

KEY MESSAGES: Mental health and substance use impacts of COVID-19

PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL (PSP)



THERE ARE BENEFITS AND BARRIERS TO DIGITAL HEALTH FOR MILITARY, VETERANS, AND PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL (PSP)

In trauma-affected populations, digital health tools have many benefits, including increased access and reduced stigma. Digital health can be as effective as in-person delivery of psychotherapeutic interventions for clinically and significantly reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, and anxiety disorders among military, veterans, and PSP.

Facilitators of digital health interventions for these populations include convenience of access (particularly for rural/remote clients), comfort in participating from home (including less stress and stigma), and reduced travel time and missed work.

Barriers to digital health use in these populations are similar to other populations and include privacy concerns and technology issues. Additionally, PSP are generally more hesitant to seek help for mental health concerns compared to the general population, and structural workplace challenges can also interfere with accessing care. Connectivity can cause inequalities in access to care (e.g. access to high quality internet).

MORE RESEARCH IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF FIRST RESPONDERS AND OTHER PSP



There is an urgent need for evidence-based solutions to manage the mental health burden of first responders and other PSP during and following the pandemic.

There is evidence that firefighters and PSP prefer to seek peer support when managing their mental health. Mindfulness, training focused on mental health, and cognitive behavioural therapy may be effective strategies to incorporate into a mental health management program for this population. Although internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy (iCBT) has demonstrated effectiveness, it is not widely available or accessed within this community.

Mental health care should be embedded in all future emergency response planning.

Learn more at <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/52001.html>