

Honourable Shirley Bond
Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training

March 21st, 2105

Re: WorkSafe Coverage for First Responders

Minister Bond,

I understand several groups of people representing first responders and emergency service workers have been appealing to your office to review current legislation and policy governing WorkSafe BC's handling of mental health claims from first responders. As a recently retired RCMP officer myself, and now working full-time as a trauma psychologist treating first responders, I can tell you this is a real and pressing issue, with many BC workers and their families being deeply affected.

First responders are at significantly increased risk for Operational Stress Injuries such as PTSD, Depression, Anxiety, Sleep Disturbance, Addictions and many other mental health concerns. Research consistently tells us that first response work can and does damage people. Some very seriously. For some it damages them to the point of suicide. Workers and families are damaged for years. Because we know the added risks to the mental health of first responders we as a province have a moral obligation to care for these workers. This is not to mention a legal obligation. Ensuring our first responders have presumptive coverage should they put in a mental health claim is the start. Ensuring these workers receive early intervention and treatment will help ensure their symptoms do not worsen, and get treated early on. I cannot emphasize enough to you the importance of early intervention and treatment. Sadly I have many first responders who go through horrific trauma on the job, feel the effects, want treatment, but their claims are disputed and now they feel accused of being a fraud. They are left traumatized by their work, then fighting their employer and WorkSafe to get the help they need. This doubly traumatizing to them.

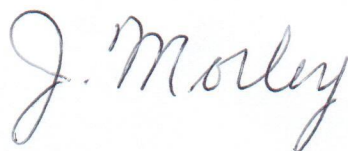
I also think it import that government review psychological help policy at organizations like BC Ambulance. I am an experienced trauma psychologist working almost exclusively with first responders. If a paramedic is feeling symptoms and wants to come and see me do you know how much coverage their employer provides them to work with me? \$100.00. Not enough to cover one session. This is a travesty. While they may have access to an EAP, EAP counsellors by their own admission, are short-term solutions and most are not trained or equipped in working with deeper, complex trauma, or in working with first responder trauma.

People can develop PTSD or other mental health conditions from one single traumatic event. How many traumatic events do you think first responders see in a course of a year or over a career? Hundreds if not thousands. We know trauma is cumulative, and can take a serious toll. We need to provide first responders proper access to the services they need through WorkSafe, extended health coverage, proper CISM and peer support programs, and through effective research and education programs.

You, Minister, are in a position to make change on these issues. You can make a difference in the lives of these workers and their families. I personally think BC should have a provincial strategy to coordinate services, education and treatment for all first responders here in BC. I believe it would actually save the province money in the long run, offer a coordinated vision, and ensure all first responders are treated with respect they deserve in terms of getting the education, early intervention, and any treatment they may need.

I hope you will be mindful and compassionate in addressing this issue and do the right thing for our first responders, and for the people of BC who show great support for their first responders.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. Morley". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name and credentials.

Dr. Jeff Morley
Registered Psychologist (#1577)

Board Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress
American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress