

CMHA TO WORK WITH BC FIREFIGHTERS TO BUILD RESILIENT MINDS

CMHA & BCPFFA Join Forces to Roll Out Mental Health Training

Vancouver, B.C. – The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is partnering with the BC Professional Fire Fighters Association (BCPFFA) to offer mental health training to firefighters across the province over the next 18 months.

Approximately 1,200 firefighters will benefit from CMHA's Resilient Minds course, a comprehensive, four-module prevention program designed specifically for first responders to support them in areas of psychological trauma and workplace stress.

"Firefighters across the province are being asked to respond to increasingly complex situations and are experiencing mounting pressures in their work. There is a strong need to ensure that they are prepared for the various situations they face on a daily basis and that they have the necessary skills to bounce back after difficult experiences" explains Bev Gutray, CEO, CMHA BC.

The Resilient Minds course educates first responders about trauma so they know how to recognize signs of illness and so that can get support sooner. The program is unique in that it is co-delivered by a CMHA trainer and a firefighter. The collaborative approach is key to its success. Previous participants in the training described it as some of the best training they had received.

"During their careers fire fighters are exposed to an abundance of horrific and mind numbing scenes that can adversely impact their mental health," says Gord Ditchburn, President, BC Professional Fire Fighters Association. "By partnering with CMHA to train fire fighters, we are creating a much stronger team of individuals who understand our work, the physiological make up of fire fighters and how we function. We're very proud of the work we're doing in helping our members both today and in the long term."

Knowledge about the problems facing firefighters in British Columbia is supported by recent surveys conducted jointly by CMHA and BCPFFA which have revealed the following:

- 95.5% think learning about mental health challenges will be helpful in their work
- 69.5% report that they have not received training on psychological trauma.
- 76% had received no resiliency training.

In 2017, 80 firefighters will be trained to become Resilient Minds trainers. These 'train the trainer' sessions will take place in the Lower Mainland, Prince George and Kelowna. Vancouver Island has already committed to train approximately 40 trainers to serve their region. Each of these trainers will then train a minimum of 15 firefighters in local halls around British Columbia. The BCPFFA and WorksafeBC will be providing funding to support the provincial roll out of this training.

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About CMHA

Founded in 1918, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada. Through a presence in hundreds of neighbourhoods across every province, CMHA provides advocacy and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive. Visit the CMHA BC website at: www.cmha.bc.ca.

Notes to Editor:

About the collaboration that supported the development of the Resilient Minds training:

- CMHA's Vancouver Fraser branch partnered with Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services (VFRS) in fall of 2015 to develop the Resilient Minds program
- A member from the VFRS team, a certified field traumatologist with over 20 years of experience working with individuals in crisis, brought his knowledge and experience to the content
- The program was piloted in 2016-2017. VFRS funded the curriculum research and development process, train-the-trainer program, and workshop materials. WorkSafeBC funded the evaluation process.

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