
For Information

REPORT TITLE: External Violence Against Paramedics Update

FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on the External Violence Against Paramedics program since its launch in 2019.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Paramedic exposure to any form of violence, threat to their physical safety or actual assault, whether a singular incident or cumulatively is a serious concern.
 - On February 1, 2021, the External Violence Incident Report was launched which provides a tool to report violence incidences.
 - Paramedics exposed to acts of violence, are at risk of potentially significant physical and psychological harm including operational stress injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and suicide.
 - One Peel paramedic reports a form of violence every 18 hours, reports of a paramedic physically or sexually assaulted occurs every 46 hours and is physically injured due to assault occurs every 9 days.
 - The documented cases of violence by paramedics identifies a significant need in building paramedics' knowledge and skill in the areas of threat awareness, assessment, management, and self-defense. Funding to support training paramedics will be requested as part of the 2024 budget.
 - On June 14, 2023, Paramedic Services received national recognition by receiving the Paramedic Chiefs of Canada Award of Excellence for a Quality Workplace due to the External Violence Against Paramedics program.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

In 2019, Peel Regional Paramedic Services launched a workgroup, External Violence Against Paramedics (EVAP). The workgroup's mandate was to create and implement strategies to mitigate the external violence experienced by paramedics. This working group surveyed Peel paramedics to gain insight about their experiences with workplace violence, the impact of singular or cumulative incidents, and their reporting practices. Survey results were documented in the report: "Violence, in fact, is not part of the job" A Qualitative study on Paramedic Experiences with Workplace Violence. Mausz J., Johnston M., 2019.

Survey results indicated that Peel paramedics had regularly been exposed to some or multiple forms of violence (e.g., verbal abuse, physical assault, sexual harassment)

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throughout their career. Survey findings also indicated that an organizational culture of tacit or implied acceptance of violence as “part of the job” existed due to several factors such as frequency of occurrence, lack of a reporting mechanism, and no consequence for perpetrators. These factors combined contribute to a psychologically harmful culture resulting in a normalization of paramedic exposure to violence leading them to believe that it is “part of the job.”

In response to the study results and alignment with other local research on violence in paramedicine, EVAP recommended several strategies to address organizational culture, improve reporting, and mitigate violence experienced by paramedics. These strategies were developed to create a psychologically and physically safer workplace for Peel paramedics. These prevention strategies were supported, endorsed, and resolved by Council as documented in council report from the Commissioner of Health, listed on the November 14, 2019 Regional Council agenda titled “Violence Prevention in Paramedic Services”, and in the report from the Commissioner of Health, as listed on the November 12, 2020 Regional Council agenda titled “Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action”.

In the past four years, the EVAP program has been instrumental in developing and implementing the recommended prevention strategies needed to mitigate external violence experienced by paramedics. The program has improved organizational culture that previously normalized exposure to violence through developing and launching the Zero Tolerance for Violence from the Public Policy and External Violence Incident Report (EVIR).

2. Accomplishments of the EVAP Program

Since the inception of the EVAP workgroup, the program and its activities have been embedded into Peel Paramedics organizational structure. The following list showcases the EVAP program’s accomplishments:

a) Public Awareness and Education Campaigns

- i. Public Awareness Campaign, “It’s Not Normal” (Appendix I)
- ii. Zero Tolerance Signage in Ambulances
- iii. Harassing Client Letter Process, created and implemented within PRPS (Appendix II)

b) Safety Equipment

- i. Spit Hoods and Soft Restraints

c) Policy

- i. Zero Tolerance for Violence from the Public Policy and Position Statement (Appendix III)

d) External Violence Incident Report

e) Collaboration with Local Partners

- i. **Collaboration with Peel Regional Police** Paramedic Services has continued to strengthen the partnership with Peel Regional Police (PRP). Collaborating over the past two years on the creation of an inter-operability workgroup. The workgroup meets and communicates regularly regarding frontline matters for both organizations such as clarity in roles, responsibilities, limitations, and liabilities. Addressing new, emergent frontline issues and problem solving to reduce risk for paramedics, police, and the community. Both organizations have committed to joint training to develop a more collaborative response to 9-1-1 calls. Our respective organizations participate in recruit orientations and panels

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of PRP subject matter experts attend PRPS management and promotional meetings. We continue to make new connections within our respective organizations to find ways to expand our collaboration.

f) **Collaboration with Central Ambulance Communication Center and Community Health Partners**

Paramedic Services is working with Ministry of Health operated Mississauga Central Ambulance Communication Centre to support a structured, collaborative approach to problem solving issues related to paramedic safety. Identified areas for improvement include risk awareness, 10-2000 (emergency alarm) procedures, and an improved system for flagging people and addresses identified as high risk. As a result of EVIR documentation, we have identified that paramedics are at significant risk of experiencing violent incidents while at hospitals. Paramedic Services is working with Community Health Partners to raise awareness. Paramedic Services has and will continue to recommend prevention strategies to improve paramedic safety, especially while on off-load delay.

3. Advocacy for Legislative and Policy Changes Following the November 12, 2020, council report titled “Eliminating Violence Against Paramedics – A Call to Action” the Region of Peel advocated federally and provincially for legislative and policy changes which would increase protections for Paramedics. On May 4, 2023, Honorable Justice Minister David Lametti received a letter from Peel that supported Bill C-321, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code*, (assaults against healthcare professionals and first responders). This advocacy effort is one step closer to making assaults against paramedics an aggravating factor during sentencing.

4. Culture Change As a result of the EVAP programs comprehensive strategy and actions to address workplace violence, the culture of Paramedic Services has positively shifted. The EVAP program worked to address an organizational and professional culture which normalized violence as ‘part of the job.’ The change in culture is evidenced not only by paramedic’s willingness to report violence, but also their openness in speaking about incidents and the resulting impact, professionally and personally. This openness has been seen by 48 per cent of the active paramedic workforce filing violence reports from January 2021- March 2023.

a) **External Violence Incident Report**

To address barriers and a culture that previously discouraged paramedics from reporting violence, Paramedic Services developed the EVIR. This first of its kind tool was developed through a paramedic lens. It is compliant with Ministry of Health Documentation Standards and is multi-functional in capturing information on Incident Reporting, Hazard Flagging and cumulative exposure while facilitating an improved Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) reporting. The EVIR ultimately provides Paramedic Services with information and data to address high risk trends, mitigate specific risks, and generates data for analysis to inform and improve policy, procedure, process, and training.

5. Program Evaluation A recent EVAP program evaluation was conducted during the 2022-2023 Continuing Service Education. The objectives were to:

- Estimate paramedics’ willingness to report violence since introduction of the EVIR
- Identify factors which influence a paramedics decision to report violent incidents
- Gather paramedic feedback on program initiatives

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Evaluation results found that for those survey participants who had experienced violence since the launch of the EVIR, 83 per cent indicated that they documented incidents at least “some of the time”. Based on their reporting experience, 86 per cent of participants said that they would report similar incidents in the future. This result illustrates that Peel paramedics’ willingness to report violence has more than doubled since the 2019 study.

- 6. Provincial and National Recognition of EVAP** Paramedic Services is a provincial and national leader in violence prevention through the development of policy, process, strategy, and reporting practices. The EVAP program has influenced and lead change in culture and reporting practices as evident by a province wide adoption of the EVAP program and the EVIR. Specifically, 36 Ontario Paramedic Organizations have contacted Paramedic Services interested and requesting assistance in implementing components or adopting the entire EVAP program. Additionally, approximately 50 per cent of Ontario Paramedic Organizations have adopted use of the EVIR. Further, 15 Ontario Paramedic Organizations have signed a data share agreement with the Region of Peel contributing to Paramedic Services led research on violence in paramedicine.

a) Awards

On June 14, 2023, Paramedic Services received national recognition by receiving the Paramedic Chiefs of Canada Award of Excellence for a Quality Workplace due to the EVAP program. This award recognizes a process or program that shows “extraordinary achievement” in creating a quality workplace that is productive, safe, enables excellence in care, promotes trust between staff and management and allows paramedics to operate at peak performance.

b) Research Publication

Paramedic Services continues to be leader in research on the topic of violence in paramedicine, addressing organizational culture, and the development of a violence reporting process. Additionally, Paramedic Services research and analysis about circumstance surrounding violence encounters is first of its kind, both nationally and internationally. The research completed by Paramedic Services have been published in peer reviewed journals, presented at conferences, and received media interest and interviews.

7. Research Finding from the EVAP Program

Following the implementation of EVIR, from February 1, 2021, to January 31, 2023, 48 per cent of active paramedic workforce filed 941 violence reports. The completion of reported violence incidences captured through EVIR, illustrate the prevalence of violence experienced by Peel Paramedics. A copy of this document can be provided through the Office of the Regional Clerk. The following is a breakdown of violence circumstances identified in EVIR:

a) Types of Violence:

- Verbal Abuse (including offensive language): 38 per cent (368 reports)
- Assault (using force to cause or attempt to cause harm): 18 per cent (170 reports)
- Threats (verbal comments or gestures meant to intimidate): 4 per cent (39 reports)
- Sexual harassment (lewd comments, propositions, and looks): 2 per cent (20 reports)
- Sexual Assault (groping around the buttocks, breasts, or genitals): 1 per cent (10 reports)

This data indicates 36 per cent of reports documented more than one type of violence occurred and 41 per cent of reports documented indicated some form of physical or sexual assault occurred either alone or in combination with other forms of violence.

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Table 1 details the characteristics of the violence reported. The percentage indicates the reporting amount of a particular characteristics.

Table 1: Violence Characteristics, 2021-2023*

		% of Reports
Violence Themes	Sexism	30%
	Racism	16%
	Homophobia	3%
Violence Location	At Scene	49%
	In Transit	9%
	At Hospital	12%
	Combination of one or more of the above	38%
Violence Risk Factors	Mental Health or Intoxication (alcohol or drugs)	45% in Violence Reports
	Mental Health or Intoxication (alcohol or drugs):	59% in Assaults

*Between February 1, 2021 - January 31, 2023

8. Psychological Health and Safety The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety includes 15 factors that contribute to a psychologically safe work environment. The factor: *protection of physical safety*, focuses on an environment that is free from actual, attempted or threatened workplace violence. This factor is foundational to supporting the EVAP program. Data collected from EVIR has shown that in addition to paramedics being physically harmed, 23 per cent (211 paramedics who filed a report) indicated having been “emotionally impacted” because of the violence and 19 per cent (174 paramedics) stating “I’m uncertain” about the emotional impact of the event. Therefore, it is important that a workplace protects psychological and emotional well-being of workers through ensuring they are protected from hazards and risks related to their physical environment. One strategy is ensuring workers get sufficient training to perform their work safely.

9. The EVAP Program Moving Forward Despite the maturity and continued growth of the EVAP program and implemented strategies, Peel paramedics continue to be exposed to incidents of violence at an alarmingly high rate. Over 941 incidents of violence have been reported since February 1, 2021. Singular or cumulative exposure to incidents have left paramedics emotionally impacted, psychologically harmed, or physical injured. There have been several critical incidents that resulted in serious physical and psychological injury, resulting in WSIB claims for time lost and medical care.

EVIR reports, incident debriefs, and new (Peel specific) research on violence in paramedicine make evident that paramedics have not been provided with sufficient training to respond to potentially violent events. Paramedics do not have the knowledge and skills required to manage situations they will inevitably find themselves in, unfortunately by nature of their job. Unless further training is provided, continued exposure to incidents of violence is likely.

a) Conflict Avoidance and Threat Management Training

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Training in conflict avoidance and threat management is fundamental to the safety of paramedics and continued success of the EVAP program. Early recognition of risk, risk assessment, and threat management including tactile communication and disengagement will help paramedics avoid or manage situations which could result in psychological or physical harm. Providing paramedics with additional knowledge and skills, teaching them to leverage existing policy, legal authorities, and the EVAP program initiatives empowers and enables them to make decisions that would keep them safe.

- b) Research on Paramedic Behaviours with Violent Encounters** In a 2021 study, Emergency Medical Service (EMS) professionals were evaluated on their de-escalation and escape of unsafe situations in four realistic medical scenarios: possible overdose, intoxicated person, aggressive family member and domestic violence. Only 29 per cent of paramedics made an adequate attempt to de-escalate and escape the unsafe scene. As years of service (experience) increased, the likelihood the EMT or paramedic escaped the unsafe scene decreased. The study determined that there was a common need for education and training amongst all EMS personal.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Without additional knowledge and skill, paramedics will continue to experience violence resulting in their psychological and physical safety being threatened. Continued exposure to violent incidents creates an operational risk for Paramedic Services due to the potential challenges (i.e., operational stress injuries) for providing care to clients. Providing Conflict Avoidance and Threat Management Training is an important strategy to support paramedics through mitigating or reducing future incidents of external workplace violence.

BILL 112 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of Bill 112, *The Hazel McCallion Act* (Peel Dissolution), poses challenges for Paramedic Services to continue to deliver great pre-hospital care to the Peel community. The dissolution of Peel brings uncertainty of paramedics' ambulance governing or ambulance operator entity. Although paramedics will continue to be needed, concerns on role clarity and the responsibility of paramedics within a regional geographic boundary are unclear. Bill 112 brings additional uncertainty for paramedics on:

- Being responsible for delivering quality pre-hospital and community care in Peel;
- Continuing to manage service pressures related to population growth and aging; and
- Prioritizing and building on measures to help improve broader health system performance.

Currently, language written in Bill 112, does not mention changes for Paramedic Services, but the dissolution of Peel poses a question on the governing body or ambulance operator entity that will continue to support and advocate for paramedics.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A one-time cost of \$1.25 million is needed to resource the Conflict Avoidance and Threat Management training for Peel paramedics. This ask will be brought forward in the 2024 budget request process.

CONCLUSION

Despite the array of accomplishments achieved through the EVAP program, Paramedics continue to experience violence. To ensure that paramedics are more equipped to identify,

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assess, and manage risk situations a training program is essential to support them in avoiding situations and incidents that can cause psychological or physical harm.

APPENDICES

Appendix I - Public Awareness Campaign, "It's Not Normal"

Appendix II - Harassing Client Letter Process

Appendix III - PRPS Position Statement - Violence Against Paramedics Nov 2020



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