

EVENT

SUMMARY

From Input to Action:
An Interactive Virtual Town
Hall for the Families of
Public Safety Personnel

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LAUNCHING THE NETWORK

The families of Public Safety Personnel (PSP) serve alongside their members in these high-risk professions. While there is growing awareness of the impact of occupational risks and requirements on the physical and mental health of the PSP, families have rarely been the focus of research or programming. We believe that families matter unequivocally in their own right, with experiences, needs and issues directly and indirectly related to the occupations of the family member. PSP families are often called upon to support the PSP as an extension of the organization, ensuring operational readiness and sustainability. These are important ways in which families are vital contributors to these demanding occupations. For them to be able to successfully support the PSP, they too need support, independent of the family member they are expected to support.

To find ways to better support PSP families, the Families Matter Research Group, in partnership with the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research & Treatment (CIPSRT) and with support of the Medavie Foundation, hosted an Interactive Virtual Town Hall on January 27th, 2022. This event launched the PSP Families Network and sought to explore with families what it means to be “on the job” and what needs to be done to support families in the future.

This summary serves to summarize the discussion highlights, recognizing the priorities of families, and responding with opportunities to work collaboratively to activate and create a network of support to better serve them.

We thank all the families and supporters of families who generously contributed their time, perspectives, experiences, and insights in this launching event.



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Acknowledgements & Appreciation

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We would also like to recognize and thank the large team of researchers and trainees who came together to support families of PSP and the success of this launch event.

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Dr. Heather Hadjistavropoulos	Dr. Rose Ricciardelli
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Shannon Hill	Robyn Shields
Fardous Hosseiny	Dr. Linna Tam-Seto
Cheryl Hymus-Fraser	Jirayu Uttarakorn
Dr. Nick Jones	Ashley Williams
Katy Konyk	

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Attendees

We were fortunate to have representation from many PSP sectors including fire, police, paramedic, communications, and corrections. Participants included current and former PSP, parents, partners, adult children of PSP, and dual-serving PSP family members, as well as service providers, organizational and association leadership, and philanthropic organizations who support PSP families.

Breakout room discussions were moderated by leading Canadian researchers and trainees with an interest in military, Veteran, and Public Safety Personnel and their families.

Discussion Highlights

Small group discussions were candid and insightful, with participants identifying key themes and priorities for future action. Families shared how service affects families across their life course. They highlighted how PSP duties impact the daily rhythms, routines, roles, and well-being of family members. They discussed how education, knowledge of and access to evidence-based resources, programs, and culturally competent service providers focused on families are unavailable or in limited supply.

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Key Themes

Families need knowledge.

Families emphasized the importance of ongoing education so that they are prepared and equipped to deal with potential impacts of the job. Families participating in the event identified two priorities for education – dealing with traumatic exposures (what could happen, what might happen), and communication with loved ones (work-family conflict, loneliness, transitions, role conflict, decision-making, etc.).

Families need to be defined broadly.

A variety of families participated in the event, highlighting the need for the definition of families to be broad and inclusive. Families may include single PSP supported by parents, PSP supporting first and second families, and dual-serving families; a continuum of supports must take into account these variations.

Families need access to a continuum of support.

Families emphasized the importance of access to formal and informal supports that are independent of their PSP, inclusive of families composition, and available regardless of their location. . Also, families underscored the importance of access to a variety of culturally competent service provider options across the continuum of care including prevention, peer support, and tailored treatment. While identifying a number of ongoing needs and issues, spouses and partners seemed to view themselves as secondary, prioritizing their needs for supports that enable them to support their PSP and their children.

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Families need organizational recognition and investment.

Families highlighted the significance of organizational leadership recognition, inclusion, and investment in families. There was indication of a range of ways families are included by leadership within organizations across sectors. Building trust and mechanisms for the PSP to act as a conduit between families and their organizations were identified as areas for development. Evidence of potential expertise within the PSP community was discussed through sharing of innovative, locally generated approaches to including families.



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KEY PRIORITIES

Priority #1. Families-focused Education

- ◇ Families of all variations need access to education so that they are prepared and equipped to respond and adapt to the unique lifestyle dimensions that impact the routines, roles, and rhythms of the family across the life course.
 - › Families are requesting education on how to support their loved ones. This includes how to communicate and how to respond to traumatic exposures, including recognizing the signs and symptoms of operational stress/post traumatic stress and where to go for support.
- ◇ Families need access to a continuum of services which are evidence informed and trauma responsive.

Priority #2. Families-focused Infrastructure

- ◇ Development of a centralized and virtual “one-stop shop” where families from all sectors can go to find information on resources, strategies and tools, programs, and research.
- ◇ Working with families representing rural/urban, single/parent, and equity seeking communities to determine preferences for ways to work collaboratively on building a network of support for families of PSP.
- ◇ Identification of family champions – individuals and organizations that recognize and support families of PSP.

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Priority #3. Families and PSP Organizations

- ◇ Identification of how and where families are included and sustained in PSP organizations and associations.
- ◇ Development of a network through which these mechanisms and processes can be shared, adapted, and adopted.
- ◇ Development of a process for organizations to assess their stage of development and introduce plans and strategies to include and support families.
- ◇ Long-term, all PSP organizations move towards integration of families from onboarding to post-retirement.



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Next Steps

In response to participants' preferences, next steps will include:

- ◇ Development of the Interactive Series: What Matters to Families
 - › Communicating about trauma was the top priority recognized by participants at the recent launch of the Families Matter Research Group. In response, we invite families of PSP to join us as we welcome two therapists who specialize in working with individuals who have been exposed to trauma as well as those who are close to them. Dr. Tim Black, R. Psych., Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology – University of Victoria, National Clinical Co-Advisor – Wounded Warriors Canada, will discuss trauma – what it is and why we need to deal with it, and Dr. Rachel Dekel, Full Professor in the School of Social Work, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, will discuss how trauma can present itself in couples. A moderated question and answer session will follow — participants can safely and anonymously submit questions ahead of time or during the event.
- ◇ Creation of engagement opportunities for families and supporters of families to collaborate with researchers on a variety of projects including:
 - › mapping of applicable resources, programming, supports, and services for families currently available across Canada;
 - › identifying mechanisms and processes of including and supporting families currently being used by organizations across Canada; and
 - › shaping content of PSPNET Families Wellbeing Hub – a family-centred hub offering a continuum of evidence-based and trauma-informed mental health promotion resources and supports.