Police Association of Ontario

About the Police Association of Ontario (PAO)

The Police Association of Ontario (PAO) is the recognized voice for over 32,000 sworn officers and civilian police personnel from 46 police associations across Ontario. Dedicated to advocacy, representation, and support, the PAO provides its members with vital resources, education, and a strong presence in legislative and policy discussions. Founded in 1933, the PAO has played a pivotal role in shaping the policing profession in Ontario, advancing safe workplaces, fostering healthy labour relations, and prioritizing the mental health and well-being of its members. For more information, visit www.pao.ca.

Building an Effective Policing System in Ontario: Support, Efficiency, Investment

A WSIB Framework That Supports Mental Health

The Police Association of Ontario (PAO) continues to call for a fair and modern WSIB framework that recognizes the realities of policing and supports all police personnel—sworn and civilian—who experience mental health injuries on the job.

Police work can be very stressful. The ongoing staffing crisis, repeated exposure to trauma, and the impact of weak bail laws have all increased the workload for police, leading to more stress and an elevated risk of developing a mental health injury. Police officers, 9-1-1 communicators, special constables and support staff are all exposed to traumatic events and are far more likely to develop serious mental health injuries like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than the general public.

Ontario's existing presumptive legislation allows police officers and some civilian police personnel who are diagnosed with PTSD to access WSIB mental health benefits more quickly, with the presumption that the injury is work-related. However, the current framework leaves too many vulnerable workers behind. Presumptive coverage should be expanded to include:

1. The expansion of presumptive coverage to all civilian police staff, particularly those who review body camera footage, handle frontline disclosure materials, or whose work exposes them to traumatic material.
2. Currently, the law says that claims for work-related mental health injuries must be made within six months of being diagnosed. But mental health injuries do not always affect someone's ability to work right away. Some police personnel may be diagnosed with PTSD or another work-related mental health injury, but it might not impact their work until much later. Many are also hesitant to file a claim too soon due to the stigma. The time limit to file should start only when the mental health injury actually affects their ability to work, not when they are diagnosed.

Our Recommendation

Expand presumptive WSIB coverage to include all civilian police personnel and adjust the WSIB filing time limit so that it begins only when a mental health injury impairs an employee's ability to work.

Strength Through Support: New Scholarship for Public Safety Officers' Suicide Survivors

The Constable Joe MacDonald Public Safety Officers' Survivors Scholarship Fund was established to honour the sacrifice made by Ontario's public safety officers who die in the line of duty. The fund provides financial assistance to their spouses and children for post-secondary education, covering up to five years of tuition, books, living expenses, and accommodation costs.

While this scholarship rightly acknowledges the ultimate sacrifice made by officers killed in the line of duty, it excludes the families of officers who die by suicide, despite overwhelming evidence that many of these deaths are directly linked to occupational trauma and cumulative mental health injuries sustained through service.

The Ontario Government has made significant progress in recognizing post-traumatic stress injuries (PTSIs) among first responders as work-related occupational injuries through the *Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act*, the creation of the Runnymede Post Traumatic Stress Injury Centre of Excellence for First Responders, and supporting the Ontario Police Suicide Memorial. However, ongoing commitment and proactive steps are essential to ensure continued improvement.

If a psychological injury can be recognized as work-related during an officer's lifetime, then a death by suicide that results from such an injury must also be recognized as a duty-related death.

This addition would modernize and expand support to reflect the current understanding of mental health in public safety professions.

Our Recommendation

That the Government of Ontario create a Public Safety Officers' Suicide Survivors Scholarship Fund to support the spouses and children of public safety officers who have died by suicide, where credible evidence indicates that the death resulted from a duty-related occupational stress injury or trauma.

Transforming the Ontario Police College: Investing in the Future of Policing

The Ontario Police College (OPC) plays a vital role in preparing both new recruits and experienced officers to keep Ontario's communities safe. The government has committed the necessary funding to modernize the OPC's aging infrastructure. This investment recognises the essential function of OPC in equipping both new recruits and experienced officers to effectively ensure the safety and security of our communities.

Built in 1962, the Ontario Police College's facilities and technology have become increasingly outdated, limiting the ability to deliver the advanced, practical, and specialized training that today's highly skilled officers require. Modern policing demands training environments that incorporate realistic simulations, state-of-the-art technology, and up-to-date approaches to mental health crisis response, de-escalation, and community engagement.

With this investment, it is essential that the Police Association of Ontario (PAO) is actively engaged in the planning, consultation, implementation, and decision-making processes, alongside other policing partners.

Our goal is to ensure the new Ontario Police College offers the highest-quality training environment. Modern, advanced facilities and equipment will empower Ontario's police officers—and all our members—to receive the specialized, up-to-date training needed to meet today's complex public safety challenges.

As the Ontario Police College embarks on major upgrades, it is imperative that the Police Association of Ontario is fully integrated into the consultation process. We are prepared to contribute our members' expertise to help shape the college's future—ensuring that new facilities and equipment meet the highest standards and support exceptional police training in Ontario.

Our Recommendation

Ensure the Police Association of Ontario is a meaningful and contributing partner in the consultation, planning, and implementation of the Ontario Police College modernization—so that new facilities, technology, and programs meet the highest standards of training excellence for Ontario's police personnel.

When Seconds Matter: Why Canada Needs a Dedicated Emergency Broadband Network

When emergencies occur, Canada's first responders—police, firefighters, and paramedics—often rely on commercial cellphone networks to communicate. However, these networks can fail during major disasters or outages, leaving first responders unable to coordinate at critical moments. This breakdown in communication puts lives and communities at risk. Establishing a dedicated network for first responders, known as a Public Safety Broadband Network (PSBN), would ensure they always have a secure and dependable way to stay connected.

The success of PSBNs in Peel and Halton Regions has demonstrated that these networks save lives and improve coordination among first responders during emergencies. As today's first responders use more advanced technology and must transmit large amounts of data quickly and securely, they require a network they can trust. Without a unified system serving the province and country, regions may develop incompatible solutions or become reliant on a single provider. The recent nationwide outage of a major phone company revealed the dangers of this dependence, as it left first responders unable to do their jobs and put public safety in jeopardy.

We urge immediate action to establish a national Public Safety Broadband Network that draws on multiple carriers and networks, providing seamless backup if one system fails. The Ontario Government must lead by making this initiative a top priority and work in close partnership with other provinces, territories, and the federal government to deliver a resilient, life-saving communications network for all Canadians.

Our Recommendation

The Ontario Government should prioritize the development of a Public Safety Broadband Network, spearheading collaboration with provincial and territorial partners to get the Federal government to deliver a resilient, life-saving communications system for all Canadians. This network must always ensure reliable and secure connectivity for first responders, including daily operations and emergencies, regardless of commercial network failures.

Scan here to read more about these priorities.

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