



# ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

*Leading innovation and excellence in public and life safety*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

JULY 30, 2015

### **Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs announce trainer graduates on leading edge mental health program**

Ajax, ON – The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) today announced the launch of a partnership with the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) which will see the Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) program made available to fire services across Ontario. This program, originally developed by Canada's Department of National Defense, addresses stigmas, and identifies the signs and symptoms of occupational stress injury, based on a comprehensive mental health continuum model.

"The mental health of our firefighters and senior officers is a top priority for the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs. The introduction of the R2MR program will allow the O AFC to take a definitive and proactive step in our commitment to educate, prevent, and support those impacted by occupational stress injury," said Matt Pegg, President O AFC. "The first step in this process will be to train 24 fire service personnel as R2MR trainers. These trainers, in turn, will train other firefighters and chief officers throughout the province. Our goal is to be able to provide each and every firefighter and chief officer in Ontario with these much-needed skills and tools as this program expands and spreads."

The issue of occupational stress injury, including both post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic mental stress (TMS), are very real issues in the fire service. In May 2015, O AFC members passed a resolution at the annual meeting prioritizing mental health training and education for the fire sector. After a comprehensive review, the R2MR program was chosen by the O AFC, based upon the success of this program in both the military and police services.

"For first responders, both physical and mental trauma is an ever-present risk at every emergency incident," said Pegg. "To make things worse, there is often a stigma that prevents emergency responders from recognizing, understanding or seeking help when they are suffering from symptoms of an occupational stress injury. The O AFC is making a substantial investment by bringing the R2MR to Ontario's fire services. We are confident that this important training will help us address this serious issue in the fire service and will improve firefighter health and safety."

The inaugural R2MR train-the-trainer program is expected to be launched in January 2016.

The O AFC represents the chief fire officers of the 454 municipal fire services in Ontario. Our mission is to lead innovation and excellence in public and life safety by inspiring and influencing a safer Ontario.

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