

## **Memorandum**

**PHD-C 1-2025**

**Subject:** Programs to Support Psychological Wellness at Niagara EMS

**Date:** April 8, 2025

**To:** PHSSC

**From:** Karen Lutz, Deputy Chief, Operations, Niagara EMS

---

In 2016, Ontario introduced Bill 163 in response to increasing evidence linking Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) diagnoses in first responders to workplace stressors. The legislation required employers of first responders to develop and implement PTSD prevention plans. Niagara EMS responded to this directive and has since built upon this foundational plan, creating innovative programs designed to proactively support the psychological health of frontline staff.

### **Key Programs:**

1. Decompression Time and Mental Stress Leave Days:

These initiatives allow frontline staff to take additional recovery time after traumatic events, ensuring they are not immediately moving on to the next call without sufficient mental recovery. This program aims to mitigate the psychological toll of traumatic events, ensuring staff have the necessary time to decompress.

2. High Acuity Incident Heat Maps:

High acuity incident heat maps provide real-time data on the frequency of high-stress incidents faced by EMS personnel. This allows Superintendents to identify which staff members may have been affected by particularly traumatic calls, enabling them to proactively check in and offer mental health support.

3. Time on Task Reports:

These reports provide a real-time snapshot of the workload of each staff member. Superintendents can use this data to assess and redistribute workloads, ensuring paramedics are not overburdened and are working in areas with lower call volumes when possible.

These innovative programs have been recognized both nationally and internationally for their forward-thinking approach to mental health in first responders. Since 2019, these programs have helped to reduce workers' compensation claims by 56%, avoiding and estimated \$435,110 in costs. As well, in 2024, there was a 26% reduction in lost time days compared to 2023, showcasing the success of these preventative measures.

Niagara EMS is continuously improving its psychological wellness programming, with several new initiatives currently under development. The goal is to further reduce the impact of mental stress injuries and continue supporting the mental health of frontline staff.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

---

Karen Lutz  
Deputy Chief, Operations, Niagara EMS