

# Programs to Support Psychological Wellness at Niagara EMS

PHSSC April 8, 2025

# Objectives

- To proactively highlight to PHSSC three innovative programs at Niagara EMS to support the Psychological Wellness of staff and the ways they are used.
- To demonstrate the linkage between these programs and researched evidence surrounding mental stress injuries and first responders.
- To report on the impact of these programs to date.

# Presumptive Legislation in Bill 163

- 2016 - Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act
- A first responder, diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, is presumed to have been injured on the job without the need to prove a causal link between PTSD and a workplace event.

# First Responder Work Related Stressors

- Operational workload
- Physical risks – lifting, workplace violence
- Psychological stress from traumatic events
- Lack of time to recuperate between calls
- Evidence demonstrates that organizational support during these stressors may mitigate these stressors that precipitate mental stress injuries.

# Proactive and Innovative Programming

- Decompression Time and Mental Stress Leave Days - to address Psychological Stress from traumatic events and to allow time to recuperate between calls
- High Acuity Incident Heat Map – to actively monitor any physical and psychological traumatic events
- Time on Task Report – to address Operational Workload

# Decompression Time and Mental Stress Leave Days

- Following a difficult call or specific incident that elicits an acute stress reaction a period of decompression time may be provided to the staff member
- Employees are offered mental health supports
- If required, up to two additional Mental Stress Leave Days may be requested

# High Acuity Incident Heat Map

- Is a quick visual view for Superintendents of the frequency of exposures to high stress calls
- Developed by analyzing our own data and WSIB reports for the types of calls linked to mental stress injuries
- Superintendents can quickly look to see if any of their staff have had an increase in frequency of exposures and proactively check in.

# Time on Task Report

- This is a real time report that monitors the workload of all our staff
- High workloads are highlighted by colours – red, yellow and green
- Superintendents can use this data to move crews with high workloads to areas where call volumes are less to decrease the workload and potential exposure to high acuity stressful calls



# Others Mental Health Supports in Place

- Peer Support
- Chaplain
- Family information night for new frontline Paramedics and System Status Controllers (SSCs)
- Coach Medic/SSC Mentorship program for new recruits
- Provincial Resource Guide
- Operational Hotwash Process by Superintendents
- EFAP (Employee Family Assistance Program)

# Results of Programs to Date

- Reduction of 56% of WSIB Claims or cost avoidance of \$435,110.00 since 2022
- 26% reduction of Lost Time days in 2024 compared to 2023
- Allows our Superintendents to proactively monitor the psychological health of our staff, perform check-ins and offer an array of supports if required
- Programming recognized nationally and internationally

# Next Steps

- Continue to actively encourage and support our Superintendents to complete check ins with staff
- Implement more seamless processes for Return to Work after Mental Stress Injuries
- Build a program to support staff preparing to retire using evidenced based research
- Increased resources for Peer Support including Leadership Peer Support

Questions?