



## Item No. 9.1

**Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality  
December 4, 2024  
December 18, 2024**

**TO:** Chair Kent and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality

**FROM:** Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** November 21, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Update on HRP Actions to Enhance Psychological Safety and Trauma Supports Including Consideration of Budgetary Implications

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### **INFORMATION REPORT**

#### **ORIGIN**

December 13, 2023, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality (Item No. 10.2.2):

MOVED by Commissioner Giles, seconded by Commissioner Smith

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality approve the action items and timeframes in the Board of Police Commissioners' 2024-2025 Workplan, as outlined in Attachment 1 of the staff report dated November 29, 2023.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Board of Police Commissioners ("the Board") on steps taken by Halifax Regional Police (HRP) in relation to the enhancement of psychological safety and trauma supports for HRP employees, including consideration of budgetary implications.

Over recent years, HRP has taken significant steps to build on its existing health and well-being framework, to provide support to all employees in several areas of health and wellness, including psychological safety and trauma support.

These steps include the official formation of a Reintegration Program, the creation of a Reintegration Coordinator position, the hiring of a second Health Specialist, the creation of an internal support network for employees who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+, and the approval of a second Employee and Family Assistance (EFAP) Coordinator position. These additional resources build on the existing framework and are essential to address the demand in this area, which has been steadily increasing.

Other steps include the identification and initiation of an Early Intervention (EI) Program designed to intervene where there are early signs of psychological struggle for an employee, where otherwise they might be missed.

The proposed HRM IT Business System 2025/26 Capital Budget includes a request for the IT system which is necessary to enable the EI Program. If approved by Regional Council, the project will move forward in partnership with HRM IT, in 2025.

## **BACKGROUND**

On December 13, 2023, the Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC) for the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) passed motion 10.2.2 in relation to the Board of Police Commissioners 2024-2025 Work Plan.

Included in this plan is the strategic priority “Oversee the development of a people-focused policing strategy” under one of its four pillars; Evolve. This priority is described as ensuring “*our police develop a clear plan (including policies, practices, and systems) that will enable them to attract, retain, and develop the people in their services.*”<sup>1</sup>

The work plan approved by the Board includes an action item under this pillar and priority of an update on the actions of Halifax Regional Police (HRP) to enhance psychological safety and trauma supports, including consideration of budgetary implications. This report is provided in response to that action item.

## **DISCUSSION**

The health and well-being of our people is a priority for HRP. This includes feeling safe in the workplace and during their work. Support in this area benefits the individual employee, the organization, and the public they serve. There are existing and planned HRP programs and initiatives which enhance psychological safety and trauma supports in the workplace, including:

- Employee and Family Assistance Program
- Reintegration Program
- Wellness Program Specialist
- Health Specialists
- Safeguarding Program
- Critical Incident Debriefs and Assessments
- Rainbow Internal Support Network

Additional work and supports in this area include focus areas being addressed by the HRP Employee Engagement Working Group, and recently implemented HRM policies.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.halifax.ca/media/84632>

## **Employee & Family Assistance Program**

The HRP Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) provides confidential support for employees and their families who are experiencing personal, professional, or health-related challenges, including psychological health. The goal is to provide early intervention and support, and encourage employees to seek the assistance they may need. Sometimes, initial contact with the EFAP may be all that an employee or their family member needs, but others may require further follow-ups, or a full EFAP referral to connect them with the services they may require.

Referrals can be made for any type of challenge the person is experiencing. These can include mental health concerns, traumatic incidents, grief and loss, marital difficulties, illness, etc. Since the beginning of 2024, the top three concerns reported by persons seeing EFAP assistance were mental health, operational difficulties, and traumatic incidents.

Prior to 2024 there was one permanent EFAP Coordinator position. As part of the 2024/25 operating budget process, a second position was approved, which HRP is working to fill. EFAP Coordinators being HRP employees offers the substantial benefit that they understand the unique nature of the policing environment and its challenges. This is also a critical component when assistance is provided to an employee's family member, as the family member may be struggling with their loved one being affected by the policing environment, even though they themselves are not directly involved in it.

The responsibilities of an EFAP Coordinator include the delivery of internal training in specialist trauma-informed subject areas, including Applied Suicide Intervention, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), CIS Debriefing, and Strategic Resiliency. These types of crisis intervention are acute emergency mental health interventions<sup>2</sup>, sometimes referred to as "emotional first aid", which require this specialized training. The EFAP Coordinator also delivers an overview of the program to the Police Science Program (PSP) cadet class, so they are aware of the supports in place prior to being hired as a police officer.

Other responsibilities of the EFAP Coordinator include the coordination and communication with internal and external stakeholders, such as the Chaplaincy Program, HRM support services, and external service providers, such as counsellors, social workers and psychologists.

To better support HRP employees and the EFAP Coordinators, peer referral agents have been trained to respond to the needs of employees requiring assistance. Currently, there are over 30 referral agents, who are trained in key areas, including Suicide Intervention, CIS, and CIS Debriefing. Referral agents are all HRP employees, they work on a volunteer basis and are on call 24/7. There is also a waitlist of people who have expressed an interest in becoming a peer referral agent and are waiting for training.

Figure 1 shows the total annual referrals between 2014 and 2024 year-to-date (November 1), which illustrate how these have been steadily increasing.

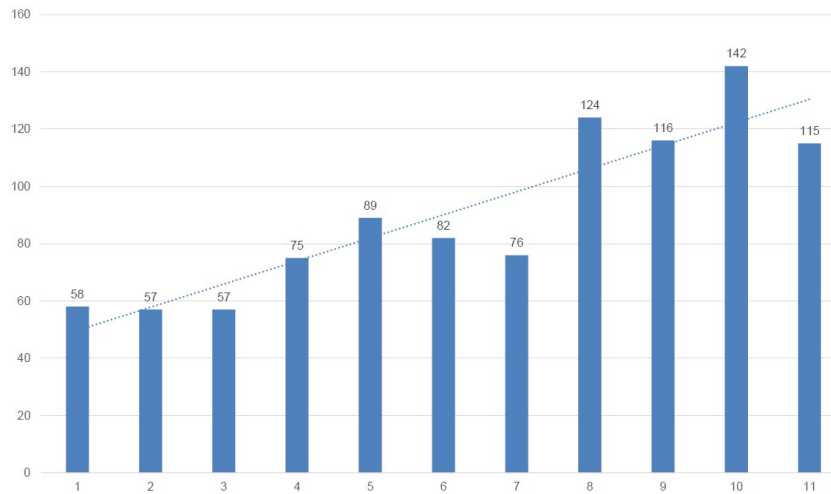
It is important to note that these numbers simply reflect each time a referral is made. They do not reflect the nature and extent of the work that is subsequently required, nor do they include the number of occasions where advice, information, or support is provided by EFAP, but does not result in a referral.

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<sup>2</sup> This is different to Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) which is separate police training, intended to enhance skillset and provide the most effective police response to individuals who are experiencing mental illness

Figure 1 – Annual Referrals to the HRP Employee & Family Assistance Program, 2014-2024 YTD (Nov 1)

**Halifax Regional Police Employee and Family Assistance Program  
Total Annual Referrals, 2014-2024 (ytd)**



In 2023 there were 142 EFAP referrals. 91 of those were made in relation to an employee, and 51 in relation to an employee's family member. Families and relationships are a critical part of a person's support network, so it is important to recognize the role the EFAP plays in that wider support.

### Reintegration Program

The HRP Member Reintegration Program was officially launched in Fall 2022. It is a confidential peer-driven, multi-faceted program which provides support and training for members who have experienced a critical incident and those returning to work following an absence, such as occupational stress injury (OSI) (persistent psychological injury resulting from operational stress). Returning to work after a long-term absence can be overwhelming, and members may need assistance with building their confidence and skills, to ensure readiness to resume their regular duties.

The program is staffed by a full-time Reintegration Coordinator, and supported by a team of volunteers. The coordinator and volunteers have all received a 5-day training course delivered by Edmonton Police, which was the first agency in the country to implement a reintegration program and has since been established as the source of best practice and training.

The training is designed to provide employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to become a peer support Reintegration Program team member. The demand for this training is high. It was delivered to 22 employees in May 2024, from which 12 more volunteers were selected, including three from Integrated Emergency Services (IES), which includes the frontline positions of Emergency Response Communicators. The intention is to continue training people to ensure there is sufficient representation across the organization. The coordinator and volunteers will also avail themselves of other relevant training opportunities as they arise, these are often organized by the EFAP Coordinator, who will let the Reintegration Coordinator know.

The Reintegration Program is designed to support a member's specific needs. Members can self-refer, or they may be referred by another person such as their supervisor, a co-worker, a Health Specialist, the Wellness Specialist, or the EFAP Coordinator. As each individual and their experience are unique, they will lead the pace, scope, depth, length and direction of their individual reintegration. It allows them the

opportunity to work through the sensitivities an operational event has created, in the safety of a confidential environment. The approach may require a partnership approach, involving other agencies such as medical providers and the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB). The internal HRP Health Specialists may also be involved. The goal is the best treatment to ensure the member returns to work when they are healthy and ready to do so.

The program was active prior to its official launch in Fall 2022 but was more of a side project for those who were invested and recognized the need for it. Its official formation demonstrated the commitment of HRP to supporting the health and wellness of its members. Since then, 45 people have officially participated in the program, and the Reintegration Coordinator also deals with regular requests for information, assistance, and support.

From the perspective of HRP, the Reintegration Program is flourishing, and members are feeling its benefits. Testimonials from members who have gone through the program include the following: *"The program has provided a huge confidence boost; not only performance wise but also in providing a benefit, mental health wise"*, and *"Putting on my uniform and adjusting... in a safe, nonjudgemental environment is crucial to me."*

### **Wellness Specialist and Programs**

The HRP Wellness Program Specialist (WPS) is responsible for implementing a health and wellness program across HRP, through education, training, prevention, intervention, and recovery strategies, which focus on holistic lifestyle approaches to health and wellness. The position employs a comprehensive approach to the development and implementation of initiatives and programs that encompasses psychological, physical, ergonomic and emotional components, with the objective of empowering and motivating employees to make positive personal choices that improve their overall health and well-being.

Where employees have experienced occupational stress injuries, need accommodations or are returning to work, the WPS is a collaborative partner with the Health Specialists, the Reintegration Coordinator, and the EFAP Coordinator, in identifying and implementing the required supports to help the individual.

The WPS is consulted as a subject matter expert when relevant policies and procedures are developed, and is often called upon to deliver training. They deliver a day of mental health stress management to the PSP cadet class, and act as a consultant on the physical training component of the PSP. A shortened version of the training is also delivered to Experienced Police Officers (EPOs) and Emergency Response Communicators (ERCs) when they are hired. The Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) is a separate two-day course delivered to the PSP class, which is a performance and mental health training, and education program developed by the Canadian Armed Forces, designed to improve well-being and short-term performance, while mitigating any long-term mental health problems.<sup>3</sup>

In 2023, the WPS delivered refresher training to existing employees in block training<sup>4</sup>, to remind all employees of and signpost to the supports available.

An initiative identified a couple of years ago by the WPS is the Early Integration (EI) Program. This is designed to intervene where there are early signs of psychological struggle for an employee, where otherwise they might be missed. They have worked steadily and tirelessly to research the program, analyze its capability and fit with HRP programs and operations, and raise awareness.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/health-support/road-to-mental-readiness.html>

<sup>4</sup> Block training occurs on an annual basis and consists of training delivered to all sworn and some civilian employees, which is either mandatory or identified as a priority by the organization

The benefits of this program have been recognized by HRP and the HRM IT Business System 2025/26 Capital Budget includes a request for the software which is necessary to enable the EI Program. The approximate cost is estimated at \$66,000 for the first year, then \$31,000 annually thereafter – these will be funded from the HRM IT budget. This request will move forward within the budget process, for consideration by Regional Council. If the request is approved, HRP will move the project forward in partnership with HRM IT, in 2025.

It is not possible to predict with precision the savings this program would realize but, when compared against the salary range of a full-time constable, it would only need to divert one officer from being on a leave of absence for a few months each year, to pay for itself.

### **Health Specialists**

The HRP Health Specialists are responsible for delivering effective case management services to support the reintegration of ill or injured employees back into the workplace. They act as the coordinator in facilitating the return to work, liaison with the Nova Scotia Workers' Compensation Board (WCB), as well as support services for employees who stay at work during their recovery.

The Health Specialists will work with the Reintegration Coordinator, the Wellness Program Specialist, the EFAP Coordinator, and any other support services they deem necessary to support and facilitate the employee's full return to the workplace. As with the Reintegration Program, there is no one-size-fits-all solution so they work to develop a plan tailored to the individual employee.

There are two full-time permanent Health Specialists at HRP. The second position was introduced in late 2021 and created more capacity to deal with the increased workload of complex health files (see Figure 2, below)

In 2014, psychological injury coverage was introduced in Nova Scotia under the WCB. There was a further change in 2018 when presumptive psychological injury coverage was introduced, whereby emergency services first responders who suffer a psychological injury are presumed to have incurred the injury due to their work. This was a recognition that they are at a higher risk of such injury than the general population.

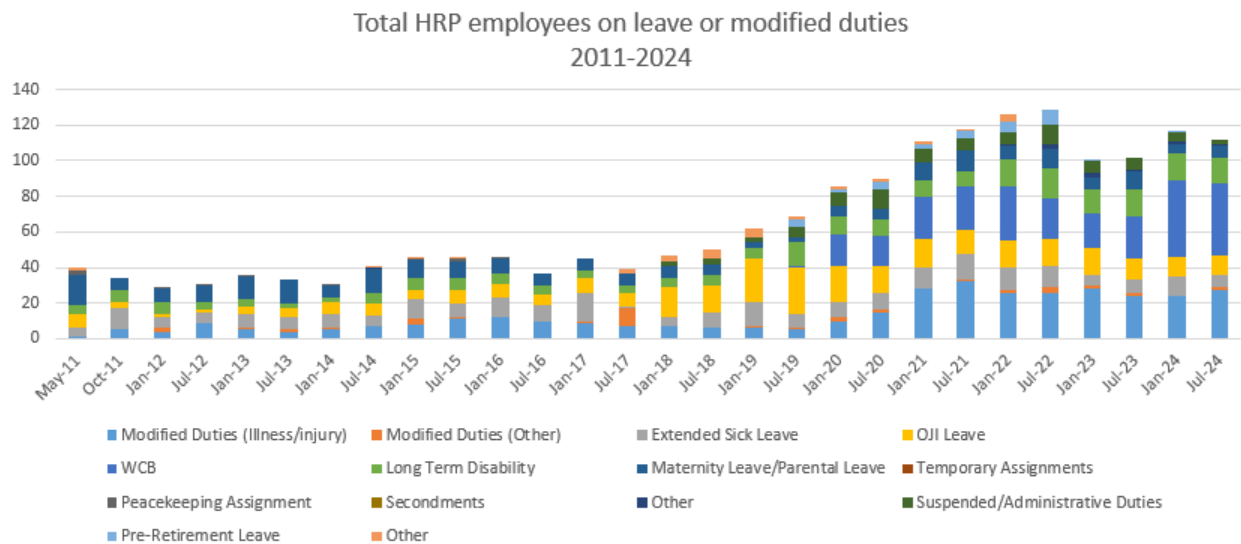
On September 1, 2024, the law changed to include Gradual Onset Psychological Injury under the WCB process. A work-related gradual onset psychological injury is caused by repeated significant stressors at work. Most often, these kinds of injuries happen because of ongoing bullying or harassment in the workplace, and they are injuries that build up over time.<sup>5</sup> For a claim to be accepted there would have to be a clinical diagnosis that the injury is directly related to these repeated significant stressors within the workplace.

Due to the recency of its introduction, it is too early to assess the impact of this legislative change on HRP, but the expectation is claims will be increasingly received as it becomes established.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wcb.ns.ca/claims/gradual-onset-psychological-injury/what-is-GPI>

**Figure 2 – Total HRP employees on leave or modified duties, 2011 – 2024**



**Safeguarding Program**

There are certain positions within HRP which are at a higher risk of significant and/or prolonged exposure to situations and material with an increased likelihood of having an adverse impact on the employee, such as child abuse, sexual assault, and homicide. These employees participate in an annual assessment with a psychologist to assess whether they are coping with the demands of the role and are safe to continue working in that position, or whether they may need additional supports or treatment, such as counselling or a period of leave. HRP is currently exploring the expansion of this program to the Patrol division through an initial pilot.

A private psychologist is contracted to carry out these assessments. They also carry out pre-employment assessments of applicants for the PSP cadet class, and post-critical incident assessments where required.

**Critical Incident Debriefs and Assessments**

Where there has been an incident of a particularly traumatic nature, the EFAP Coordinator will arrange for a debrief to be held with the employees exposed to the trauma, either individually or as part of a group. Participation is voluntary but strongly encouraged. During the debrief the EFAP Coordinator will assist the participants in normalizing the feelings they are experiencing, and help them understand potential reactions they may feel and experience, as well as educate them on available resources and supports if they do experience such reactions.

The exposure can take different forms, such as officers directly attending and witnessing the event, the call-takers and dispatchers hearing and witnessing the event over the phone and radio, or the forensic identification members attending the scene to capture and document the forensic evidence.

Psychologist assessments are scheduled for six weeks post-incident, and beyond. If the psychologist identifies that an employee has been significantly impacted by the incident, the Wellness Program Specialist will connect with the employee to see if they would benefit from support and assistance. Where they would, a claim is submitted to the Workers' Compensation Board and the employee will be supported through that process by the Health Specialists.

### **Rainbow Internal Support Network (R-ISN)**

The R-ISN is an employee-led confidential support group which was established to support employees who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. The need for such a group was identified by several employees, including the HRP Diversity Officer, who went on to work on its design, development, and implementation. With the full support of the HRP, Chief MacLean, and other members of the HRP management team, the R-ISN was formalized in 2023.

Since then, the R-ISN has supported 2SLGBTQIA+ employees in several ways; providing advice and support on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues in both their personal and professional lives, whether they involve the employee directly, or someone they care about, or where the employee is just looking for some general information. The R-ISN was heavily involved in the 2023 block training on the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, which was delivered to all employees and the management team, and remains available to share their knowledge at any time.

The R-ISN is also there to bridge the gap between policing and community. Employees can contact the group at any time for advice on investigations, and the group has seen a significant level of outreach from officers. While there is no official measure of the impact from this, there is little doubt that this collaborative way of working will have positively contributed to policing operations and investigations.

The R-ISN held its inaugural Pride BBQ event at Police HQ on July 20, 2024, during Pride week. The event was for HRP employees plus their family and friends, to allow them to celebrate Pride and feel included. Another R-ISN initiative is the Rainbow Name Tag project, whereby employees can wear a name tag with the rainbow symbol, or a rainbow lanyard, to show allyship to the community and colleagues.

The creation and implementation of the R-ISN should be recognized as an enormous step forward for HRP. Where employees' psychological safety can be impacted if they feel they don't fit in with the majority, the R-ISN is a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment which provides support both personally and professionally.

### **Employee Engagement Working Group**

In January 2024, the Employee Engagement Working Group was re-established, and consists of committed volunteers who feel passionately about their colleagues, and making the workplace better for them. As of the date of this report, the group has 24 members.

Following the results of the 2022 Employee Engagement Survey, three key areas of focus were identified, and sub-committees were established to look at each area: (1) internal communication, (2) personal development, and (3) workplace culture, well-being and environment. All areas involve intertwined elements that both individually and collectively contribute to psychological safety.

Effective, regular and timely internal communication is essential for employees to feel involved and engaged with their organization. Not being informed about key information, or even non-essential but nice-to-know information, can make employees feel sidelined. The Internal Communication sub-committee has worked hard to brainstorm and develop ideas, including the launch of the first bi-weekly HRP communication on November 21, 2024. The communication was developed in partnership with the HRP Public Relations and Corporate Communications team, and is designed to provide regular organizational and operational updates, such as staffing moves, hires, and departures. While some information is currently delivered in alternative ways, this communication will consolidate it, streamline the process, and provide a mechanism available to all employees to both receive and deliver information in a regular and timely manner.



Personal development is another area of focus. Most who work in management will be familiar with the theory behind Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs<sup>6</sup>, where 'self-actualization' is the highest level of need, and is met when people are fulfilled and doing all they are capable of. People are most motivated and engaged when they feel they have a purpose, they are clear on that purpose, and when they feel what they are working towards has meaning. Although the general work purpose of those who are employed in policing may appear obvious, there is a multitude of policing roles, held by both civilian and sworn members, all with different objectives and priorities. And all individuals have their own goals and aspirations. There is a real need for a structured internal personal development framework. The personal development sub-committee has been working to identify how best to achieve and optimize this, as well as a review of current training opportunities, as these link heavily to employees' personal development. These areas of work will be significant long-term projects.

The third area of focus is workplace culture, well-being, and environment. Where culture is essentially the workplace's way of life, employees who do not feel they fit in, that their way of life is different, may be more likely to experience psychological stress and injury. They must come to work; they cannot simply avoid this stressor. Significant changes in culture will not happen overnight, but the sub-committee for this area has been working to identify and prioritize potential actions and initiatives. They have identified two initiatives which are in the development phase – short wellness briefings to be delivered to frontline officers, and reintroduction of the HRP Family Program, which recognizes the importance and benefits of an employee's family having an enhanced understanding and involvement in their professional life.

### **Additional Supports**

HRP is in the very early stages of exploring the potential implementation of Psychological First Aid (PFA) training, which is about self-care and caring for others, during challenging times. It is a two-day course, developed and maintained by the Canadian Red Cross<sup>7</sup>, with the objective of equipping people with the skillset to help both themselves and others during a mental health emergency, through building up resiliency to stress and establishing coping strategies. HRP has a PFA instructor who is able to instruct and certify others, and the program can be tailored to any team within the department.

It is also important to note the HRM policies in place. In April 2024, the HRM Respectful Workplace and Whistleblower policies were implemented. The purpose of the Respectful Workplace Policy is to support the provision of a work environment where all persons are treated with respect, fairness, and dignity. The purpose of the Whistleblower Policy is to ensure those who bring forward concerns in good faith are protected from retaliation. Taken together, these contribute significantly towards employees feeling psychologically safe in the workplace. The policies are directed at increasing respectful interactions and opportunities for employees to have meaningful dialogue and intervention, and reduce workplace conflicts.

There is also an HRM EFAP. Full-time HRP employees who are non-union, NSGEU or CUPE, are eligible to seek assistance from the HRM EFAP program. Similar to the HRP EFAP, it offers confidential, short-term counselling, advisory and information services designed to encourage employees and their family members to voluntarily seek assistance with issue that may impact their well-being.

In the 2023/24 budget process, HRP requested two new positions, and these were approved: Psychologist and Occupational Health Nurse. These requests highlighted a need for such capability and capacity across HRM, so the positions were transferred to Human Resources to create the HRM positions of Director of Employee Wellbeing and Occupational Health Practitioner. The Director of Employee Wellbeing is focusing on foundational work by completing a current state assessment of the corporate occupational health and safety program and an audit of existing policies and practices, to understand gaps and opportunities and where HRM is in terms of a psychologically healthy workplace, compared against the national standard.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383241976\\_Maslow's\\_Hierarchy\\_of\\_Needs](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383241976_Maslow's_Hierarchy_of_Needs)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.redcross.ca/training-and-certification/course-descriptions/psychological-first-aid>

This work is underway but is complex and long-term. The Occupational Health Practitioner has recently been hired and will be working with all business units to support management from both a frontline and prevention perspective.

HRP recognizes the benefits of these new positions and is committed to a collaborative partnership for the benefit of all employees. It is felt that HRP would still benefit from an in-house psychologist, including that they would complete all psychological assessments during the hiring process for both new and experienced police officers rather than this process being contracted out. The position would also be readily available for advice to the existing health and wellness team, and liaison with other treatment providers, thereby reducing potential delays in the return to work or recovery process. This will be a potential consideration in future budget discussions.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

No financial implications were identified when creating this report.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

No community engagement was required for the purpose of creating this report.

### **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

Nova Scotia *Police Act*, 2004, c. 55:

Section (3), states:

- (3) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), a board shall...
  - (c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;
  - (d) ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;
  - (e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers;

Section 53(1), states:

- 53(1) The Board shall annually cause the chief to prepare a budget for the police department.

Halifax Charter, section 35(1), states:

- 35(1) The Chief Administrative Officer shall (b) ensure that an annual budget is prepared and submitted to the Council.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

There are no attachments to this report.

**Update on HRP Actions to Enhance Psychological Safety and Trauma Supports Including  
Consideration of Budgetary Implications**

**Board of Police Commissioners Report - 11 -**

**December 4, 2024**

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Report Prepared by: Joanne Smith – Research & Development Coordinator, Halifax Regional Police

Report Approved by: Chief Don MacLean – Chief of Police, Halifax Regional Police

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