 2020.

Research has shown that firefighters are frequently exposed to distressing events and critical incidents such as motor vehicle accidents, burnt bodies, failed rescue attempts, threats to one's own life, and completed suicides. This exposure can trigger posttraumatic stress reactions and increases their chances of developing a mental illness. Firefighters experience a 50% higher rate of marital problems and a 30% higher rate of death from suicide than the general population. A North America wide study in 2017 showed there were more deaths from suicide than 'in-line-of-duty' deaths among firefighters.

Resilient Minds is a new workshop originally developed in a partnership between CMHA VF and the Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services. It was developed in response to the disturbing experience of firefighters and stress-related injuries outlined above. Resilient Minds uses CMHA's "4R Action Toolkit" to build skills needed to reduce personal risks related to psychological impacts, and assist members of the public, colleagues and family who may be struggling with a mental health problem or be in a crisis.

"Using the latest information in the research literature, combined with the wisdom of the lived experience of firefighters, lived experience of people with mental illness and CMHA's knowledge of how to promote positive mental health, CMHA has developed a program that is benefiting the firefighters who work so hard to keep us safe," says Michael Anhorn, Executive Director, CMHA VF.

The evaluation of a province-wide pilot of *Resilient Minds* found that in addition to effectively educating firefighters on psychological resiliency and stress-related injuries, the program helped to reduce firefighters perception of stress on all of the 17 stressors measured in the evaluation. It also increased the firefighters' confidence and ability to support their peers, members of the public and family members experiencing psychological distress. Based on these findings and the incredibly high satisfaction ratings from the pilot program participants, CMHA and BCMSA have developed a partnership to ensure this workshop is available to both career and volunteer fire service personnel across the province.

"Combining BCMSA's expertise and reputation in delivering safety training to municipalities and CMHA's expertise and reputation in promoting positive mental health has led to a powerful partnership focused on significantly advancing the work of preventing stress-related injuries in our province's fire services personnel," says Mike Roberts, Executive Director of BCMSA. "We are looking forward to working with British Columbia's fire departments and the CMHA to reduce stress and stress-related injuries among firefighters in BC."

Fire departments wanting to make this training available to their members can reach out to BCMSA to discuss implementation plans.

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About CMHA

CMHA is Canada's most established mental health charity and the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health. CMHA VF believes everyone deserves to be mentally healthy and live in a healthy community. By offering community-based mental health education, services, and supports for all ages, CMHA VF contributes to the long-term health and wellbeing of our communities. We have three pillars of work:

- *Wellness and Community Inclusion* – CMHA VF walks alongside people living with mental illness. We support them to reach their hopes and dreams and to live full and contributing lives in their communities.
- *Prevention and Early Intervention* – CMHA VF increase young peoples' mental health knowledge while developing their skills to maintain positive mental health and to ask for help when they need it.
- *Mental Health Promotion* – Mental health includes habits and behaviours that build positive mental health, social support networks we can count on and having a strong connection to our community. We help people with these aspects of living a mentally healthy life and reduce the stigma related to mental illness.

About BC Municipal Safety Association

The central purpose of the BCMSA is to improve worker health and safety through the sharing of knowledge and resources within local government. The BCMSA delivers many training and education programs throughout the province and strives to be the health and safety resource of choice.

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