

December 3, 2025



## Halifax Regional Police

Actions to enhance psychological safety and trauma supports

# Background

- The 2025-2026 Board of Police Commissioners Work Plan contains four key pillars:
  - Develop
  - Engage
  - Adapt
  - Evolve
- Included within the “Evolve” pillar is the strategic priority “Oversee the development of a people-focused policing strategy”:
  - This priority includes the action item of an annual report from HRP on actions to enhance psychological safety
  - This presentation and the accompanying report is the second annual update related to this request

# Existing Programs and Initiatives

- There are a number of existing programs and initiatives available to employees, including:
  - Employee and Family Assistance Program
  - Reintegration Program
  - Wellness Program Specialist
  - Health Specialists
  - Safeguarding Program
  - Critical Incident Debriefs and Assessments
  - Rainbow Internal Support Network
- There are also several initiatives either being explored - or in the early stages of implementation - including the Early Intervention Program

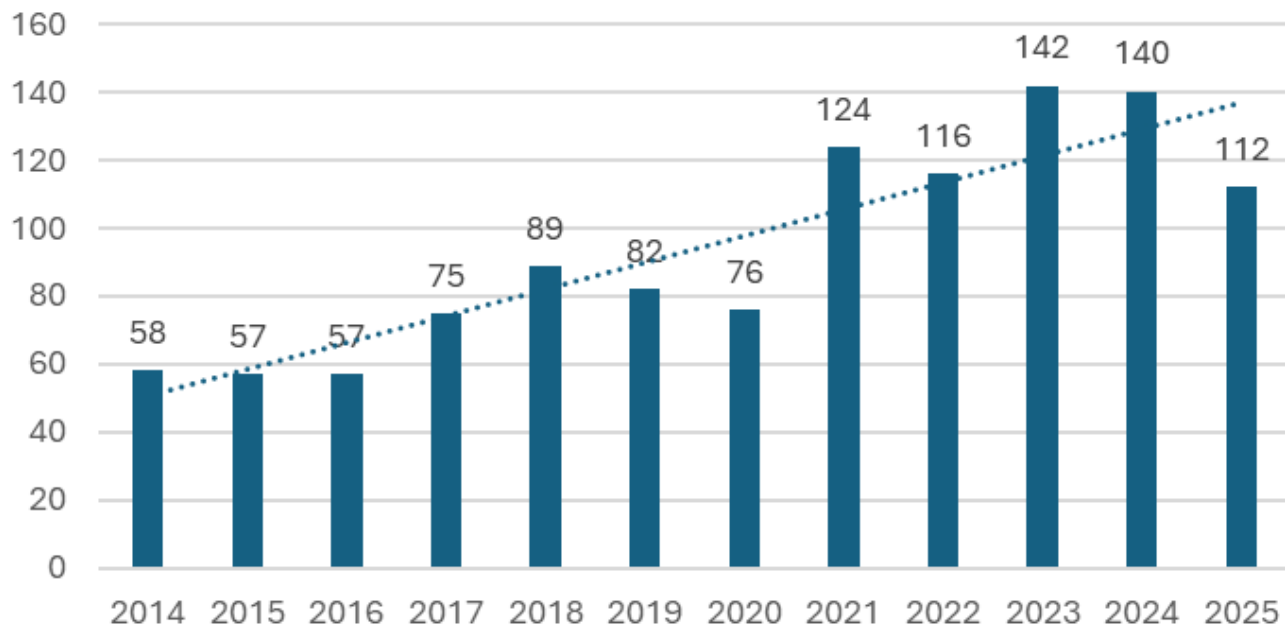


# HRP Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)

- The HRP 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, support, and encourage employees to seek the assistance they may need
- Since the beginning of 2025, the top three concerns reported by people seeking EFAP assistance were mental health, operational stress, and marital/relationship issues
- EFAP is currently staffed by one Coordinator and supported by a team of volunteers
- As part of the 2024/25 HRP budget process, a second position titled “Peer Team Lead” was approved. This position has been filled and will start in early December

# Annual Referrals to HRP EFAP Program 2014-2025

(YTD: July 23, 2025)



# EFAP – Peer Referral Agents

- To better support HRP employees and the EFAP Coordinator, peer referral agents have been trained to respond to the needs of employees requiring assistance
- Currently, there are over 20 peer referral agents who are trained in key areas, including Suicide Intervention, Critical Incident Stress (CIS), and CIS Debriefing
- Peer referral agents are all HRP employees who work on a volunteer basis and are on call 24/7
- There is a waitlist of people who have expressed an interest in becoming a peer referral agent and are waiting for training
- Between January 1 - July 23, 2025, peer referral agents were activated 20 times to provide support to members either during or after a major incident

# Reintegration Program

- The 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 an 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
- Since its inception in Fall 2022, 65 people have officially participated in the Reintegration Program in some capacity

# Coordinator Role & Volunteer Peer Supporters

- The Reintegration Program is staffed by a full-time Reintegration Coordinator and supported by a team of volunteer peer supporters
- 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
- In May 2024, the Reintegration Coordinator delivered the first ever HRP Reintegration Program Peer Supporter course, which provided employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to become a peer supporter. Of those who participated in the training, 16 people were selected to become volunteer peer supporters
- A second Reintegration Program Peer Supporter course is scheduled to take place in December 2025. Once the training is complete, the participants could potentially become volunteer peer supporters



# Reintegration Program – Recent Initiatives

- A two-day team training and building event for volunteer peer supporters took place in October
- The Reintegration Program information brochure has been revised, and the Coordinator is collaborating with the HRP Public Relations & Communications Section on new ways to enhance internal awareness of the program
- The Coordinator conducted a presentation for the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB), outlining how the Reintegration Program and WCB collaborate to support members returning to the workplace
- Volunteer peer supporters did a presentation to all four watches and the Criminal Investigation Division, which provided information about the program, how it supports employees and how to access its services
- The Coordinator is currently working with the new IES manager and the two IES peer supporters to determine the best method to provide a similar presentation to all IES employees

# Reintegration Program Facilitators Course

- A Reintegration Program Facilitators Course, designed to introduce external police and public service agencies to the HRP model, was developed by the Reintegration Program Coordinator
- The one-week course equips participants with the knowledge and tools needed to establish and sustain a Reintegration Program within their own organizations
- The inaugural course took place in mid-November 2025 and included attendees from Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency, EHS, Canada Border Services Agency and municipal and provincial health and wellness employees

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# Wellness Program Specialist

- The 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
- 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

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# Early Intervention Program

- The Early Intervention (EI) 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
- The benefits of this program have been recognized by HRP and the software necessary to enable the EI program was approved by Regional Council as part of the HRM IT Business System 2025/26 Capital Budget
- HRP is moving forward with the project in partnership with HRM IT

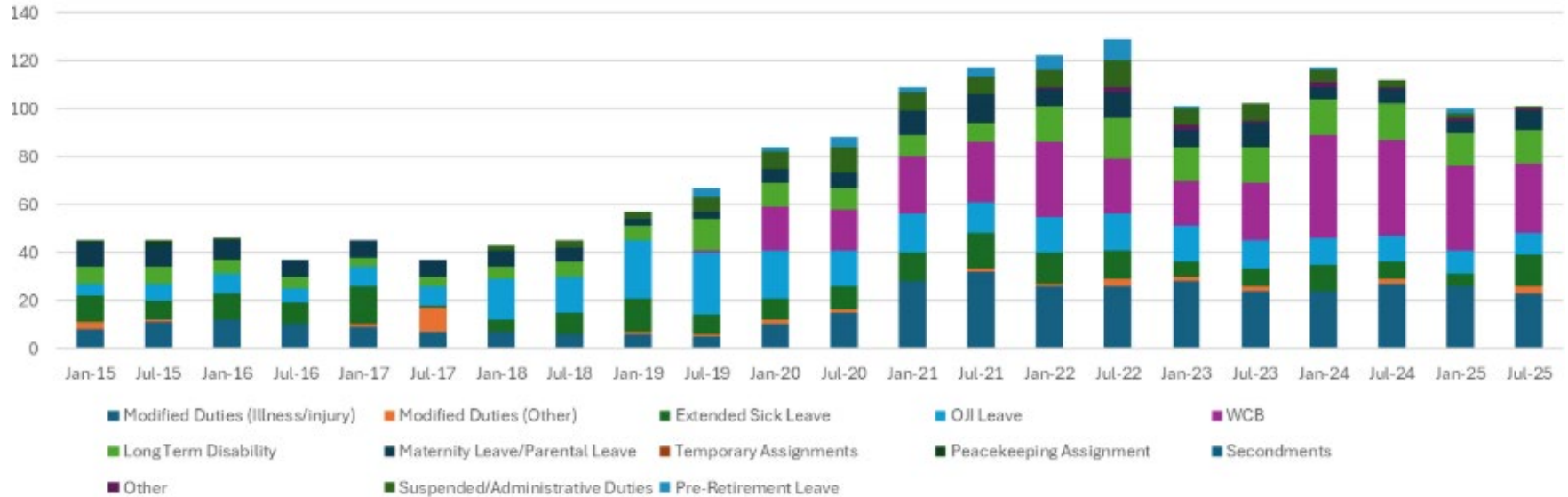
# New Position - Culture and Support Manager

- As part of the 2025/26 HRP Operating Budget, Regional Council approved a Culture and Support Manager
- This new position will manage the positions of Reintegration Coordinator, Wellness Program Specialist, and EFAP Coordinator and volunteers
- The Culture and Support Manager will also have responsibility for the creation of an overarching strategy and policies in this area, as well as other business and strategic programs and initiatives such as the Safeguarding and Early Intervention programs
- This position is currently being evaluated through HRM Talent and Rewards and is expected to be posted in the near future
- Once this position is filled, it is expected to alleviate some of the direct reporting demands on the Inspector within the Administration Division and allow them to focus more attention on the Training Section

# Health Specialists

- There are two full-time permanent Health Specialists at HRP
- Health Specialists are responsible for delivering effective case management services to ill, injured, and absent workers
- Health Specialists act as a coordinator in facilitating return to work and will liaise with the Nova Scotia Worker's Compensation Board (WCB), Blue Cross Long-Term Disability, and individual treatment providers
- 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
- Health Specialists also provide support and guidance to workers who may be struggling with illness, injury, or other absence but who want to stay at work, by connecting workers with the services and support they need, based on their individual requirements

# Total HRP Employees on Long-Term Leave or Modified Duties 2015-2025



# 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
- Employees who work in these positions 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 support or treatment, such as counselling or a period of leave
- A private psychologist is contracted to carry out these assessments. A private psychologist also conducts pre-employment assessments of applicants for the Police Science Program, and post-critical incident assessments, where required



# Critical Incident Debriefs & 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 in Critical Incident Debriefs 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 support if they do experience such reactions

# Critical Incident Debriefs & 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

# Respectful & Safe Workplace Working Group

- The Respectful and Safe Workplace (RSW) Working Group is an employee group committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all employees
- The RSW's mandate emphasizes inclusion and diversity
- The group aims to empower those who have experienced or witnessed disrespect, harassment, or bullying, to be part of meaningful change
- The RSW aspires to drive cultural transformation within HRP by reviewing and improving the current complaint process, consulting with senior management and internal leaders to provide informed recommendations, developing an HRP-specific Respectful and Safe Workplace Policy and conducting focus groups and research to better understand employee concerns and experiences
- As its first major endeavor, the RSW hosted an inaugural HRP Respectful and Safe Workplace Symposium on October 27, 2025

# Rainbow Internal Support Network

- The Rainbow Internal Support Network (R-ISON) is an employee-led confidential support group which was established to support employees who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+
- Formally recognized in 2023, the R-ISON has supported 2SLGBTQIA+ employees in several ways; providing advice and support on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues, supporting members through complaints processes, creating and rebuilding relationships with HRM's 2SLGBTQIA+ community, driving internal change with new initiatives, and creating safer spaces and resources for 2SLGBTQIA+ identifying employees
- The R-ISON 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

# Recent Initiatives by the R-ISN

- **Fees waived** - In 2024, HRP waived the fee for people to obtain fingerprinting as part of a name change or gender change process
- **Rainbow Name Tag project** – Employees can wear a name tag with the rainbow symbol, or a rainbow lanyard, to show allyship to the community and colleagues
- **Pride BBQ** – For the last two years, the R-ISN has hosted a Pride BBQ at HRP headquarters during Pride Week. The event is for HRP employees, their families, friends and the public



Photo: HRP name tag with the rainbow symbol

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# Employee Engagement Working Group

- The Employee Engagement Working Group (EEWG) was re-established in January 2024 and consists of committed volunteers who feel passionately about making the workplace better for their colleagues
- The group meets monthly and has more than 20 members, representing several areas of HRP
- 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



# EEWG – Recent Initiatives

- “**The Dispatch**” bi-weekly newsletter launched in November 2024, providing regular organizational and operational updates, such as staffing moves, hires and departures
- “**The Little Things**” pilot allowed employees to apply for one-time funding of up to \$250 to purchase an item which would directly benefit their workplace. Nine projects were approved including a coffee machine for the Prisoner Care Facility, an air fryer for the Patrol Division and an under desk elliptical for IES members who are unable to move from their desk for extended periods of time
- In May 2025, the EEWG conducted a **survey on employee engagement** specific to HRP. The results have generated additional action items and suggestions for initiatives, which the group continues to explore

# Occupational Health and Safety Committee

- The OHS committee is comprised of members from various units/sections of HRP including the integrated Criminal Investigation Division (CID), Patrol, Training and Quartermaster. The committee also includes representation from the Halifax Regional Police Association Union, HRP management and the Manager of Corporate Safety for HRM
- Meetings are held monthly to discuss and address issues/matters of Occupational Health and Safety that have been brought forward by members within the department
- Some items that have been recently discussed include the Armoured Rescue Vehicle, ear protection for members who ride motorcycles or are pistol/carbine instructors, issues of air quality in the police headquarters building and mask requests for CID members when engaged in search warrants



# Chaplaincy Program

- The HRP Chaplaincy Program provides spiritual support to sworn and civilian HRP members. Chaplains answer directly to the Chief of Police and hold the rank of honorary Inspector
- HRP currently has two Chaplains. Their responsibilities include, but are not limited to, visiting divisional offices, going on patrol, attending death notifications, providing resources in areas such as addictions, family counselling, critical incident stress and grief counselling, as well as meeting with members and/or their families about personal issues
- In the coming months, EFAP plans to work in conjunction with the Chaplaincy Program to onboard two additional Chaplains. This would bring the complement of Chaplains available to HRP employees to four

# Therapy Dog Program

- Through a partnership with community volunteers, HRP has participated in a therapy dog program for the last seven years
- Therapy dogs typically visit various HRP offices six times per month to help provide stress relief
- The dogs provide employees with a distraction from the negativity they see on a daily basis and can be therapeutic for some members
- HRP currently has two volunteer therapy dog teams who are both certified through St. John Ambulance



Photo: Austin is one of the dogs that visits HRP as part of the Therapy Dog program

# Wellness Rooms

- HRP currently has four official wellness rooms, located within Central Division, West Division, the Criminal Investigation Division and Integrated Emergency Services (IES)
- A fifth wellness room is currently under construction at the Northbrook Training Center in Dartmouth
- Wellness rooms are meant to be a private space where employees can go if they need a few minutes alone to rest or decompress



Photo: This is the wellness room at HRP headquarters on Gottingen Street

# Psychological First Aid

- In March 2025, several HRP members took part in the Psychological First Aid program
- The two-day course is developed and maintained by the Canadian Red Cross, 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

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# HRM Policies and Resources

- In April 2024, the HRM Respectful Workplace and Whistleblower policies were implemented
- There is also an HRM EFAP:
  - Full-time HRP employees who are non-union or members of the NSGEU 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 issues that may impact their well-being

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# HRM Director of Employee Wellbeing

- The Director of Employee Wellbeing is focused on foundational work guided by a current state assessment of the corporate occupational health and safety program completed in the fall of 2024
  - An internal audit of existing policies and practices is ongoing which highlights current strengths and opportunities compared against the national standard of Canada for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace
- The Director of Employee Wellbeing manages strategic partnerships with the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration to ensure alignment with current programs and legislative requirements
- The Director of Employee Wellbeing meets regularly with the HRP Superintendent of Administration to have regular and open dialogue

# HRM Occupational Health Practitioner

- The Occupational Health Practitioner collaborates with business units to identify injury prevention opportunities, support work connectedness through the promotion of early intervention best practices, provide dedicated coaching to employees and business unit leadership following extended absence from the workplace, support temporary and permanent work accommodations when required, and champion other general health & wellness related programs and benefits provided by HRM

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# Questions?

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