

Round Table



Symposium

2025 Session Results

Background

On Saturday, March 1, 2025, the Alberta First Responders Association (AFRA) hosted its inaugural Round Table Symposium, bringing together 50 participants from 32 organizations with a shared goal: improving support for Alberta's First Responders.

This document outlines the key concepts, best practices, and actionable takeaways from this year's discussions.

Key Themes and Practices

1. Health: A Holistic Approach

- The overall health of an individual must consider both their physical and mental health.
- A decline in physical or mental health inevitably impacts the other.
- Physical and mental health must be equally valued and supported in an organization.

2. Health is an ongoing journey and not a destination

- Everyone is different and so is their health journey.
- We all respond differently to physical and mental stress.
- Good health requires the support of ongoing good habits.
- Ongoing training and education play a vital role in fostering strong, lasting health habits.
- Despite any individuals best efforts their health may decline due to injury or disease.
- Just like diet and exercise need to be tailored to each individual, so do effective health plans.

3. Regular Health Assessments are Critical

- Health assessments include physical and mental health checks.

- Standardized annual check-ups and assessments may miss early signs of health decline.
- Assessments can and should include a combination of casual and formal processes to tailor the support system to the needs of an individual's health journey.
- Making self assessment tools available that are free, user friendly and easily accessible encourages individuals to take a proactive approach to their well-being.
- Assessments are not pass or fail tests but rather proactive health monitoring feedback tools.
- Organizational education is required at all levels to foster a culture of ongoing health awareness and support.

4. Injury Assessments Must Be Timely

- Traumatic incidents can cause both physical and mental injuries.
- Injuries can show up days, weeks, or months after a traumatic event.
- Just like health is a personal journey, trauma is a personal response.
- Repeated exposure to trauma can increase the risk of injuries and the frequency of assessments needs to reflect this increased risk.
- Using a Trauma Lens approach acknowledges that trauma can have long-term effects on health.
- Identifying risks is key to providing the appropriate training and tools to avoid or reduce injuries.

5. Early intervention is key

- Assessments play a crucial role in guiding early intervention.
- Early assessment of a decline in health is key to developing a health plan that focuses on diagnosis and then provides the appropriate supports, interventions and treatments.
- Ensuring minor injuries receive timely rest and care is key to prevent escalation.
- Early interventions must focus on addressing the specific challenges or needs of the individual.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of an early intervention requires diagnostic and follow-up evaluations, allowing for ongoing monitoring.
- When symptoms persist or worsen, professional medical and psychological assessments are essential to prescribe the appropriate health plan with the next level of support and treatments in a timely manner.

6. Mandatory Intervention Protocols

- Early intervention is key to improving health outcomes.
- Recovery requires adequate time and care and neglect only delays healing.
- Education is essential to reinforce that injuries or illnesses do not resolve without the proper health plan which can include assessments, support, treatments and/or actionable steps.
- To be truly accessible, interventions and their related health plans can not financially burden the recipient.

7. Family and the First Responder

- Family tends to be our primary support systems.
- Family also tends to be our primary care givers when our health declines.
- The family tends to be among the first impacted when a first responder's health declines.
- Family members need to understand their role in relation to health plans and health providers.
- Organizations must include the family in their training, on boarding and their support systems

to ensure they have the knowledge and resources to assist and support effectively.

8. Organizational Support Mandates

- Easily accessible.
- Timely.
- Does not financially burden the recipient.
- Support is directly proportional to the health needs of the individual.
- Fosters a proactive approach to self-care and health.
- Tailored to the individual and includes both directional and intentional care.
- Includes the family.

9. Organizational Culture & Training

- Ongoing mandatory health training is required for all staff.
- Core health messages and health training should start at recruiting.
- Early and ongoing training can help reduce or prevent trauma related injuries.
- Mandatory implementation of policies and procedures to reinforce wellness principles.
- Leadership and support roles must be educated on sanctuary trauma to foster a safe and supportive environment.
- Support programs should take a collective, community-driven approach, ensuring a health plan tailored to the needs of the individual.

AFRA's Commitment Moving Forward

- Will continue to take a collaborative, collective, community approach to providing mental health support and suicide prevention for Alberta first responders.
- In 2025, will start to build a comprehensive centralized online health support database for the benefit of all organizations and first responders.
- In 2025, will start developing “1st Health for First Responders” educational campaign to share some of the core messages from this year's Symposium. This campaign and the associated support material can be used by all first responder organizations at no cost.
- In March 2026, will hold our 2nd Annual AFRA Round Table Symposium based on the overwhelmingly positive feedback from our first event.

Conclusion

The inaugural AFRA Round Table Symposium was a significant step toward strengthening health supports for Alberta's first responders. The discussions reinforced the need for a holistic, proactive, and community-driven approach to first responder well-being. The AFRA remains committed to leading these efforts through collaboration, education, and accessible resources.

Acknowledgment

The AFRA extends its gratitude to all participants and contributing organizations for shaping this critical dialogue and for their ongoing commitment to supporting Alberta's first responder community. We also extend our gratitude to those involved in the Peer Review process of this document.

1st Health for First Responders



Coming soon... www.1st-Health.ca

