

## LEARNING ABOUT PTSD – MEMBER Q AND A

**You are not alone.** Some jobs can't be left at the office. The nature of policing and serving our communities means that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Operational Stress Injuries (OSIs) are very real occupational hazards that face Ontario's police personnel. Just like any other workplace injury, PTSD is something that people carry with them – it has the potential to impact every part of their personal and professional lives. The stigma that surrounds speaking openly about mental health issues and seeking treatment means that, in many cases, trauma is carried for years.

Police personnel are people first – and everyone needs backup.

### WHAT CAUSES POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)?

- PTSD can be caused by a wide range of factors – there is no 'one-size-fits-all' cause to PTSD. Generally, PTSD will develop following exposure to an extremely stressful event, or prolonged exposure to trauma and stress. Witnessing violent acts, even if witnessed remotely, can have a lasting impression on a person's mental well-being. PTSD is also extremely common.
- PTSD will usually appear within [three months](#) of experiencing a traumatic event, but symptoms may not appear for years. Everyone's experience with the illness is different.
- [One in five](#) first responders will develop PTSD in their lifetime, and 28 per cent of all first responders will have suicidal thoughts. Every week, at least one first responder in Canada takes their own life.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF PTSD?

- The most common and distinctive symptom associated with PTSD is re-experiencing the [trauma through flashbacks](#). Flashbacks can take many forms – they can manifest as chronic nightmares, or they can be set off by a trigger during your day-to-day activities. They can sometimes be accompanied by physical sensations, such as pains throughout your body or heavy sweating.
- PTSD can also cause [several other symptoms](#), including 'emotional numbing,' wherein affected individuals distance themselves emotionally from those around them, sometimes by focusing on a specific pursuit, such as their work or a hobby. This can also sometimes take the form of individuals experiencing poor memory, especially in relation to the traumatic event(s). Families and friends may notice that an individual is withdrawn and isolated from them. Those suffering from PTSD can also experience hyper-arousal, where they feel constantly on edge. This can manifest through irritation and anger, insomnia, and difficulty concentrating.
- [PTSD symptoms](#) are not necessarily always prevalent; they can vary in intensity over time and can be set off during times of high stress or when reminded of a traumatic experience.

## HOW COMMON IS PTSD AMONG POLICE PERSONNEL?

- It is very hard to gauge how prevalent PTSD is among police personnel. This is because of the stigma associated with discussing mental health openly and seeking treatment, plus the fact that it can be hard for an individual to even realize that they are suffering from PTSD. However, studies conducted by [Dr. R. Nicholas Carleton](#) from the University of Regina have found that Public Safety Personnel, including police personnel, are constantly exposed to common types of traumatic events as part of their job, and experience a high prevalence of PTSD and other mental health issues as a result.

## WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I'M SUFFERING FROM PTSD?

- If you think you're experiencing symptoms of PTSD, the most important thing that you can do is talk to a mental health professional. A medical diagnosis will open up a number of treatment options that can help you handle your symptoms.
- The PAO has several resources on our website that are dedicated to helping police personnel who are dealing with mental health challenges, as their experiences are unique from people in other professions who may also experience PTSD. These resources include 24/7 anonymous support, peer support networks, and other organizations that provide mental health screening and treatment options. Please visit [www.pao.ca/EveryoneNeedsBackup](http://www.pao.ca/EveryoneNeedsBackup)

## WHAT CAN I DO IF I THINK SOMEONE I KNOW IS SUFFERING FROM PTSD?

- If you believe someone you know is suffering from PTSD, the most important thing that you can do is to provide a [safe and supportive presence](#) and encourage them to seek professional help. However, you should never force someone who is suffering from PTSD to seek treatment or lay down ultimatums.

## IS PTSD TREATABLE? CAN PTSD BE CURED?

- According to the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#), there are several treatment options that are available for PTSD. You should work with your healthcare professional to find the best option, or combination of options, for your case. PTSD can be treated through therapy, through peer support groups, and through medication, or some combination of the three.
- PTSD is a mental illness, which means that it is harder to define a "cure." However, the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#) does state that people can recover from PTSD, though there is no definitive timeline for how long that can take or what treatments are effective for each person.

## HOW WILL A PTSD DIAGNOSIS AFFECT MY JOB AND WORK RELATIONSHIPS?

- In Ontario, all [first responders diagnosed with PTSD](#) are entitled to receive workplace insurance benefits. There is no burden of proof placed on you to show how your work caused that trauma. However, like other workplace insurance benefits claims, you must file a claim within six months of the diagnosis of PTSD by a psychologist or psychiatrist.

## HOW DO I FILE WORKPLACE INSURANCE BENEFITS FOR PTSD?

- Please visit the [Workplace Safety & Insurance Board \(WSIB\)](#) under Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in First Responders and Other Designated workers to review the policy.