



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS  
*Fire Chiefs on the Hill, November 2018*

## **Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2019 Budget**

### **Ensuring Canada's Competitiveness by Mastering Public Safety Risks**

**By: The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs**

## List of Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** *That the government and the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment adjust the planned use of the \$30M in funding to:*
  - (1) *adapt and implement internet based cognitive behaviour therapy so that it is nationally available to first responders (rather than develop and pilot);*
  - (2) *adapt and test innovative delivery models that expedite access to care for first responders (rather than study the incidence);*
  - (3) *use a portion of the funds to implement and test a resilience training program in all fire departments.*
- **Recommendation 2:** *That the government provide funding in the amount of \$50M per year for a fire sector research and innovation program to develop and test hazard responses to social and building code innovations.*
- **Recommendation 3:** *That the government implement continued ongoing funding for all HUSAR teams and ensure national deployment strategies are in place.*
- **Recommendation 4:** *That the government reinstate its Joint Emergency Preparedness Program to enhance regional capacity for all types of emergencies.*
- **Recommendation 5:** *The federal government implement a national fire advisor secretariat to provide substantive expertise in linking federal fire related initiatives.*

## Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs

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## Ensuring Canada's Competitiveness by Mastering Public Safety Risks

(References appear on the CAFC website)

No country is competitive if its physical infrastructure is at risk. Notwithstanding the human and social costs; we have all seen the economic consequences of floods; wildfires; building collapses; and the toll that resulting mental health issues take on the productivity of victims and responders. While we may not be able to escape vulnerability, we can often face, embrace, and master it, to keep Canadians safe, strengthen the economy; and advance our position on the world stage.

First, we would like to acknowledge the many important federal initiatives serving our sector (1). We thank you for your leadership and the opportunity to present these recommendations.

### Optimize use of Budget 2018's \$30M for Public Safety Mental Health

Budget 2018 proposed to invest \$10 million over 5 years, starting this year for Public Safety Canada and the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT) to *develop* an Internet-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy *pilot* as a means of providing greater access to care and treatment for public safety officers across Canada, particularly those in rural and remote communities.

We support the use of research levers to improve access to care provided it is done in an applied manner. We also support internet based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (ICBT). It has proven effective and accessible in many situations. However, at least 13 ICBT models have already been developed and evaluated (2). Pilot projects are known to be shelved at the end of pilot funding (3). We ask that the project specifications be revised *from* developing and pilot testing, *to* adapting, evaluating and implementing, in order to ensure that the \$10M reaches as many first responders as possible.

The Government also proposed to provide \$20 million over five years to support a new national research consortium between the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment. This new consortium will work to address *the incidence of post-traumatic stress injuries* among public safety officers. We again commend use of the levers of health research to improve care.

However, we ask that the intention be revised from *studying the incidence* to *studying the implementation of innovations* that could help first responders nationally. We respectfully disagree that more research to identify the problem is necessary. First responders succumb to mental health injuries. The government correctly acknowledged this in its specifications of the Memorial Grant Program for first responders. Many interventions have already been developed. We need to use the funding for implementation science projects that make these interventions accessible in new, innovative, cost effective and appropriate ways to a larger number of responders.

Over the last year, we saw a step in the right direction. We had asked the Federal Government for \$2.5M to implement the Road to Mental Health Readiness (R2MR) Program or an equivalent mental health resilience/readiness training program across all fire departments (4). The program and training were being purchased by fire departments from the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

The Department of National Defence (DND) that had developed a version of the same program for its own forces allocated distribution rights of its R2MR program to CIPSRT. A pilot study was funded by PSC at CIPSRT to train 10 fire sector master trainers in the RM2MR program. The pilot study was completed. It showed that providing the program for free is not sufficient. The Master Trainers need to be able to get to others and their positions backfilled when they do. The type of work that the Mental Health Commission was doing to facilitate the training is necessary, however particularly in a country where the majority of fire departments already rely heavily on volunteers and fundraising, we ask that the departments be relieved from purchase costs going forward.

We would therefore ask that from the \$20M allocated, that CIPSRT, CIHR, DND and the Mental Health Commission of Canada work together to find ways to implement and evaluate R2MR or an equivalent resilience training for all fire departments in the country. The federal government has the people, funding, mechanisms and levers. We are asking for the political will to make it happen.

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  - (1) *adapt and implement internet based cognitive behaviour therapy so that it is nationally available to first responders (rather than develop and pilot);*
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  - (3) *use a portion of the funds to implement and test a resilience training program in all fire departments.*

## **Building Codes Fire Safety, Research, Innovation and Education Fund**

The fire service, by necessity, is an early adapter and first responder to all anticipated consequences of innovation, particularly when it pertains to the fire safety of buildings. We often develop experience in what needs to be changed well before the data is generated. Unfortunately, these very real experiences constitute anecdote in an evidence informed system (5). Fire departments for the most part simply don't have the mandates or resources to generate research grade evidence. As a sector, we are seeking ways to partner with researchers to overcome this issue (6).

However, we need a more reliable and regular mechanism to respond to innovation. We ask the federal government for a research and innovation fund directed by the fire sector to test and develop fire hazard responses to building code innovations (7). Here are examples of how it could be used.

1. Canada is home to one of the world's tallest mass timber construction buildings (8). Once source posits there are only 28 tall wood buildings in the world (9). Tall wood building construction will be part of the national model building code. Whether these buildings are truly as safe as traditional construction is actually unknown to us. What we know is that there will be more. We know some departments are better resourced to handle these than others. We know this where we will send our men and women in the event of disaster. As such, we are asking the federal government to build on Canada's leadership in this area by expanding our knowledge and capacity for safety hazards identification and response. This could be done through a research and innovation fund.
2. The value of insured home losses in Canada exceeded \$4B in 2016 (10). The homes we are building, once ignited, are reaching flash points and ignition temperatures faster than older homes. Even if residents escape, the property is often unsalvageable. Implementing sprinkler systems will avoid economic loss and grief. To incent homebuilders, a tax rebate for homebuilders installing sprinklers in new construction could be implemented. As this may require a cost-benefit study and socialization, resources from a research and innovation fund could be used.
3. The legalization of Cannabis will bring building code and fire department considerations that are not currently reflected in the regulations. Canada has the opportunity to explore the lessons learned from our colleagues in Colorado and at the National Fire Protection Agency (11) to ensure we respond safely.

**Recommendation 2:** *That the government provide funding in the amount of \$50M per year for a fire sector research and innovation program to develop and test hazard responses to social and building code innovations.*

## **National Deployment and Sustainability of Heavy Urban Search and Rescue**

We commend the federal government for providing \$3.1 million annually and ongoing to establish the Heavy Urban Search and Rescue Program. We also commend its commitment to re-instating funding to HUSAR Task Forces in Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary, and Manitoba, as well as developing HUSAR capacity in Halifax and Montreal. We'd like to see stable and predictable funding after the initial five years moving forward.

Canada also needs to be able to facilitate the deployment of HUSAR teams from one part of the country to another when needed. Public Safety Canada's work looking at how adapting The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) standards help is a step in the right direction. By using a common standard across the country, we facilitate communication and planning.

At this point in time however, different HUSAR teams have different understandings of what our immediate capacity is to deploy from one part of the country to another. Do we currently have the appropriate communications, operations, and governance models? Can we do so as rapidly and as efficiently as we do for forest fires? We ask the federal

government explore this issue and ensure that communication is provided nationally to all fire departments in the country. One model that some HUSAR teams would encourage the federal government to consider is its success Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre which facilitates the necessary for forest fires.

***Recommendation 3:*** *That the government implement continued ongoing funding for all HUSAR teams and ensure national deployment strategies are in place.*

### **Joint Emergency Preparedness Program**

The Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP) was established in October 1980 to enhance capacity to respond to all types of emergencies and to enhance the resiliency of critical infrastructure (12). This program offered matched funding for equipment, training, and other infrastructure needed by the country's fire departments. It was an especially important program because of the number of volunteer departments in this country. This program was terminated for reasons that are unclear to us. The issue may have been a lack of applicants because of the matching funding component. The sector is now better positioned to negotiate and prepare such applications. We would ask that you re-instate this program. It was an important innovation and had the capacity to provide meaningful and concrete assistance to all fire departments.

***Recommendation 4:*** *That the government reinstate its Joint Emergency Preparedness Program to enhance regional capacity to respond to all types of emergencies.*

### **Concluding Remarks**

Our submission speaks to the important work the government is championing in our sector. Our final recommendation is to link these initiatives through a national fire advisor secretariat. CAFC would be willing to help provide this role with the appropriate funding and in collaboration of the provincial associations and national affiliate associations that form our national advisory council. There may also be other models.

***Recommendation 5:*** *The federal government implement a national fire advisor secretariat to provide substantive expertise in linking federal fire related initiatives.*