

December 18, 2024

Halifax Regional Police

HRP Actions to Enhance Psychological Safety and Trauma Supports

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Background

- The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Board of Police Commissioners 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.

(Originating motion - December 13, 2023): 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.

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Existing and Planned Programs and Initiatives

- The health and well-being of our people is a priority for HRP.
- There are existing and planned 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

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HRP Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)

- 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.
- 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.

HRP Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)

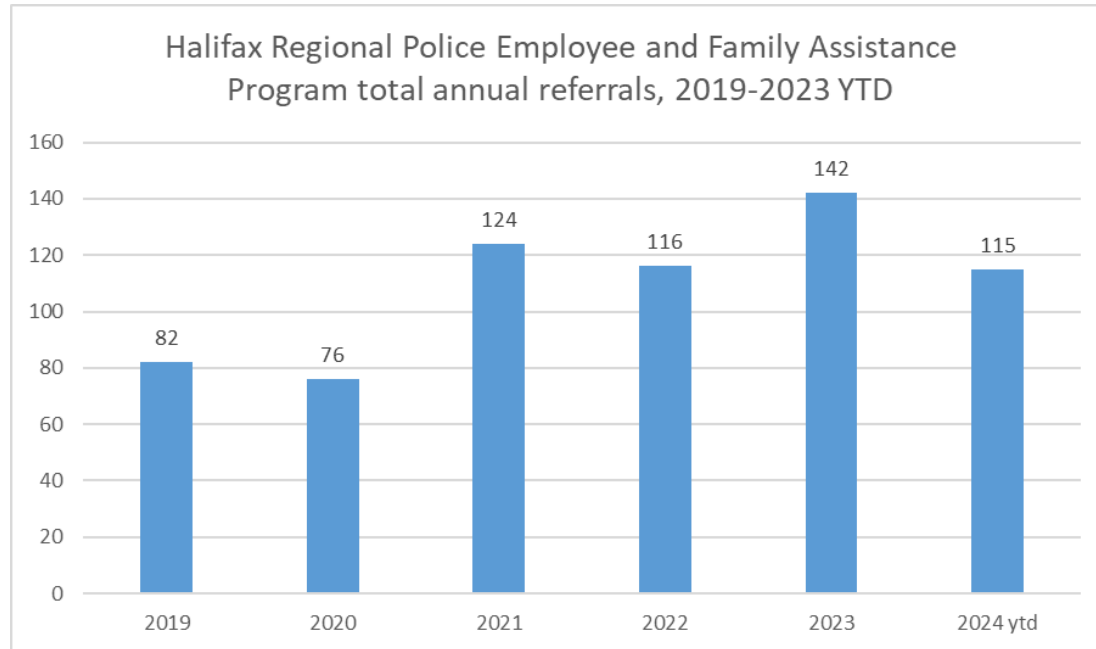
- EFAP Coordinators are HRP employees, so they understand the unique nature of the policing environment and its challenges.
- An EFAP Coordinator is responsible for the delivery of internal training in specialist trauma-informed subject areas and delivering an overview of the EFAP program to the Police Science Program 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 partners and stakeholders, such as the Chaplaincy Program, HRM support services, and external service providers, such as counsellors, social workers and psychologists.

HRP Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)

- 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 peer referral agents, who are trained in key areas, including Suicide Intervention, Critical Incident Stress, and Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.
- Peer 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.

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Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) Total Annual Referrals



HRP Member Reintegration Program

- The Member Reintegration Program 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).
- 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.
- The Reintegration Program officially launched in Fall 2022. Since then, 45 people have participated in the program.

HRP Member Reintegration Program

- The Reintegration Program is staffed by a full-time Reintegration Coordinator and supported by a team of volunteers.
- Edmonton Police Service, which was the first police agency in Canada to implement a reintegration program, delivered training to the first group of HRP volunteers in May 2022.
- HRP has since developed, implemented, facilitated and delivered our own Reintegration Program training course. The demand for this training is high. In May 2024, 22 employees attended the training, from which 12 more volunteers were selected, including three from Integrated Emergency Services.
- From HRP's perspective, this program is flourishing, and members are feeling its benefits. 9

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Wellness Specialist and Programs

- The Wellness Program Specialist 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.
- The Wellness Program Specialist is consulted as a subject matter expert when relevant policies and procedures are developed and is often called upon to deliver training.

Early Intervention Program

- An initiative identified by the Wellness Program Specialist that could assist the health and well-being of HRP employees is the Early Intervention program.
- The Early Intervention program is designed to intervene where there are early signs of psychological struggle for an employee, where otherwise they might be missed.
- HRP would determine the threshold parameters for the program and track certain variables, such as call types attended/received, overtime, and sickness. Once the early intervention threshold is triggered, the Wellness Program Specialist would review the case and may suggest intervention.

Early Intervention Program

- 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 Early Intervention 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. 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.

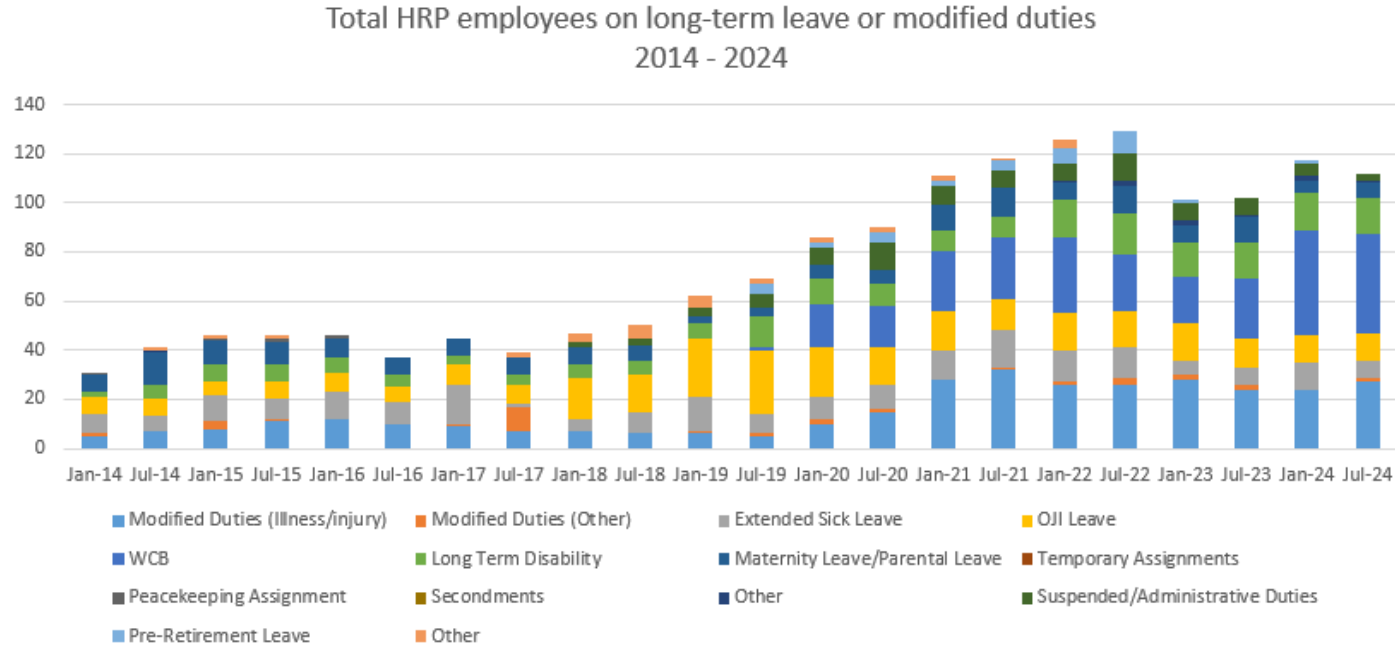
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Health Specialists

- 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.
- 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.

Health Specialists

Total HRP employees on long-term leave or modified duties since 2014



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.

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.

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Critical Incident Debriefs and Assessments

- The exposure to a traumatic incident 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 Health Specialists and the Wellness Program Specialist will connect with the employee regarding further support and assistance.

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 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 training on the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, which was delivered to all employees and the management team during annual HRP training.
- 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.



Rainbow Internal Support Network (R-ISN)

- The R-ISN held its inaugural Pride BBQ event at Police HQ on July 20, 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, where 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.
- The group meets monthly and has 24 members.
- Three sub-committees were established to look at the following areas:
 - Internal communication
 - Personal development
 - Workplace culture, well-being and environment.
- All three sub-committee focus areas involve intertwined elements that both individually and collectively contribute to psychological safety.

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Additional Supports

HRM Policies

- In April 2024, the HRM Respectful Workplace and Whistleblower policies were implemented.
- 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.
- 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.

Additional Supports

HRM Programs and Support

- There is also an HRM Employee and Family Assistance Program. Full-time HRP employees who are non-union, NSGEU or CUPE, are eligible to seek assistance from the HRM EFAP.
- In the 2023/24 budget process, HRP requested two new positions – a Psychologist and Occupational Health Nurse. These positions were approved and transferred to HRM 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. This work is underway but is complex and long-term.

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Additional Supports

HRM Programs and Support

- 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.
- HRP would still benefit from an in-house psychologist who would complete all psychological assessments during the hiring process for both new and experienced police officers, be readily available for advice and liaise with other treatment providers, reducing potential delays in the return to work or recovery process. This will be a potential consideration in future budget discussions.

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Questions/Comments

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