



Public Safety Personnel

# The Role of Peer Support in Prevention, Recovery and Return to Work

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# Disclosure of Financial Support

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  - Not applicable

# Faculty/Presenter Disclosure

- **Faculty:** Staff Sergeant Beth Milliard, PhD
- **Relationships with financial sponsors:**
  - **Grants/Research Support:** Not applicable
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  - **Other:** Employee of York Regional Police

# Mitigating Potential Bias

- The information presented in this program is based on recent information that is explicitly “evidence-based”.
- This Program and its material is peer reviewed and all the recommendations involving clinical medicine are based on evidence that is accepted within the profession; and all scientific research referred to, reported, or used in this CE/CPD activity in support or justification of patient care recommendations conforms to the generally accepted standards



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# Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the difference between formal and informal peer support for public safety personnel (PSP)
2. Describe the goals of peer support for PSP
3. Identify the desired characteristics and role of a peer supporter for PSP

# Presenter Info



# Introduction

- Peer support is one of the most popular interventions among PSP organizations
- Peer support is more than just a “conversation”
- Indispensable tool for helping PSP learn about themselves & importance of early help-seeking
- Peer support in a police organization mainly comes from “organizational stressors”
- The effectiveness of peer support programs varies widely depending on program fidelity
- *Mental Health Framework - more research needed into peer support for PSP - CIPSRT*

# Review Questions

1. Distinguish informal vs. formal peer support within a PSP organization.
2. Identify the skills and characteristics of a peer supporter and how they would best support the client in their mental health journey.
3. What is one of the key components of PSP peer supporters?

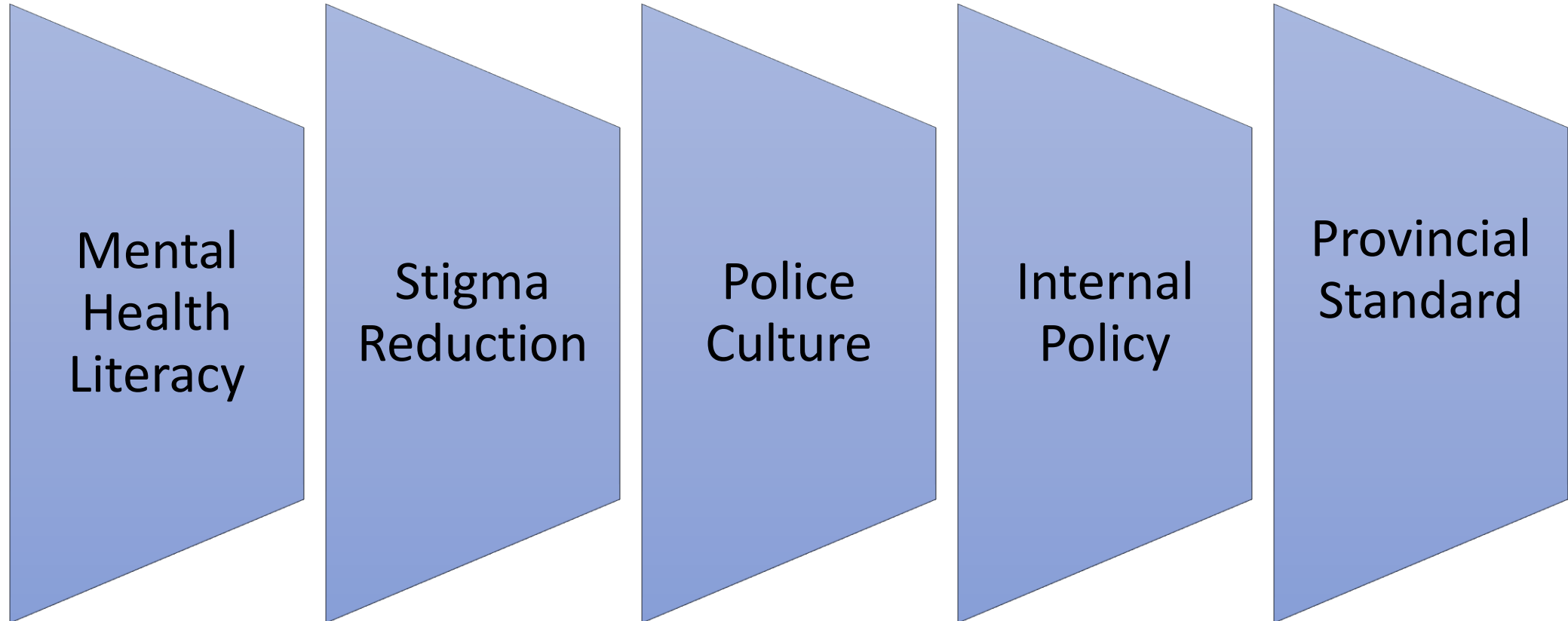


# Why Peer Support for PSP?

- A safe space for PSP to share their experiences with other PSP who can relate
- Confidential outlet for PSP to speak free from judgement, a means of sharing confidential information
- Validation that PSP are not alone and no shame in seeking help
- Lived experience - 2 forms

Milliard, B. (2021). Stigma Of Mental Illness For First Responders. In: Dobson, K. & Stuart, H. (Eds) The Stigma Of Mental Illness. Oxford University Press.

# Key Themes



Milliard, Beth. "Utilization and impact of peer-support programs on police officers' mental health." *Frontiers in psychology* (2020): 1686.

# Peer Support – “Organizational Stressors”

- Promotional Process
- Police Culture
- Bullying
- Harassment
- Favouritism
- Unsupportive Supervisors
- Authoritative Supervisors
- Toxic Work Environments

Milliard, B. (2023). One Way To Address Stigma: Peer Support For Public Safety Personnel (PSP). Justice Report, Vol. 38. No.2. Canadian Journal Of Criminology & Criminal Justice.

# Informal versus Formal Peer Support

- Informal – day to day conversations, from anyone
- Formal – members are part of an established peer support program
- Difference – training, education, reporting structure, when to refer, internal policy, selection
- Issue – no provincial or national standard on peer support for PSP, every program is different

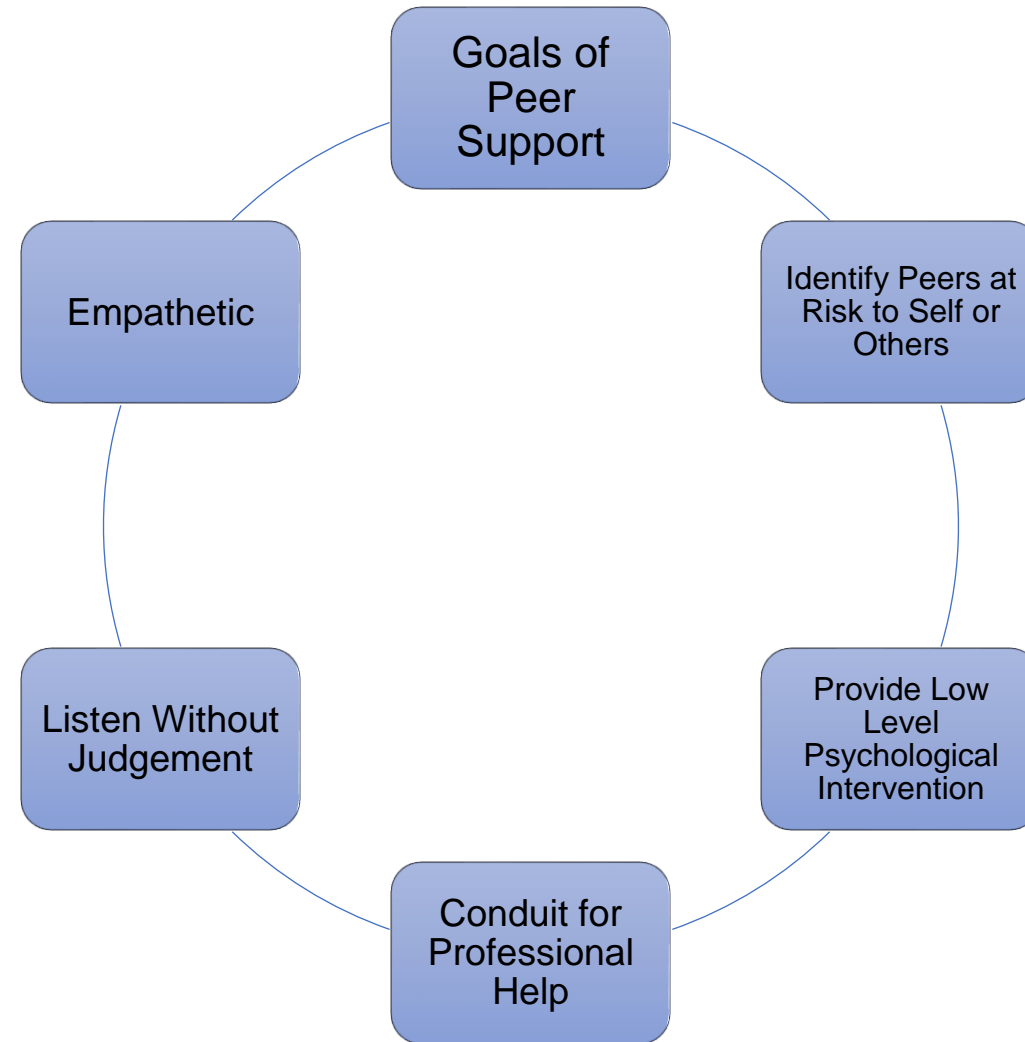
# Characteristics of Peer Supporters

- **Credible**
- Diversity
- Lived experience
- Empathetic
- Active listener
- Overall “good person”

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# Key Components of Peer Support

- **Training**
- Selection & Support
- Skills, Abilities & Lived Experience
- Ethical Practice
- Nuances specific to each profession



# The Role of Peer Supporters

- **TO SUPPORT AND NOT TO ADVOCATE**
- *Proactive support* before something happens (continuous check-ins during a member's shift, following a block, address organizational, operational and personal stressors)
- *Maintenance support* – significant incident, member is away from the organization, constant check-ins so they don't feel disconnected from the organization, a liaison with the member and the organization
- *Return to work support* – peer attending meetings, engaged in the re-integration process & how best to support the peer upon return and through their recovery



# Quotes from Peer Supporters

- *Officer 2: Stress from members is more than just the job. [It includes] everything from [the] promotional process, [to] bullying, [to] internal politics, [to] compassion fatigue.*
- *Officer 9: I've had to peer-support two members that were being bullied [.] [I] gave them ideas of how to work around it, [and] gave feedback to help them through it.*
- *Officer 7: I peer-supported a member who was bullied [.] I connected them with a mental health professional to give them tools [.] I later found out from the member [that they] had contemplated taking their life [.] [I was] told by the member that receiving help (peer and professional) had saved them.*

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# Take home messages

1. Peer support for PSP is more than a conversation and is one of the most popular interventions among PSP organizations.
2. The main role of a peer supporter of PSP is to support members and not to advocate.
3. Peers who are involved in formal peer support programs are an important part of a member's mental health journey.

# References

- Milliard, B. (2023). One Way To Address Stigma: Peer Support For Public Safety Personnel (PSP). Justice Report, Vol. 38. No.2. Canadian Journal Of Criminology & Criminal Justice.
- Milliard, B. (2021). Stigma Of Mental Illness For First Responders. In: Dobson, K. & Stuart, H. (Eds) The Stigma Of Mental Illness. Oxford University Press.
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# Questions ?

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