



First responders, PTSD and Bill 2

A FACT SHEET FROM THE OPSEU AMBULANCE DIVISION

What is PTSD?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental illness that can happen when someone experiences one or more traumatic events. A person with PTSD often re-experiences the traumatic event(s) that triggered it.

Symptoms of PTSD include:

- Nightmares and flashbacks to the traumatic event(s)
- Constant nervousness or edginess, being easily startled
- Feeling that something terrible is about to happen
- Feeling detached or numb
- Difficulty concentrating
- Avoidance of things that remind the person suffering from PTSD of the event(s)

What is a “first responder”?

A first responder (also known as “emergency response worker”) is any worker whose job it is to be the first on the scene in response to an emergency. They are commonly described as “those who run in while others are running away.” Three common first-responder jobs are paramedics, police, and firefighters.



How does PTSD affect first responders?

First responders experience traumatic events on a regular basis at work. Not every traumatic event results in PTSD. However, a single traumatic event can cause the condition. In addition, the cumulative effects of exposure to multiple traumatic events can cause PTSD.

PTSD isn't just an inconvenience – it can be debilitating and even deadly:

- **20-30 per cent of paramedics have PTSD symptoms.**
- **39 first responders committed suicide in Canada in 2015.** Approximately 60 per cent of those deaths are related to PTSD, according to the Tema Center Memorial Trust.

Can first responders with PTSD receive WSIB benefits?

It can be difficult for first responders to get Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) benefits for PTSD.

- Currently, WSIB can deny benefits unless workers can prove a direct link between their PTSD and a traumatic event on the job.
- While WSIB may take into account that cumulative traumatic events on the job can also cause PTSD, the burden of proof is on the first responder to show that their condition is work-related, which is often difficult to do.
- This means that when first responders get PTSD on the job, they can be denied WSIB benefits.

What is Bill 2, and how can it help first responders with PTSD?

Bill 2 is a private member's bill put forward by Cheri DiNovo, NDP MPP for Parkdale-High Park. Under the proposed legislation, if an emergency response worker gets PTSD, then WSIB must presume that they got it on the job, unless they can prove otherwise.

So instead of the burden of proof being on the emergency response worker to prove they got PTSD at work for their claim to be approved, WSIB would have to prove that they got PTSD from something that happened outside of work to deny their claim.

Alberta already has legislation that automatically recognizes PTSD as an occupational disease for first responders. In June 2015, Manitoba passed legislation recognizing PTSD and other psychological injuries as work-related for all occupations.

With presumption comes prevention

When PTSD in first responders is presumed to be an occupational disease, employers and government are motivated to focus on prevention measures in order to curb the human and financial cost of PTSD in the workplace.

Who are “emergency response workers” in Bill 2?

Bill 2 currently defines “emergency response workers” as paramedics, police officers and firefighters.



First responders need Bill 2 now. Bill 2 will help those of us who are injured by PTSD on the job to get the help we need from WSIB to heal, and get back to the work we love.

While we support Bill 2 as it now reads, OPSEU paramedics also support the principle that workers in all occupations who experience traumatic events on the job should be presumed to have an occupational disease if they develop PTSD or other psychological injuries.

Please contact your MPP and ask them to support Bill 2.

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