

Evaluating implementation and impact of PeerOnCall, a mobile health approach to peer support for Canadian Public Safety Personnel

(Stream 2 of the Project: Advancing peer support programming to address PTSD and trauma among Canadian Public Safety Personnel)

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Introduction

- Across Canada, > 350,000 public safety personnel (PSP) face workplace stressors that increase their risk for posttraumatic stress injury^{1,2}
- PSP may avoid accessing mental health supports due to stigma around admitting weakness and reaching out for help³
- Peer support interventions have the potential to decrease stigma and increase treatment-seeking behaviours among PSP
- PeerOnCall and PeerOnCall Support are paired apps developed by, and for, Canadian PSP to reduce barriers to accessing support

Goals

Project Goals

- Scale two apps designed to facilitate peer support by building the technical and administrative infrastructure to support deployment and sustainability
- Build peer support capacity across four sectors (i.e., corrections, fire, paramedics, public safety communications)
- Implement and evaluate the new PeerOnCall and PeerOnCall Support apps in approximately 30 PSP organizations across Canada



PeerOnCall

App Goals

- Reduce barriers to seeking help
- Promote high quality information and support when and where needed (24/7)
- Ensure private, secure connection to peer support
- Enable systematic evaluation of peer support (implementation and impact)

Methods

PeerOnCall App-based peer support designed by and for the Canadian Public Safety community

Frontline support in the palm of your hand

- Get support from a peer, Q&A to find relevant resources, track your wellness, and build an action plan for change
- Get information about the app, explore FAQ, set notifications, adjust your profile
- Browse for tips to cope, articles and peer wisdom videos on a range of topics
- Connect privately to a peer of your choice via phone or text, explore the "check-in" chat, explore resources, and upload photos to your wellness toolbox
- Set and maintain mental wellness goals, and track your progress through use of the app

Tools for Frontline Public Safety Personnel

- A prospective cohort study design to evaluate implementation and impact of the apps will be implemented in approximately 30 organization across four sectors: corrections, fire, paramedics, public safety communications
- Pre/post data, collected over a 3-month implementation period, to assess the impacts of the apps on PSP: outreach to peer support, mental health literacy, and mental distress
- Implementation data will include: app utilization data, interviews with organization champions, surveys with public safety personnel, focus groups with peer support providers, and implementation costs

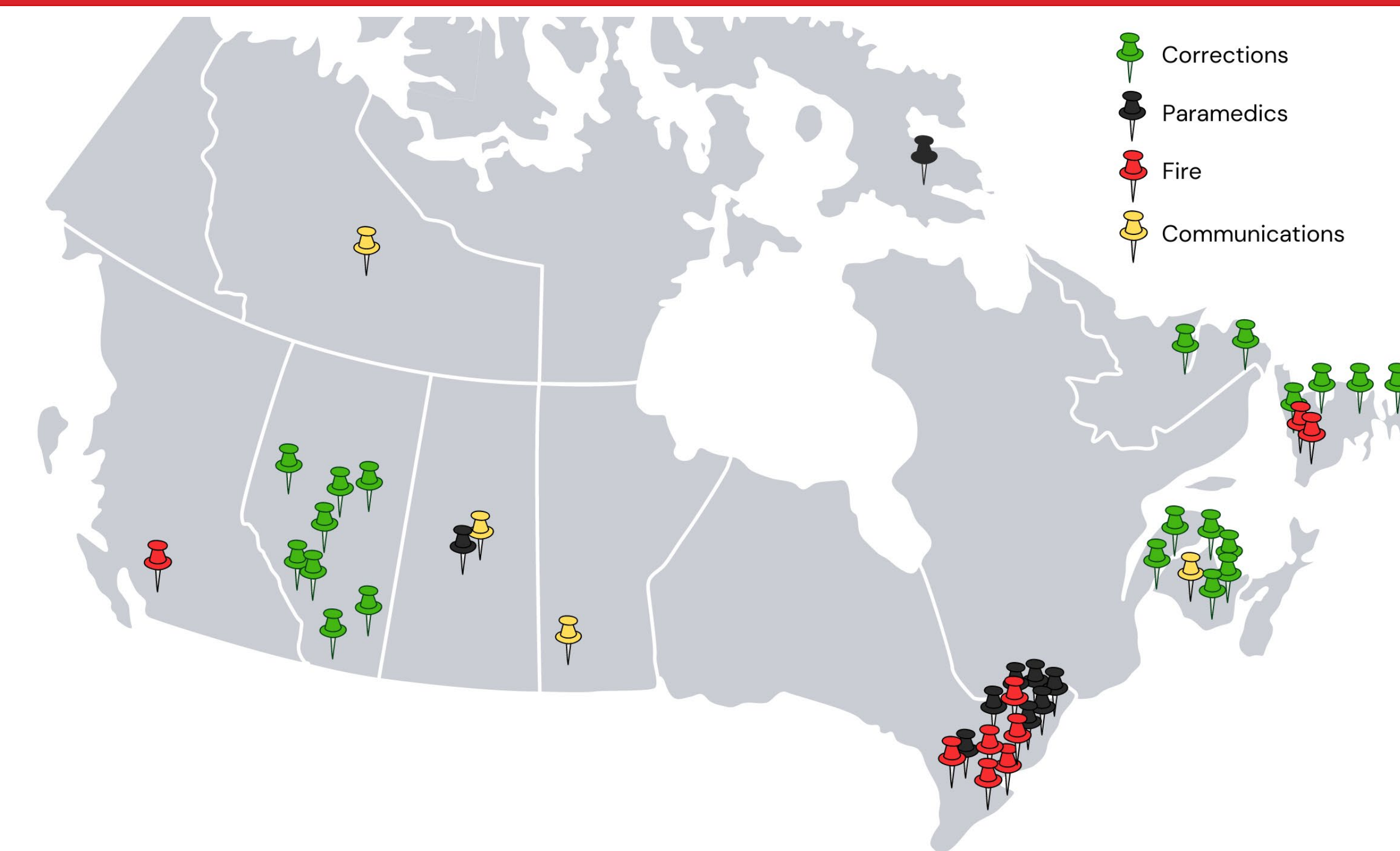
PeerOnCall Support App-based peer support designed by and for the Canadian Public Safety community

Supporting your peers, one connection at a time

- Masked peer connections helps maintain the privacy of those in need
- Connect with peers using talk or text
- Maintain your peer network: call, chat, request feedback, book follow-ups, and file reports
- Set your visibility to your peer network, change your password, and provide feedback on the PeerOnCall Support app
- Useful tips, tools, and resources that peer supporters may find helpful

Tools for Peer Support Providers

PSP Organization Engagement



Preliminary Insights

- Positive responses to the potential value of app-based peer support
- Peer support training is inconsistent & lacking; need to build capacity
- Implementation requires a unique understanding of workplace culture and established connections in the PSP community
- Privacy and data security are primary concerns across all sectors
- Time needed to secure support for implementation at all levels of the organization
- Concerns about long-term sustainability of the app

"I love the anonymity of the app. There is still a stigma you face coming forward. But the ease of picking up your phone and being able to connect with someone by text through the app is good."

"...there is not a lot of talk about peer support within our centre - CISM [Critical Incident Stress Management] is often thought of for medics and fire immediately but not often offered to comms."

"This app is exciting because it is an opportunity for firefighters- both paid and volunteer, to access peer support in an innovative way that is unique to their needs..."

"It is important to speak to another correctional officer; you get the feeling you are speaking to someone who just gets it and they can relate!"

Next Steps

- 3-month implementation trial: March/April – May/June 2023 (Proposed extension to 6 months)
- Generate guidelines for implementation and scaling
- Build a sustainability plan
- Explore models for shared peer support across organizations, and centralized training/support for peers



Acknowledgements



For more information, contact: oncall@mcmaster.ca
Or visit www.oncallapp.ca

References

1. Oliphant, R. (Chair). (2016). Healthy minds, safe communities: supporting our public safety officers through a national strategy for operational stress injuries. Canada: Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security Retrieved from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=8457704andLanguage=E>.
2. Carleton RN, Afifi TO, Turner S, et al. Mental Disorder Symptoms among Public Safety Personnel in Canada. Can J Psychiatry. 2018;63(1):54-64. doi:10.1177/0706743717723825
3. Ricciardelli R, Carleton RN, Mooney T, Cramm H. "Playing the system": Structural factors potentiating mental health stigma, challenging awareness, and creating barriers to care for Canadian public safety personnel. Health Interdiscip J Soc Study Health Illn Med. 2020;24(3):259-278. doi:10.1177/1363459318800167