



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

*We are the trusted leader in fire services
by inspiring and influencing a safer Ontario.*

September 26, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs launches new mental health program in support of Chief Fire Officers

[AJAX, ON] The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) extends its heartfelt appreciation to the Ontario government for funding the **O AFC Chief Fire Officer Peer Support Program**. This inaugural funding will support the training of chief fire officers and the roll out of PeerOnCall, a peer support application for fire chiefs across the province. This program enables users to access mental health resources, services, events, news, and peer support, providing fire chiefs the autonomy to manage their own mental health.

As leaders in the fire service, chief officers in Ontario experience significant mental health and occupational stressors and require additional mental health supports. Their work can be isolating, and they make frequent, critical decisions, impacting their mental health and well-being. Accessing peer support from trained fire service leaders who have the same roles and responsibilities will provide an intervention that encourages the sharing of mental health awareness principles, promotes the reduction of mental health stigma, and boosts self-esteem for all chief fire officers.

The O AFC in partnership with researchers, including from Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), provides access to the PeerOnCall application, train and onboard fire chiefs onto the application and conduct an evaluation to understand the effectiveness of peer support. With the support of the province, the O AFC has received the funding to coordinate the delivery of the Peer Support Program for Ontario's Fire Chiefs.

The O AFC commends the government's commitment to supporting chief officer's during their most challenging moments and is confident that these measures will significantly contribute to the safety and effectiveness of fire services across Ontario. The Association also looks forward to continuing its strong partnership with the government and working together to ensure the safety and well-being of over 15 million Ontarians.



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Quote:

“Ontario’s 437 fire departments are led by almost 800 exceptionally dedicated Chief Fire Officers, the majority of whom continue to respond to emergencies on a regular basis and who have served long and distinguished careers. While Chief Fire Officers put programs and measures in place to support the mental health and resiliency of their staff, the O AFC is excited to announce the launch of their Chief Officer Peer Support Program, which will ensure that all Chief Fire Officers from across the province have access to support also. Peer programs, where someone can talk to someone who is in the same role as them, have proved very effective, and I thank the 15 Ontario Fire Chiefs who took the initial training to implement this program. This 24/7 service will ensure that access to support is available to everyone, and that nobody is ever left behind.”

—Deputy Chief Rob Grimwood, President, O AFC

““Mental health services are crucial for our fire chiefs, who face immense stress and challenges in their line of duty. By prioritizing their mental well-being through the O AFC Chief Fire Officer Peer Support Program, we are ensuring they are equipped to lead their teams effectively and continue to be at the forefront of keeping our families, our neighbourhoods, and our communities safe.”

—Ontario Solicitor General Michael Kerzner

“The conversations around mental health in firefighting is growing quickly. Evaluations help us to understand which interventions are most effective and how make them more so. Thank you to O AFC and SOLGEN for seeing the potential and investing in the wellness of chief fire officers.”

— Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli, Professor, Research Chair: Safety, Security, and Wellness, Memorial University of Newfoundland

About us:

Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC): The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) is a non-partisan, non-profit association that represents the Chief Fire Officers of the 437 fire departments in the Province of Ontario. The 437 fire departments are divided into 32 career fire departments, 43 composite fire departments and 362 volunteer fire departments. There are approximately 30,716 firefighters in Ontario including about 18,281 volunteer firefighters, 11,971 career firefighters and 464 part-time firefighters.

These Chief Fire Officers are ultimately responsible, by statute, for the management and delivery of fire, rescue, and emergency response to the 15 million residents of Ontario. We are the trusted advisor to government when it comes to public and firefighter safety. The O AFC supports initiatives designed to improve the fire and life safety of our members and all who reside in Ontario.



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