# Item No. 2

**Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality**
**March 2, 2026**

**TO:** Chair Greg O'Malley and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality

**SUBMITTED BY:** Bill Moore, Commissioner of Public Safety

**DATE:** February 13, 2026

**SUBJECT:** **HRM Police update on local progress against Progress Monitoring Committee (PMC) themes**

## INFORMATION REPORT

## ORIGIN

August 7, 2024, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality (Item No 7.1):

MOVED by Commissioner Kent, seconded by Commissioner Blackburn

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality direct the Chief of the Halifax Regional Police and advise the Officer in Charge of the RCMP to provide updates to the board using the Joint Chief Reporting Template on local progress made against the themes identified by the Progress Monitoring Committee (PMC) following the release of each biannual PMC public update.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

## BACKGROUND

Following the devastating mass casualty in Nova Scotia in April 2020, the Mass Casualty Commission (MCC) was created by the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia. The MCC was the joint public inquiry created by the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia to examine the April 18-19, 2020, mass casualty and to provide recommendations to help make communities safer in the future.[1]

[1] Mass Casualty Commission

Following the final report of the MCC in March 2023, the two governments jointly established the Progress Monitoring Committee (PMC). The purpose of the PMC is to monitor and report on progress by the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia, and the RCMP, in response to the MCC final report.[2]

Early in its mandate, the PMC grouped the MCC recommendations into themes and sub-themes. In August 2024, the above motion was passed by the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Board of Police Commissioners (the Board), requesting an update on local progress against the PMC themes by Halifax Regional Police (HRP) and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment (HRD) following the release of each biannual PMC public update.

A PMC report was released on November 29, 2024. Following its release the first joint Information Report was received by the Board on June 4, 2025. A copy of this report can be found at **Attachment 1** and the following link: https://www.halifax.ca/media/90863

The latest PMC report was released on October 9, 2025.[3]

This report contains updates since the first report to the Board in June 2025 and should be read in conjunction with that report.

## DISCUSSION

The below themes and sub-themes were identified by the PMC; the updates provided are grouped by those headings.

| THEMES | SUB-THEMES |
|---|---|
| COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL-BEING | • Community Well-Being<br>• Emergency Management Readiness |
| PUBLIC HEALTH | • Victim Supports<br>• Grief, Bereavement and Mental Wellness<br>• Professional Regulatory Oversight |
| GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE | • Gender-Based Violence Response<br>• Gender-Based Violence Services and Prevention |
| ACCESS TO FIREARMS | • No sub-theme |
| POLICING REFORM | • Improving Royal Canadian Mounted Police Governance<br>• Provincial Policing<br>• Serious Incident Response Team<br>• Interoperability and Critical Incident Response<br>• Broader Policing Reform |

[2] Progress Monitoring Committee - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada

[3] Progress-Monitoring-Committee-Annual-Report-2024-25-en.pdf

The following updates from HRP and HRD since June 2025 should be read in conjunction with the first report submitted to the Board in June 2025 – see **Attachment 1**.

Halifax Regional Police

- **Community Safety and Well-Being:**
    - Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) was held in January 2026. The CIT program is part of the collaborative partnership between HRP and the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team (MHMCT) and provides learning for a more informed and skilled approach to mental health issues. This also increases capacity building for families, communities, mental health services and law enforcement officers. CIT is a model of response for law enforcement officers to provide the most effective police response possible to individuals who are experiencing mental illness. Officers gain increased understanding and skills through an intensive 40-hour training program. This training supports skill building in responding to mental health calls and enhances the safety for individuals, community, and officers.
    - HRP implemented on-demand and scheduled interpretation and translation services in December 2025. These are available 24/7 in over 300 languages, including American Sign Language (ASL), allowing front-line employees to better communicate with the public where there is a language barrier.
    - In November 2025, HRP delivered to the Board the second annual report on HRP actions to enhance psychological safety and trauma supports.[4] This report outlines many of the programs and services available to HRP employees.
    - In partnership with HRM IT, work to implement an Early Intervention (EI) program is underway, with the project being formally initiated in late 2025. EI is designed to intervene where there are early signs of psychological struggle for an employee, where otherwise they might be missed. HRP will determine the threshold parameters for the program and track certain variables, such as call types attended/received, overtime, and sickness. Once the early intervention threshold is triggered, the Wellness Program Specialist would review the case and may suggest intervention.
    - As part of the 2024/25 HRP Operating Budget, a Peer Team Lead position was approved. This position was filled in December 2025 and will work with the HRP Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) Coordinator. EFAP provides confidential support for employees and their families who are experiencing personal, professional, or health-related challenges, including psychological health.
    - As part of the 2025/26 HRP Operating Budget, Regional Council approved a Culture and Support Manager. This new position will manage the positions of Reintegration Coordinator, Wellness Program Specialist, and EFAP Coordinators and volunteers. The Culture and Support Manager will also have responsibility for the creation of an overarching strategy and policies in this area, as well as other business and strategic programs and initiatives such as the Safeguarding and Early Intervention programs, which will directly impact the wellbeing of HRP employees.

[4] https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions/251203bopc1031.pdf

- HRP hosted the inaugural Reintegration Program Facilitators Course in November 2025. The one-week course equips participants with the knowledge and tools needed to establish and sustain a Reintegration Program within their own organizations. Participants included attendees from Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency, EHS, Canada Border Services Agency and municipal and provincial health and wellness employees.

- The HRP Respectful and Safe Workplace (RSW) Working Group is an employee group committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all employees. As its first major endeavor, the RSW hosted an inaugural HRP Respectful and Safe Workplace Symposium on October 27, 2025.

- **Emergency Management Readiness:**

  - In 2025, HRP's Emergency Plan was updated. Should an emergency, incident or event occur where the demand for assets and resources exceeds existing operational capacity, the Emergency Plan will be activated. It is designed to coordinate the planning, response, resources, and communication required to effectively and efficiently respond to the incident. The size and scope of the incident and/or emergency will dictate the response, resources and agencies activated. There are a number of annexes included within the Emergency Plan including, but not limited to:
    - Weather Emergencies;
    - Flood Emergencies;
    - Power Outage Emergencies;
    - Infectious Diseases;
    - HAZMAT Emergencies;
    - Wildfires; and
    - Emergency Public Information Plan.

  - HRP updated its Business Continuity Plan (BCP) in 2025. The BCP outlines which services are critical and identifies the risks and threats to critical operations so that appropriate controls and mitigation strategies can be put in place to ensure operations are maintained to the highest degree possible given the cause of the interruption. The plans were tested with senior management at the end of 2025 through an in-house exercise.

  - HRP is strengthening operational preparedness with regard to alerting systems and processes with upcoming refresher training for IES supervisors[5] on Alert Ready and Amber Alert systems, along with a planned Amber Alert exercise.

  - Together with other business units and RCMP, HRP is participating in the work to renew the HRM Strategic Emergency Management Plan.

  - The critical incident program continues to be evaluated; a few changes are planned to ensure alignment with the RCMP by adopting their building identification terminology.

  - A joint CIC tabletop exercise with the RCMP is being organized to enhance collaboration on ERT, K9, Alert Ready usage, and inter-agency incident transitions.

[5] HRP's Integrated Emergency Services primarily receive, and process calls for police, fire, and EHS within HRM

- ICIR training is being rolled out to IES staff, patrol members, and supervisors to reinforce shared understanding of critical incident expectations, protocols, and communication language.

- **Public Health:**

  - **Victim Supports:**

    HRP is working collaboratively with the NS Department of Justice and Gender-Based Violence to ensure internal training regarding Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is up to date and in compliance with the provincial approach and standards. The training is provided to new police recruits, within annual block training, and any other internal training as deemed necessary. HRP has the capacity to deliver the training internally and brings in external specialists as required.

    The training topics include but are not limited to; what is IPV, coercive control, 8 stages of domestic homicide, sexualized violence, trauma-informed approach to policing, IPV effects on children, ODARA[6] scoring, domestic violence (DV) and mental health courts, non-fatal strangulation, and a community panel comprised of specialists from external community groups.

  - **Grief, Bereavement and Mental Wellness:**

    Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) was held in January 2026. The CIT Program is part of the collaborative partnership between HRP and the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team (MHMCT) and provides learning for a more informed and skilled approach to mental health issues. This also increases capacity building for families, communities, mental health services and law enforcement officers. CIT is a model of response for law enforcement officers to provide the most effective police response possible to individuals who are experiencing mental illness. Officers gain increased understanding and skills through an intensive 40-hour training program. This training supports skill building in responding to mental health calls and enhances the safety for individuals, community, and officers.

- **Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence:**
  - **Gender-Based Violence Response**
  - **Gender-Based Violence Services and Prevention**

  - As outlined above, HRP is working collaboratively with the NS Department of Justice and Gender-Based Violence to ensure internal training regarding IPV is up to date and in compliance with the provincial approach and standards. The training is provided to new police recruits, within annual block training, and any other internal training as deemed necessary. HRP has the capacity to deliver the training internally and brings in external specialists as required.

    The training topics include but are not limited to; what is IPV, coercive control, 8 stages of domestic homicide, sexualized violence, trauma-informed approach to policing, IPV

[6] Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) - iResearchNet

effects on children, ODARA[7] scoring, DV and mental health courts, non-fatal strangulation, and a community panel comprised of specialists from external community groups.

- Since September 2025, HRP and RCMP have been publicly disclosing domestic violence statistics at the monthly Board of Police Commissioners meetings.

- Since December 2024, HRP has been participating in a 12-month pilot with the RCMP Sexual Assault Investigations Review Committee (SAIRC) process. SAIRCs are responsible for independently reviewing sexual assault investigations which did not result in charges, to ensure that appropriate investigative steps were taken. A report outlining the pilot and a recommendation as to continued HRP participation is scheduled for the Board's March 2026 meeting.

- **Access to Firearms:**

  - HRP has signed an agreement with the federal government to participate in the Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program (ASFCP).[8] Over 2,500 makes and models of assault-style firearms which were previously available in the Canadian market to lawful and licensed gun owners have now been prohibited by the federal government. The ASFCP allows gunowners to declare their prohibited firearm and receive payment for their disposal or deactivation. Gunowners must declare their intent to participate in the program by March 31, 2026. Following the declaration period, eligible participants will be able to schedule an appointment for the collection of their firearms by HRP. HRP's participation in this program is funded by the federal government.

  - In collaboration with the NS Department of Justice and under the response to the Desmond Inquiry,[9] HRP has strengthened its firearms-related public safety processes by improving how Firearms Interest Police (FIP) flags are created, recorded, and transmitted to the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC). This ensures timely notification to the Chief Firearms Office (CFO) about individuals whose behaviour may affect firearms eligibility. HRP has conducted internal audits to ensure correct coding and compliance. This work strengthens HRP's role in preventing unsafe access to firearms by ensuring accurate reporting and timely alerts to the CFO, and directly supports the CFO's mandate under the Firearms Act to assess risk, suspend licences under review, and revoke or refuse licences where public safety concerns exist.

- **Policing Reform:**

  - **Interoperability and Critical Incident Response:**

  - HRP is strengthening operational preparedness with regard to alerting systems and processes with upcoming refresher training for IES supervisors[10] on Alert Ready and Amber Alert systems, along with a planned Amber Alert exercise.

---

[7] Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) - iResearchNet

[8] Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program - Canada.ca

[9] Fatality Inquiries | The Courts of Nova Scotia

[10] HRP's Integrated Emergency Services primarily receive and process calls for police, fire, and EHS within HRM

- Together with other business units and RCMP, HRP is participating in the work to renew the HRM Strategic Emergency Management Plan.

- The critical incident program continues to be evaluated; a few changes are planned to ensure alignment with the RCMP by adopting their building identification terminology.

- A joint CIC tabletop exercise with the RCMP is being organized to enhance collaboration on ERT, K9, Alert Ready usage, and inter-agency incident transitions.

- ICIR training is being rolled out to IES staff, patrol members, and supervisors to reinforce shared understanding of critical incident expectations, protocols, and communication language.

RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment

- **Community Safety and Well-being:**

  - **Community Well-Being:** The proposed Framework for a National Centre of Expertise on Supporting Victims of Terrorism, Mass Violence and Mass Casualty Incidents was completed in December 2024. Efforts are underway to determine appropriate resources to continue with implementation.

    The RCMP is working with multiple partners to advance information sharing on high-risk intimate partner violence files across the province through the Nova Scotia High Risk Case Coordination Protocol Framework. As part of this initiative, evidence-based, risk-focused intimate partner violence training is shared between the RCMP and Nova Scotia Public Safety Office twice annually.

    As of December 1, 2025 - A working group has been established to finalize the *Critical Incident Stress Management Guide.* The working group includes representatives from all RCMP divisions and business lines to ensure that the wellness needs of all RCMP personnel are represented. The guide will be presented to the National Policy Health and Safety Committee in late 2025 (current status not yet available).

  - **Emergency Management Readiness:** RCMP HRD has completed its all-hazards Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). The HRD EOP is Incident Command System based and harmonizes with other public safety partners EOPs. RCMP HRD has also updated all of its Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) for each of its work locations.

    RCMP HRD has enhanced its capacity and capabilities in the application of the Incident Command System. This better ensures interoperability between HRD and its public safety partners in response and recovery operations related to all-hazards emergencies. Federal Budget 2025 announced funding to strengthen the RCMP's capacity for emergency management. HRD has put several of its members through various levels of ICS training over the past year.

    The RCMP Operational Coordination Centre created an inventory of capabilities available within the RCMP's national headquarters. This inventory supports urgent requests from the divisions or for Emergency Management Team activations. The Centre is also now equipped with computer systems from other government agencies for better interagency collaboration and is maintaining a list of available personnel in case of urgent activation.

The RCMP launched its National Public Alert Awareness Course in September 2024. It's open to all RCMP employees, as well as all Canadian law enforcement through the Canadian Police Knowledge Network. While all law enforcement employees are encouraged to take the course, it is becoming mandatory for all RCMP operational front-line members, specialty team members, and select civilian employees with direct operational support functions.

- **Public Health:**

    - **Victim Supports:** RCMP HRD has a dedicated Victim Services Unit that supports victims of serious crime. This unit's reporting structure is through RCMP Provincial HQ and supports HRD. The RCMP has consulted with other Canadian police services to identify appropriate contacts to advance discussions on creating the Victim Support Centre.

    - **Grief, Bereavement and Mental Wellness:** Public Health is not within the mandate of RCMP HRD but with regard to this theme it is relevant to mention the police role in responding to persons experiencing mental health challenges. Similar to HRP, HRD officers may, as deemed appropriate, proportionate and necessary, involve the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team, or medical professionals. Where appropriate to do so, HRD members may also refer any person to Victim Services for support in the areas of grief, bereavement, and mental wellness.

      A full-time psychologist was hired to provide psychological health services to all officers at National Headquarters and V Division (Nunavut). A business case was submitted in February 2024 for the development of extended staffing support to deploy these services to regular members in all RCMP Divisions. The RCMP is currently considering the addition of paraprofessional positions, such as Mental Health Advisors, to bolster this service.

      The RCMP has published its employee and family resource guide where employees can get information on the broad range of support services available for personnel in the wake of a crisis.

      December 1, 2025 - The draft Psychological Health and Safety Policy, which includes the role of the National Mental Health Champion, has been approved by the Commissioner and will be shared with employees in the coming months.

    - **Professional Regulatory Oversight:** The Government of Nova Scotia has initiated this review. The Nova Scotia RCMP is participating, with support from National Headquarters. The Nova Scotia RCMP continues to be a participant in the Province of Nova Scotia's ongoing review.

- **Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence:**

    - **Gender-Based Violence Response:** The RCMP has updated and published its Intimate Partner Violence policy to provide new guidance and information on Clare's Law, coercive control and trauma-informed approaches to investigations. The RCMP also completed a Gender-based Analysis Plus review of the policy during its review, which also considered Indigenous heritage, place of residence (rural vs urban), cultural considerations, age and ability.

      RCMP HRD has implemented a specialized Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) unit to

oversee and investigate high-risk IPV, strengthen service provider partnerships and enhance IPV victim and offender support. There is currently a request to council to fund an additional two positions in HRD for the IPV unit.

- **Gender-Based Violence Services and Prevention:** As mentioned above, RCMP HRD has created an Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) unit which consists of two regular member FTEs, with a resource request to council in the 2026 budget for two more positions. The goal of this unit is to provide greater support to victims of violent incidents of crime, with an additional focus on offenders and the root causes behind these incidents with a goal of reducing them.

  The RCMP and Public Services and Procurement Canada have contracted a study of supportive reporting centers for women, with a focus on victims of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. This study includes an environmental scan of different models of supportive reporting centers that can be considered for communities policed by the RCMP (ex: rural, remote and urban communities).

  Discussions were held with several divisions to share information on current programs in place across Canada. These programs will be examined to see if best practices can be used in the development of a national program or in additional divisions.

  December 1, 2025 - The RCMP continues to offer learning opportunities for all employees through monthly virtual events presenting on a wide variety of gender-based violence related topics. External experts are incorporated to share their research and work carried out by their organizations centered on preventing and identifying intimate partner violence and its effects and provide material to proactively update policies and training to ensure the RCMP remains current.

- **Access to Firearms:**

  - The Canadian Firearms Program is supporting regulatory work led by Public Safety Canada on expanded license revocation and eligibility provisions. It is also exploring the feasibility of possible future statistical reporting.

    Criminal Intelligence Service Canada continues to work with the RCMP, as well as all other police services across the country, to develop a new national criminal intelligence database. This database will enhance the ability to collect, develop and share valuable information in a timely manner. The new database has been rolled out with over 1,100 users from more than 50 police services across Canada. It will enhance border security in terms of intelligence sharing on transnational criminality such as firearms smuggling, fentanyl importation and exportation, and illegal immigration.

    Public Safety Canada is leading the project design for the new firearms tracing case management solution and the RCMP continues its consultations with stakeholders on developing and implementing a new firearms tracing case management system.

    The Canadian Firearms Program's website was updated in February 2024 to ensure that all information necessary for executors to safely dispose of firearms following the death of their owners is available and accurate. The website also includes separate pages with instructions on how to lawfully transfer, export, surrender, or deactivate a firearm. The Canadian Firearms Program will continue to maintain accurate information on this website and will update it as required in the event of any legislative, regulatory or policy

changes.

The RCMP continues to assess the feasibility of reporting statistics on firearms licence revocations and gender-based violence incidents as part of the annual Commissioner of Firearms report.

- **Policing Reform:**

  - **Improving Royal Canadian Mounted Police Governance:** The RCMP and the Management Advisory Board (MAB) jointly negotiated an approach that meets the spirit of this recommendation, without requiring legislation. Under this approach, the MAB has made clear it intends for all of its advice to be made public on its official website, unless there are immediate concerns from an operational perspective, or subject to mandatory exemptions under the Access to Information Act or the Privacy Act. The RCMP has agreed with this approach and intends on posting its own official response to MAB advice on its website moving forward as well, so Canadians can understand what the RCMP position is. The MAB has already begun to post advice on its website in line with this agreement. As such, both the MAB and the RCMP consider Recommendation P41 to be complete.

    RCMP HRD continues to work closely with the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC), as well as the office of the Commissioner of Public Safety from the lens of oversight and governance.

  - **Provincial Policing:** The Government of Nova Scotia released a comprehensive Policing Review. The Nova Scotia RCMP is participating, with support from National Headquarters. The Nova Scotia RCMP continues to participate with the Nova Scotia Department of Justice.

  - **Serious Incident Response Team:** This is not within the mandate of HRD. HRD has a policy in place related to SIRT investigations and continues to cooperate fully with the SIRT whenever an incident involving an HRD member is referred.

    The RCMP in Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Serious Incident Response Team are in the final stages of signing a new Memorandum of Understanding.

    The RCMP is also currently reviewing and updating its operational policies related to serious incidents, Independent Officer Reviews and the external investigation of regular members after a serious incident.

    Operational policies on external investigation of RCMP employees are being revised. The draft policies are with the National Police Federation for additional consideration based on the most recent collective agreement.

  - **Interoperability and Critical Incident Response:** The RCMP Operational Coordination Centre created an inventory of capabilities available within the RCMP's national headquarters. This inventory supports urgent requests from the divisions or for Emergency Management Team activations. The Centre is also now equipped with computer systems from other government agencies for better interagency collaboration and is maintaining a list of available personnel in case of urgent activation.

HRD and HRP have completed an MOU regarding the Interoperability between the provincial Operational Communications Centre (OCC) and the Integrated Emergency Services (IES). The intent is to improve interoperability between both agencies during emergency events by providing access to Records Management Systems (RMS) and mapping tools such as Blue Force Tracking.

The RCMP HRD has implemented Blue Force Tracking, which is now available to all officers nationwide. This software allows the RCMP to see precise, real-time locations of its officers in the field. Access to Blue Force Tracking has been given to IES, which will be implemented in the very near future.

The RCMP has updated its Alert Ready training, and broader training in use to issue public warnings. This update has been twofold: firstly, Alert Ready training is now included for incoming personnel at Depot. Secondly, Critical Incident training has been updated to include the use of Alert Ready. The RCMP is continuing to monitor for additional improvements.

RCMP HRD and HRP Critical Incident and Police Dog Services/K9 programs regularly conduct joint training, interoperability exercises and operations.

- **Broader Policing Reform:** As noted above, the Nova Scotia RCMP continues to be a participant in the Province of Nova Scotia's review and implementation.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications identified at this time as a result of this report. The budgetary approvals referenced above have been approved as part of the operating budget processes for HRP and HRD.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required for the purpose of creating this report.

## LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Nova Scotia *Police Act. 2004*, c. 52:

> (52) On behalf of the board, the board chair or the chair's delegate may give advice or direction, in writing, to the chief officer on any matter within the jurisdiction of the board under this Act, but not to other members of the police department and, for greater certainty, no other member of the board shall give advice or direction to a member of the police department.

Nova Scotia *Police Act. 2004*, c. 55:

Section (1), states:

> (1) The function of a board is to provide
>
> > (a) civilian governance on behalf of the council in relation to the enforcement of law, the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of crime in the municipality; and

(b) the administrative direction, organization and policy required to maintain an adequate, effective and efficient police department,

but the board shall not exercise jurisdiction relating to

(c) complaints, discipline or personnel conduct except in respect of the chief officer of the municipal police department;

(d) a specific prosecution or investigation; or

(e) the actual day-to-day direction of the police department.

Section (3), states:

(3) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), a board shall…

(c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;

(d) ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;

(e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers;

*By-law Number P-100 Respecting the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality, section 7 provides:*

(2) The Chief of Police shall advise the Board with respect to the provision of efficient, effective and economical municipal police service delivery to the taxpayers of the municipality and may in consultation with the Board undertake in a timely manner, research, strategic planning, policy development and implementation and the reporting of results, in response to inquiries by the Board pertaining to its community governance responsibilities, generally categorized as:

(a) providing an effective community voice on matters pertaining to policing;

(b) civilian review of police service delivery;

(c) ensuring the quality of police service delivery by evaluation processes;

(d) keeping generally informed of policing operations; and

(e) insuring police personnel are accountable to civilian authority.

-and-

(4) The Chief of Police is accountable to the Board with respect to the provision of policing in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

## ATTACHMENTS

**Attachment 1** – Report submitted to the June 4, 2025, meeting of the HRM Board of Police Commissioners, titled *'HRM Police update on local progress against Progress Monitoring Committee (PMC) themes'*

---

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

| | |
|---|---|
| Report Prepared by: | Joanne Smith, Research & Development Coordinator – Halifax Regional Police |
| | A/Inspector Lynden Morrison – RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment |
| Report Approved by: | Chief Don MacLean – Halifax Regional Police |
| | Chief Superintendent John Duff – RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment |
| | Bill Moore, Commissioner of Public Safety, 902.490.8545 |

**Attachment 1**

# Item No. 3

**Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality**
**June 4, 2025**

| | |
|---|---|
| **TO:** | Chair O'Malley and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality |
| **FROM:** | Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer |
| **DATE:** | May 6, 2025 |
| **SUBJECT:** | HRM Police update on local progress against Progress Monitoring Committee (PMC) themes |

## INFORMATION REPORT

## ORIGIN

August 7, 2024, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality (Item No 7.1):

MOVED by Commissioner Kent, seconded by Commissioner Blackburn

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality direct the Chief of the Halifax Regional Police and advise the Officer in Charge of the RCMP to provide updates to the board using the Joint Chief Reporting Template on local progress made against the themes identified by the Progress Monitoring Committee (PMC) following the release of each biannual PMC public update.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

## BACKGROUND

Following the devastating mass casualty in Nova Scotia in April 2020, the Mass Casualty Commission (MCC) was created by the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia. The MCC was the joint public inquiry created by the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia to examine the April 18-19, 2020, mass casualty and to provide recommendations to help make communities safer in the future.[1]

Following the final report of the MCC in March 2023, the two governments jointly established the Progress Monitoring Committee (PMC). The purpose of the PMC is to monitor and report on progress by the

[1] Mass Casualty Commission

governments of Canada and Nova Scotia, and the RCMP, in response to the MCC final report.[2]

Early in its mandate, the PMC grouped the MCC recommendations into themes and sub-themes. In August 2024, the above motion was passed by the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Board of Police Commissioners (the Board), requesting an update on local progress against the PMC themes by Halifax Regional Police (HRP) and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment (HRD) following the release of each biannual PMC public update. The latest PMC report was released on November 29, 2024.

At the direction of HRM staff, this report is being provided using the Board's Information Report template.

## DISCUSSION

The themes and sub-themes below were identified by the PMC, and the following sections contain updates from HRP and HRD.

| THEMES | SUB-THEMES |
|---|---|
| COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL-BEING | • Community Well-Being<br>• Emergency Management Readiness |
| PUBLIC HEALTH | • Victim Supports<br>• Grief, Bereavement and Mental Wellness<br>• Professional Regulatory Oversight |
| GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE | • Gender-Based Violence Response<br>• Gender-Based Violence Services and Prevention |
| ACCESS TO FIREARMS | • No sub-theme |
| POLICING REFORM | • Improving Royal Canadian Mounted Police Governance<br>• Provincial Policing<br>• Serious Incident Response Team<br>• Interoperability and Critical Incident Response<br>• Broader Policing Reform |

Halifax Regional Police

- **Community Safety and Well-Being:**
    - **Community Well-Being:** In 2023 HRM established a new business unit – Community Safety. Alongside their work, HRP continues to follow a community response policing model through the deployment of community response officers and school resource officers. In the 2024/25 HRP operating budget, funding for four additional community response officers was approved. With regard to the wellbeing of HRP employees, in December 2024 the BoPC received a presentation and detailed information report on HRP actions to enhance psychological safety and trauma supports. The information report can

[2] Progress Monitoring Committee - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada

be found at Attachment 1.[3]

- **Emergency Management Readiness:** HRP has an Emergency Planning position within the Support Division, which reports to the Superintendent of Support and is responsible for the development and maintenance of internal emergency and business continuity plans, administration and coordination of the hfxALERT system, provincial Alert Ready planning and delivery, and for liaising and coordinating with the HRM and NS Emergency Management Officers, in relation to the police role in wider provincial emergency planning and preparedness. Currently, HRP is conducting a Business Impact Analysis as part of the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) renewal. A BCP table-top exercise is planned for the third quarter of 2025. HRP is also represented on the national Canadian Association Chiefs of Police (CACP) Emergency Management committee, at the Superintendent level.

- **Public Health:**

  - **Victim Supports:** HRP has an established Victim Services Unit comprised of civilian employees and volunteers who work collaboratively with police officers to provide support to victims of crime, and anyone else who may benefit from their services. The Victim Services team includes specialists in the areas of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence. In the 2025/26 HRP operating budget, Halifax Regional Council approved funding for two additional Victim Services Caseworkers: an additional Domestic Violence Case Coordinator, and funding to make the temporary position of Domestic Violence Offender Navigator permanent. In April 2025, the BoPC received a presentation on the work of the HRP Victim Services Unit. The presentation can be found at Attachment 2.[4]

  - **Grief, Bereavement and Mental Wellness:** Public Health is not within the mandate of HRP but with regard to this theme it is relevant to mention the police role in responding to persons experiencing mental health challenges. HRP officers may, as deemed appropriate, proportionate and necessary, involve the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team, or medical professionals. Where appropriate to do so, HRP members may also refer any person to Victim Services for support in the areas of grief, bereavement, and mental wellness.

    In March 2025, HRP delivered a course on Psychological First Aid. HRP also delivers Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) which is a partnership between HRP and the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team (MHMCT). CIT is a model of response for law enforcement officers to provide the most effective police response possible to individuals who are experiencing mental illness. The last course was delivered in February 2025, where 15 HRP members and five RCMP members took part in the 40-hour training program. CIT participants increase their awareness and understanding of the most common mental health illnesses, the possible behaviours of those experiencing these illnesses and the most appropriate ways to approach and respond to these individuals. Participants also develop skills to de-escalate a mental health crisis in the community.

  - **Professional Regulatory Oversight** This is not within the mandate of HRP.

- **Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence:**
  - **Gender-Based Violence Response**

[3] December 18, 2024 Board of Police Commissioners | Halifax

[4] April 2, 2025 Board of Police Commissioners | Halifax

- **Gender-Based Violence Services and Prevention**

  In August 2024, HRP submitted a report to the Board outlining policies, procedures, statistics and other relevant information relating to the issue of policing and gender-based violence. That report can be found at Attachment 3, and highlighted work completed by HRP Victim Services Unit, Sexual Assault Investigation Team, Human Trafficking and Missing Persons Team, and the Hate Crime Unit.

  In the 2025/26 HRP operating budget, Halifax Regional Council approved funding for two additional Victim Services Caseworkers: an additional Domestic Violence Case Coordinator, and funding to make the temporary position of Domestic Violence Offender Navigator permanent.

  The Integrated Sexual Assault Investigation Team (SAIT) investigates adult and child sexual assaults and child physical abuse in the municipality. The SAIT is a unit within the Special Investigation Section of the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) which is comprised of members from HRP and RCMP HRD who are all trained, qualified specialists in this field. In recent years, the team has focused on training, education and strengthening relationships with partner agencies to improve the overall response to sexual assault investigations. HRP is currently participating in a 12-month trial of the RCMP H Division (Nova Scotia) Sexual Assault Investigations Review Committee (SAIRC) process and will return to the Board in February 2026 with an update and recommendation as to continued participation. The BoPC received an information report on this item in December 2024, which can be found at Attachment 4.[5]

  The Special Victims Section of CID is also responsible for the investigation of human trafficking cases, missing persons, and online luring and exploitation of children. The Hate Crime Unit was implemented in January 2022 and is within the Special Investigation Section of CID. Its mandate includes the review of all reports with confirmed or suspected hate motivation based on personal characteristics, including gender and sex.

- **Access to Firearms:**
  - HRP continues to investigate reports of criminal offences related to firearms, and tracks when firearms are seized through either criminal investigations, voluntary surrender, and/or as a matter of public safety.

- **Policing Reform:**

  - **Improving Royal Canadian Mounted Police Governance:** This is not within the mandate of HRP.

  - **Provincial Policing:** This is not within the mandate of HRP.

  - **Serious Incident Response Team (SIRT):** This is not within the mandate of HRP. HRP has a policy related to SIRT investigations, and continues to cooperate fully with the SIRT whenever an incident involving an HRP member is referred.

  - **Interoperability and Critical Incident Response:** HRP has policies in place which relate to the response to major occurrences, including but not limited to the Public Safety Unit (PSU), the Emergency Response Team (ERT), active aggressor threats, hostage

[5] https://www.halifax.ca/media/89049

incidents, and the use of crisis negotiators.

HRP and RCMP Critical Incident Commanders receive the same training from the Canadian Police College, and HRP has engaged in Initial Critical Incident Response training similar to that which is provided to RCMP supervisors.

HRP established a full-time ERT in January 2022, which may respond to the same planned and unplanned events as the RCMP H Division ERT, as required, but will maintain their own individual roles during the event. ERT training may sometimes take place in conjunction with the RCMP ERT. During the 2025/26 HRP capital budget process, funding was approved to add an Armoured Rescue Vehicle (ARV) to the tactical resources available to the ERT. An ARV is a defensive piece of safety equipment, necessary to increase the level of safety and the ability to rescue citizens and first responders during the resolution of critical incidents in HRM.

Incident Command System (ICS) training is also available to eligible HRP employees. ICS is a standard on site command and control system used to manage emergency incidents and planned events. ICS Canada is the network of organizations working cooperatively to maintain a standard Incident Command System that enhances incident management response through improved interoperability.[6] ICS training is arranged in a series of courses labeled ICS 100 through ICS 400, which provides a gradual approach to the training. Completion of the ICS 100 course has been mandatory for all HRP employees since September 2024 and is a prerequisite for further ICS courses. In accordance with course availability, HRP members may attend additional in-person ICS courses. Most recently, two ICS 200 courses and two ICS 300 courses held between March and April 2025 were attended by an HRP Staff Sergeant, 23 Sergeants, one Constables, and eight Integrated Emergency Services (IES) members.

The RCMP in Nova Scotia and HRP are responsible for two separate Public Service Answering Points (PSAP) – the RCMP Operational Communications Centre (OCC), and the HRP Integrated Emergency Services (IES), which also has responsibility for receiving and dispatching emergency and non-emergency calls for RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment. One of the MCC recommendations was for the two PSAPs to have access to one another's Records Management Systems – PROS (RCMP) and Versadex (HRP). In 2024, access to Versadex was implemented in the OCC, and HRP is in the final stages of receiving access to PROS within IES.

In addition, and also in relation to an MCC recommendation, both PSAPs will soon have access to software that tracks the geographical locations of both agency's members. The RCMP uses Blue Force tracking software for RCMP members – this will soon be available to IES so they are able to track the geographical location of RCMP members in Halifax that they dispatch, and any other RCMP members who may be deployed within or cross the boundary into the HRM area. HRP will use vMobile software – once implemented, this will be made available to the OCC so they are able to track the geographical location of any HRP members that are deployed into or cross the boundary into RCMP areas.

- **Broader Policing Reform:** Broader policing reform is not within the mandate of HRP. HRP has fully cooperated with the recent provincial policing review and continues to work in

[6] About ICS Canada | Incident Command System Canada

partnership with HRD towards the objectives of the HRM Policing Transformation Study.[7]

RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment

- **Community Safety and Well-being:**
    - **Community Well-Being:** The proposed Framework for a National Centre of Expertise on Supporting Victims of Terrorism, Mass Violence and Mass Casualty Incidents was completed in December 2024. Efforts are underway to determine appropriate resources to continue with implementation.

      The RCMP is currently reviewing its Critical Incident Stress Management Guide. Once completed, the guide will be linked to other available materials and resources.

    - **Emergency Management Readiness:** RCMP HRD has completed its all-hazards Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). The HRD EOP is Incident Command System based and harmonizes with other public safety partners EOPs. RCMP HRD has also updated all of its Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) for each of its work locations.

      HRD has completed an after-action review of its response to the 2023 Tantallon Wildfires. This review is supported by an Improvement Plan to improve areas of HRD's operational response, with recommendations expected to be fully completed in 2025. The results of this after-action review have been presented to HRM BOPC, senior HRM staff and RCMP employees.

      RCMP HRD has enhanced its senior leadership capacity and capability by implementing a Senior Operations Officer (Superintendent) to oversee high-risk and significant operations and optimize interoperability between HRD, HRP and other public safety partners.

      RCMP HRD has enhanced its capacity and capabilities in the application of the Incident Command System. This better ensures interoperability between HRD and its public safety partners in response and recovery operation related to all-hazards emergencies.
      Federal Budget 2024 announced funding to strengthen the RCMP's capacity for emergency management.

      The Centre recently received permanent funding for 23 emergency management employees. Most positions have been filled, and employees from other units have been brought in on a temporary basis to assist with ongoing projects and priorities.

      The RCMP Operational Coordination Centre created an inventory of capabilities available within the RCMP's national headquarters. This inventory supports urgent requests from the divisions or for Emergency Management Team activations. The Centre is also now equipped with computer systems from other government agencies for better interagency collaboration and is maintaining a list of available personnel in case of urgent activation.

      The RCMP launched its National Public Alert Awareness Course in September 2024. It's open to all RCMP employees, as well as all Canadian law enforcement through the Canadian Police Knowledge Network. While all law enforcement employees are

[7] https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/230425cow4.pdf

encouraged to take the course, it is becoming mandatory for all RCMP operational front-line members, specialty team members, and select civilian employees with direct operational support functions.

- **Public Health:**

    - **Victim Supports:** RCMP HRD has a dedicated Victim Services Unit that supports victims of serious crime. This unit's reporting structure is through RCMP Provincial HQ and supports HRD.

    - **Grief, Bereavement and Mental Wellness:** Public Health is not within the mandate of RCMP HRD but with regard to this theme it is relevant to mention the police role in responding to persons experiencing mental health challenges. Similar to HRP, HRD officers may, as deemed appropriate, proportionate and necessary, involve the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team, or medical professionals. Where appropriate to do so, HRD members may also refer any person to Victim Services for support in the areas of grief, bereavement, and mental wellness.

      A full-time psychologist was hired to provide psychological health services to all officers at National Headquarters and V Division (Nunavut). A business case was submitted in February 2024 for the development of extended staffing support to deploy these services to regular members in all RCMP Divisions. The RCMP is currently considering the addition of paraprofessional positions, such as Mental Health Advisors, to bolster this service.

      The RCMP has published its employee and family resource guide where employees can get information on the broad range of support services available for personnel in the wake of a crisis.

      The new Psychological Health and Safety Policy was reviewed and approved by the National Policy Health and Safety Committees in November 2024. The detailed plans are in final consultation and will be presented to the National Committees in the winter of 2025. Final approval of the policy is anticipated in the spring of 2025.

    - **Professional Regulatory Oversight:** The Government of Nova Scotia has initiated this review. The Nova Scotia RCMP is participating, with support from National Headquarters. The Nova Scotia RCMP continues to be a participant in the Province of Nova Scotia's ongoing review.

- **Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence:**

    - **Gender-Based Violence Response:** The RCMP has updated and published its Intimate Partner Violence policy to provide new guidance and information on Clare's Law, coercive control and trauma-informed approaches to investigations. The RCMP also completed a Gender-based Analysis Plus review of the policy during its review, which also considered Indigenous heritage, place of residence (rural vs urban), cultural considerations, age and ability.

      RCMP HRD has implemented a specialized Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) team to oversee and investigate high-risk IPV, strengthen service provider partnerships and enhance IPV victim and offender support.

- **Gender-Based Violence Services and Prevention:** As mentioned above, RCMP HRD has created an Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) team which consists of two regular member FTEs. This team is expected to be fully staffed by the end of May 2025. The goal of this unit is to provide greater supports to victims of violent incidents of crime, but also on offenders and the root causes behind these incidents with a goal to reducing them.

  The RCMP and Public Services and Procurement Canada have contracted a study of supportive reporting centers for women, with a focus on victims of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. This study includes an environmental scan of different models of supportive reporting centers that can be considered for communities policed by the RCMP (ex: rural, remote and urban communities).

  Discussions were held with several divisions to share information on current programs in place across Canada. These programs will be examined to see if best practices can be used in the development of a national program or in additional divisions.

- **Access to Firearms:**

  - The Canadian Firearms Program is supporting regulatory work led by Public Safety Canada on expanded license revocation and eligibility provisions. It is also exploring the feasibility of possible future statistical reporting in 2025.

    Criminal Intelligence Service Canada continues to work with the RCMP, as well as all other police services across the country, to develop a new national criminal intelligence database. This database will enhance the ability to collect, develop and share valuable information in a timely manner. The new database is scheduled for release in the spring of 2025. It will enhance border security in terms of intelligence sharing on transnational criminality such as firearms smuggling, fentanyl importation and exportation, and illegal immigration.

    Public Safety Canada is leading the project design for the new firearms tracing case management solution that will start in 2025.

    The Canadian Firearms Program's website was updated in February 2024 to ensure that all information necessary for executors to safely dispose of firearms following the death of their owners is available and accurate. The website also includes separate pages with instructions on how to lawfully transfer, export, surrender, or deactivate a firearm. The Canadian Firearms Program will continue to maintain accurate information on this website and will update it as required in the event of any legislative, regulatory or policy changes.

- **Policing Reform:**

  - **Improving Royal Canadian Mounted Police Governance:** The RCMP and the Management Advisory Board (MAB) jointly negotiated an approach that meets the spirit of this recommendation, without requiring legislation. Under this approach, the MAB has made clear it intends for all of its advice to be made public on its official website, unless there are immediate concerns from an operational perspective, or subject to mandatory exemptions under the Access to Information Act or the Privacy Act. The RCMP has agreed with this approach and intends on posting its own official response to MAB advice on its website moving forward as well, so Canadians can understand what the RCMP position is. The MAB has already begun to post advice on its website in line with this agreement. As

such, both the MAB and the RCMP consider Recommendation P41 to be complete.

RCMP HRD continues to work closely with the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC), as well as the office of the Commissioner of Public Safety from the lens of oversight and governance.

- **Provincial Policing:** The Government of Nova Scotia has initiated this review. The Nova Scotia RCMP is participating, with support from National Headquarters.
  The Nova Scotia RCMP continues to be a participant in the Province of Nova Scotia's ongoing review.

- **Serious Incident Response Team:** This is not within the mandate of HRD. HRD has a policy in place related to SIRT investigations and continues to cooperate fully with the SIRT whenever an incident involving an HRD member is referred.

  The RCMP in Nova Scotia and the Nove Scotia Serious Incident Response Team are in the final stages of signing a new Memorandum of Understanding.

  The RCMP is also currently reviewing and updating its operational policies related to serious incidents, Independent Officer Reviews and the external investigation of regular members after a serious incident.

  Operational policies on external investigation of RCMP employees are being revised. The draft policies are with the National Police Federation for additional consideration based on the most recent collective agreement.

- **Interoperability and Critical Incident Response:** The RCMP Operational Coordination Centre created an inventory of capabilities available within the RCMP's national headquarters. This inventory supports urgent requests from the divisions or for Emergency Management Team activations. The Centre is also now equipped with computer systems from other government agencies for better interagency collaboration and is maintaining a list of available personnel in case of urgent activation.

  HRD and HRP just completed a MOU regarding the Interoperability between the provincial Operational Communications Centre (OCC) and the Integrated Emergency Services (IES). The intent is to improve interoperability between both agencies during emergency events by providing access Records Management Systems (RMS) and mapping tools such as Blue Force Tracking.

  The RCMP HRD has implemented Blue Force Tracking, which is now available to all officers nationwide. This software allows the RCMP to see precise, real-time locations of its officers in the field.

  The RCMP has updated its Alert Ready training, and broader training in use to issue public warnings. This update has been twofold: firstly, Alert Ready training is now included for incoming personnel at Depot. Secondly, Critical Incident training has been updated to include the use of Alert Ready. The RCMP is continuing to monitor for additional improvements.

  RCMP HRD and HRP Critical Incident and Police Dog Services/K9 programs regularly conduct joint training, interoperability exercises and operations.

- **Broader Policing Reform:** The Government of Nova Scotia has initiated this review. The Nova Scotia RCMP is participating, with support from National Headquarters.

  The Nova Scotia RCMP continues to be a participant in the Province of Nova Scotia's ongoing review.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications identified at this time as a result of this report. The budgetary approvals referenced above have been approved as part of the 2025/26 operating budgets for HRP and HRD.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required for the purpose of creating this report.

## LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Nova Scotia *Police Act. 2004*, c. 52:

> (52) On behalf of the board, the board chair or the chair's delegate may give advice or direction, in writing, to the chief officer on any matter within the jurisdiction of the board under this Act, but not to other members of the police department and, for greater certainty, no other member of the board shall give advice or direction to a member of the police department.

Nova Scotia *Police Act. 2004*, c. 55:

Section (1), states:

> (1) The function of a board is to provide
>
> > (a) civilian governance on behalf of the council in relation to the enforcement of law, the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of crime in the municipality; and
> >
> > (b) the administrative direction, organization and policy required to maintain an adequate, effective and efficient police department,
>
> but the board shall not exercise jurisdiction relating to
>
> > (c) complaints, discipline or personnel conduct except in respect of the chief officer of the municipal police department;
> >
> > (d) a specific prosecution or investigation; or
> >
> > (e) the actual day-to-day direction of the police department.

Section (3), states:

> (3) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), a board shall…
>
> > (c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;

(d) ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;

(e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers;

*By-law Number P-100 Respecting the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality, section 7 provides:*

(2) The Chief of Police shall advise the Board with respect to the provision of efficient, effective and economical municipal police service delivery to the taxpayers of the municipality and may in consultation with the Board undertake in a timely manner, research, strategic planning, policy development and implementation and the reporting of results, in response to inquiries by the Board pertaining to its community governance responsibilities, generally categorized as:

(a) providing an effective community voice on matters pertaining to policing;

(b) civilian review of police service delivery;

(c) ensuring the quality of police service delivery by evaluation processes;

(d) keeping generally informed of policing operations; and

(e) insuring police personnel are accountable to civilian authority.

-and-

(4) The Chief of Police is accountable to the Board with respect to the provision of policing in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

## ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Halifax Regional Police – Gender-Based Violence Information Report (August 2024)

Attachment 2 - Halifax Regional Police - Victim Services Unit on Intimate Partner Violence Initiatives – Presentation (April 2025)

Attachment 3 – Halifax Regional Police – Gender-Based Violence Information Report (August 2024)

Attachment 4 – Halifax Regional Police - Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review (December 2024)

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Joanne Smith, Research & Development Coordinator – Halifax Regional Police

Inspector Jeff Mitchell – RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment

Report Approved by: Chief Don MacLean – Halifax Regional Police

Superintendent Don Moser – RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment

Bill Moore, Commissioner of Public Safety, 902.490.8545

Attachment 1

# Item No. 9.1

**Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality**
**December 4, 2024**
**December 18, 2024**

| | |
|---|---|
| **TO:** | Chair Kent and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality |
| **FROM:** | Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer |
| **DATE:** | November 21, 2024 |
| **SUBJECT:** | Update on HRP Actions to Enhance Psychological Safety and Trauma Supports Including Consideration of Budgetary Implications |

---

## INFORMATION REPORT

## ORIGIN

December 13, 2023, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality (Item No. 10.2.2):

MOVED by Commissioner Giles, seconded by Commissioner Smith

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality approve the action items and timeframes in the Board of Police Commissioners' 2024-2025 Workplan, as outlined in Attachment 1 of the staff report dated November 29, 2023.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Board of Police Commissioners ("the Board") on steps taken by Halifax Regional Police (HRP) in relation to the enhancement of psychological safety and trauma supports for HRP employees, including consideration of budgetary implications.

Over recent years, HRP has taken significant steps to build on its existing health and well-being framework, to provide support to all employees in several areas of health and wellness, including psychological safety and trauma support.

These steps include the official formation of a Reintegration Program, the creation of a Reintegration Coordinator position, the hiring of a second Health Specialist, the creation of an internal support network for employees who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+, and the approval of a second Employee and Family Assistance (EFAP) Coordinator position. These additional resources build on the existing framework and are essential to address the demand in this area, which has been steadily increasing.

Other steps include the identification and initiation of an Early Intervention (EI) Program designed to intervene where there are early signs of psychological struggle for an employee, where otherwise they might be missed.

The proposed HRM IT Business System 2025/26 Capital Budget includes a request for the IT system which is necessary to enable the EI Program. If approved by Regional Council, the project will move forward in partnership with HRM IT, in 2025.

## BACKGROUND

On December 13, 2023, the Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC) for the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) passed motion 10.2.2 in relation to the Board of Police Commissioners 2024-2025 Work Plan.

Included in this plan is the strategic priority "Oversee the development of a people-focused policing strategy" under one of its four pillars; Evolve. This priority is described as ensuring *"our police develop a clear plan (including policies, practices, and systems) that will enable them to attract, retain, and develop the people in their services."*[1]

The work plan approved by the Board includes an action item under this pillar and priority of an update on the actions of Halifax Regional Police (HRP) to enhance psychological safety and trauma supports, including consideration of budgetary implications. This report is provided in response to that action item.

## DISCUSSION

The health and well-being of our people is a priority for HRP. This includes feeling safe in the workplace and during their work. Support in this area benefits the individual employee, the organization, and the public they serve. There are existing and planned HRP programs and initiatives which enhance psychological safety and trauma supports in the workplace, including:

- Employee and Family Assistance Program
- Reintegration Program
- Wellness Program Specialist
- Health Specialists
- Safeguarding Program
- Critical Incident Debriefs and Assessments
- Rainbow Internal Support Network

Additional work and supports in this area include focus areas being addressed by the HRP Employee Engagement Working Group, and recently implemented HRM policies.

[1] https://www.halifax.ca/media/84632

**Employee & Family Assistance Program**

The HRP Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) provides confidential support for employees and their families who are experiencing personal, professional, or health-related challenges, including psychological health. The goal is to provide early intervention and support, and encourage employees to seek the assistance they may need. Sometimes, initial contact with the EFAP may be all that an employee or their family member needs, but others may require further follow-ups, or a full EFAP referral to connect them with the services they may require.

Referrals can be made for any type of challenge the person is experiencing. These can include mental health concerns, traumatic incidents, grief and loss, marital difficulties, illness, etc. Since the beginning of 2024, the top three concerns reported by persons seeing EFAP assistance were mental health, operational difficulties, and traumatic incidents.

Prior to 2024 there was one permanent EFAP Coordinator position. As part of the 2024/25 operating budget process, a second position was approved, which HRP is working to fill. EFAP Coordinators being HRP employees offers the substantial benefit that they understand the unique nature of the policing environment and its challenges. This is also a critical component when assistance is provided to an employee's family member, as the family member may be struggling with their loved one being affected by the policing environment, even though they themselves are not directly involved in it.

The responsibilities of an EFAP Coordinator include the delivery of internal training in specialist trauma-informed subject areas, including Applied Suicide Intervention, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), CIS Debriefing, and Strategic Resiliency. These types of crisis intervention are acute emergency mental health interventions[2], sometimes referred to as "emotional first aid", which require this specialized training. The EFAP Coordinator also delivers an overview of the program to the Police Science Program (PSP) cadet class, so they are aware of the supports in place prior to being hired as a police officer.

Other responsibilities of the EFAP Coordinator include the coordination and communication with internal and external stakeholders, such as the Chaplaincy Program, HRM support services, and external service providers, such as counsellors, social workers and psychologists.

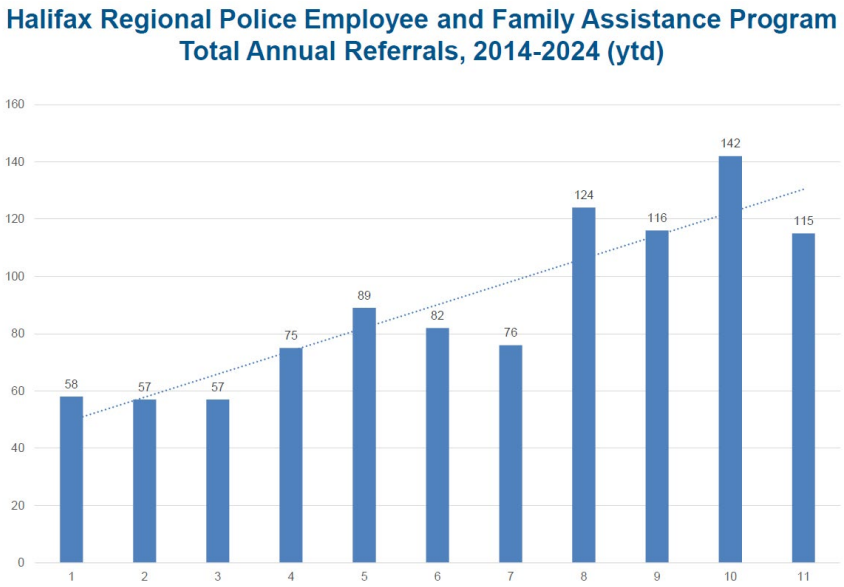
To better support HRP employees and the EFAP Coordinators, peer referral agents have been trained to respond to the needs of employees requiring assistance. Currently, there are over 30 referral agents, who are trained in key areas, including Suicide Intervention, CIS, and CIS Debriefing. Referral agents are all HRP employees, they work on a volunteer basis and are on call 24/7. There is also a waitlist of people who have expressed an interest in becoming a peer referral agent and are waiting for training.

Figure 1 shows the total annual referrals between 2014 and 2024 year-to-date (November 1), which illustrate how these have been steadily increasing.

It is important to note that these numbers simply reflect each time a referral is made. They do not reflect the nature and extent of the work that is subsequently required, nor do they include the number of occasions where advice, information, or support is provided by EFAP, but does not result in a referral.

[2] This is different to Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) which is separate police training, intended to enhance skillset and provide the most effective police response to individuals who are experiencing mental illness

**Figure 1 – Annual Referrals to the HRP Employee & Family Assistance Program, 2014-2024 YTD (Nov 1)**




In 2023 there were 142 EFAP referrals. 91 of those were made in relation to an employee, and 51 in relation to an employee's family member. Families and relationships are a critical part of a person's support network, so it is important to recognize the role the EFAP plays in that wider support.

**Reintegration Program**

The HRP Member Reintegration Program was officially launched in Fall 2022. It is a confidential peer-driven, multi-faceted program which provides support and training for members who have experienced a critical incident and those returning to work following an absence, such as occupational stress injury (OSI) (persistent psychological injury resulting from operational stress). Returning to work after a long-term absence can be overwhelming, and members may need assistance with building their confidence and skills, to ensure readiness to resume their regular duties.

The program is staffed by a full-time Reintegration Coordinator, and supported by a team of volunteers. The coordinator and volunteers have all received a 5-day training course delivered by Edmonton Police, which was the first agency in the country to implement a reintegration program and has since been established as the source of best practice and training.

The training is designed to provide employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to become a peer support Reintegration Program team member. The demand for this training is high. It was delivered to 22 employees in May 2024, from which 12 more volunteers were selected, including three from Integrated Emergency Services (IES), which includes the frontline positions of Emergency Response Communicators. The intention is to continue training people to ensure there is sufficient representation across the organization. The coordinator and volunteers will also avail themselves of other relevant training opportunities as they arise, these are often organized by the EFAP Coordinator, who will let the Reintegration Coordinator know.

The Reintegration Program is designed to support a member's specific needs. Members can self-refer, or they may be referred by another person such as their supervisor, a co-worker, a Health Specialist, the Wellness Specialist, or the EFAP Coordinator. As each individual and their experience are unique, they will lead the pace, scope, depth, length and direction of their individual reintegration. It allows them the

opportunity to work through the sensitivities an operational event has created, in the safety of a confidential environment. The approach may require a partnership approach, involving other agencies such as medical providers and the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB). The internal HRP Health Specialists may also be involved. The goal is the best treatment to ensure the member returns to work when they are healthy and ready to do so.

The program was active prior to its official launch in Fall 2022 but was more of a side project for those who were invested and recognized the need for it. Its official formation demonstrated the commitment of HRP to supporting the health and wellness of its members. Since then, 45 people have officially participated in the program, and the Reintegration Coordinator also deals with regular requests for information, assistance, and support.

From the perspective of HRP, the Reintegration Program is flourishing, and members are feeling its benefits. Testimonials from members who have gone through the program include the following: *"The program has provided a huge confidence boost; not only performance wise but also in providing a benefit, mental health wise"*, and *"Putting on my uniform and adjusting… in a safe, nonjudgemental environment is crucial to me."*

**Wellness Specialist and Programs**

The HRP Wellness Program Specialist (WPS) is responsible for implementing a health and wellness program across HRP, through education, training, prevention, intervention, and recovery strategies, which focus on holistic lifestyle approaches to health and wellness. The position employs a comprehensive approach to the development and implementation of initiatives and programs that encompasses psychological, physical, ergonomic and emotional components, with the objective of empowering and motivating employees to make positive personal choices that improve their overall health and well-being.

Where employees have experienced occupational stress injuries, need accommodations or are returning to work, the WPS is a collaborative partner with the Health Specialists, the Reintegration Coordinator, and the EFAP Coordinator, in identifying and implementing the required supports to help the individual.

The WPS is consulted as a subject matter expert when relevant policies and procedures are developed, and is often called upon to deliver training. They deliver a day of mental health stress management to the PSP cadet class, and act as a consultant on the physical training component of the PSP. A shortened version of the training is also delivered to Experienced Police Officers (EPOs) and Emergency Response Communicators (ERCs) when they are hired. The Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) is a separate two-day course delivered to the PSP class, which is a performance and mental health training, and education program developed by the Canadian Armed Forces, designed to improve well-being and short-term performance, while mitigating any long-term mental health problems.[3]

In 2023, the WPS delivered refresher training to existing employees in block training[4], to remind all employees of and signpost to the supports available.

An initiative identified a couple of years ago by the WPS is the Early Integration (EI) Program. This is designed to intervene where there are early signs of psychological struggle for an employee, where otherwise they might be missed. They have worked steadily and tirelessly to research the program, analyze its capability and fit with HRP programs and operations, and raise awareness.

[3] https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/health-support/road-to-mental-readiness.html

[4] Block training occurs on an annual basis and consists of training delivered to all sworn and some civilian employees, which is either mandatory or identified as a priority by the organization

The benefits of this program have been recognized by HRP and the HRM IT Business System 2025/26 Capital Budget includes a request for the software which is necessary to enable the EI Program. The approximate cost is estimated at $66,000 for the first year, then $31,000 annually thereafter – these will be funded from the HRM IT budget. This request will move forward within the budget process, for consideration by Regional Council. If the request is approved, HRP will move the project forward in partnership with HRM IT, in 2025.

It is not possible to predict with precision the savings this program would realize but, when compared against the salary range of a full-time constable, it would only need to divert one officer from being on a leave of absence for a few months each year, to pay for itself.

**Health Specialists**

The HRP Health Specialists are responsible for delivering effective case management services to support the reintegration of ill or injured employees back into the workplace. They act as the coordinator in facilitating the return to work, liaison with the Nova Scotia Workers' Compensation Board (WCB), as well as support services for employees who stay at work during their recovery.

The Health Specialists will work with the Reintegration Coordinator, the Wellness Program Specialist, the EFAP Coordinator, and any other support services they deem necessary to support and facilitate the employee's full return to the workplace. As with the Reintegration Program, there is no one-size-fits-all solution so they work to develop a plan tailored to the individual employee.

There are two full-time permanent Health Specialists at HRP. The second position was introduced in late 2021 and created more capacity to deal with the increased workload of complex health files (see Figure 2, below)

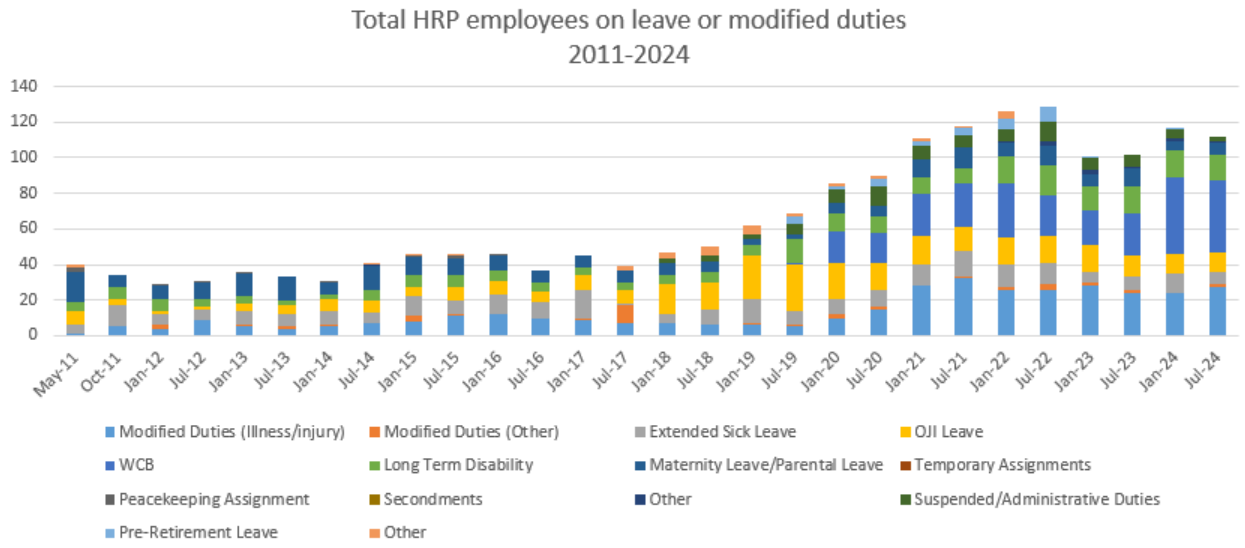
In 2014, psychological injury coverage was introduced in Nova Scotia under the WCB. There was a further change in 2018 when presumptive psychological injury coverage was introduced, whereby emergency services first responders who suffer a psychological injury are presumed to have incurred the injury due to their work. This was a recognition that they are at a higher risk of such injury than the general population.

On September 1, 2024, the law changed to include Gradual Onset Psychological Injury under the WCB process. A work-related gradual onset psychological injury is caused by repeated significant stressors at work. Most often, these kinds of injuries happen because of ongoing bullying or harassment in the workplace, and they are injuries that build up over time.[5] For a claim to be accepted there would have to be a clinical diagnosis that the injury is directly related to these repeated significant stressors within the workplace.

Due to the recency of its introduction, it is too early to assess the impact of this legislative change on HRP, but the expectation is claims will be increasingly received as it becomes established.

[5] https://www.wcb.ns.ca/claims/gradual-onset-psychological-injury/what-is-GPI

**Figure 2 – Total HRP employees on leave or modified duties, 2011 – 2024**




## Safeguarding Program

There are certain positions within HRP which are at a higher risk of significant and/or prolonged exposure to situations and material with an increased likelihood of having an adverse impact on the employee, such as child abuse, sexual assault, and homicide. These employees participate in an annual assessment with a psychologist to assess whether they are coping with the demands of the role and are safe to continue working in that position, or whether they may need additional supports or treatment, such as counselling or a period of leave. HRP is currently exploring the expansion of this program to the Patrol division through an initial pilot.

A private psychologist is contracted to carry out these assessments. They also carry out pre-employment assessments of applicants for the PSP cadet class, and post-critical incident assessments where required.

## Critical Incident Debriefs and Assessments

Where there has been an incident of a particularly traumatic nature, the EFAP Coordinator will arrange for a debrief to be held with the employees exposed to the trauma, either individually or as part of a group. Participation is voluntary but strongly encouraged. During the debrief the EFAP Coordinator will assist the participants in normalizing the feelings they are experiencing, and help them understand potential reactions they may feel and experience, as well as educate them on available resources and supports if they do experience such reactions.

The exposure can take different forms, such as officers directly attending and witnessing the event, the call-takers and dispatchers hearing and witnessing the event over the phone and radio, or the forensic identification members attending the scene to capture and document the forensic evidence.

Psychologist assessments are scheduled for six weeks post-incident, and beyond. If the psychologist identifies that an employee has been significantly impacted by the incident, the Wellness Program Specialist will connect with the employee to see if they would benefit from support and assistance. Where they would, a claim is submitted to the Workers' Compensation Board and the employee will be supported through that process by the Health Specialists.

**Rainbow Internal Support Network (R-ISN)**

The R-ISN is an employee-led confidential support group which was established to support employees who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. The need for such a group was identified by several employees, including the HRP Diversity Officer, who went on to work on its design, development, and implementation. With the full support of the HRPA, Chief MacLean, and other members of the HRP management team, the R-ISN was formalized in 2023.

Since then, the R-ISN has supported 2SLGBTQIA+ employees in several ways; providing advice and support on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues in both their personal and professional lives, whether they involve the employee directly, or someone they care about, or where the employee is just looking for some general information. The R-ISN was heavily involved in the 2023 block training on the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, which was delivered to all employees and the management team, and remains available to share their knowledge at any time.

The R-ISN is also there to bridge the gap between policing and community. Employees can contact the group at any time for advice on investigations, and the group has seen a significant level of outreach from officers. While there is no official measure of the impact from this, there is little doubt that this collaborative way of working will have positively contributed to policing operations and investigations.

The R-ISN held its inaugural Pride BBQ event at Police HQ on July 20, 2024, during Pride week. The event was for HRP employees plus their family and friends, to allow them to celebrate Pride and feel included. Another R-ISN initiative is the Rainbow Name Tag project, whereby employees can wear a name tag with the rainbow symbol, or a rainbow lanyard, to show allyship to the community and colleagues.

The creation and implementation of the R-ISN should be recognized as an enormous step forward for HRP. Where employees' psychological safety can be impacted if they feel they don't fit in with the majority, the R-ISN is a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment which provides support both personally and professionally.

**Employee Engagement Working Group**

In January 2024, the Employee Engagement Working Group was re-established, and consists of committed volunteers who feel passionately about their colleagues, and making the workplace better for them. As of the date of this report, the group has 24 members.

Following the results of the 2022 Employee Engagement Survey, three key areas of focus were identified, and sub-committees were established to look at each area: (1) internal communication, (2) personal development, and (3) workplace culture, well-being and environment. All areas involve intertwined elements that both individually and collectively contribute to psychological safety.

Effective, regular and timely internal communication is essential for employees to feel involved and engaged with their organization. Not being informed about key information, or even non-essential but nice-to-know information, can make employees feel sidelined. The Internal Communication sub-committee has worked hard to brainstorm and develop ideas, including the launch of the first bi-weekly HRP communication on November 21, 2024. The communication was developed in partnership with the HRP Public Relations and Corporate Communications team, and is designed to provide regular organizational and operational updates, such as staffing moves, hires, and departures. While some information is currently delivered in alternative ways, this communication will consolidate it, streamline the process, and provide a mechanism available to all employees to both receive and deliver information in a regular and timely manner.

Personal development is another area of focus. Most who work in management will be familiar with the theory behind Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs[6], where 'self-actualization' is the highest level of need, and is met when people are fulfilled and doing all they are capable of. People are most motivated and engaged when they feel they have a purpose, they are clear on that purpose, and when they feel what they are working towards has meaning. Although the general work purpose of those who are employed in policing may appear obvious, there is a multitude of policing roles, held by both civilian and sworn members, all with different objectives and priorities. And all individuals have their own goals and aspirations. There is a real need for a structured internal personal development framework. The personal development sub-committee has been working to identify how best to achieve and optimize this, as well as a review of current training opportunities, as these link heavily to employees' personal development. These areas of work will be significant long-term projects.

The third area of focus is workplace culture, well-being, and environment. Where culture is essentially the workplace's way of life, employees who do not feel they fit in, that their way of life is different, may be more likely to experience psychological stress and injury. They must come to work; they cannot simply avoid this stressor. Significant changes in culture will not happen overnight, but the sub-committee for this area has been working to identify and prioritize potential actions and initiatives. They have identified two initiatives which are in the development phase – short wellness briefings to be delivered to frontline officers, and reintroduction of the HRP Family Program, which recognizes the importance and benefits of an employee's family having an enhanced understanding and involvement in their professional life.

**Additional Supports**

HRP is in the very early stages of exploring the potential implementation of Psychological First Aid (PFA) training, which is about self-care and caring for others, during challenging times. It is a two-day course, developed and maintained by the Canadian Red Cross[7], with the objective of equipping people with the skillset to help both themselves and others during a mental health emergency, through building up resiliency to stress and establishing coping strategies. HRP has a PFA instructor who is able to instruct and certify others, and the program can be tailored to any team within the department.

It is also important to note the HRM policies in place. In April 2024, the HRM Respectful Workplace and Whistleblower policies were implemented. The purpose of the Respectful Workplace Policy is to support the provision of a work environment where all persons are treated with respect, fairness, and dignity. The purpose of the Whistleblower Policy is to ensure those who bring forward concerns in good faith are protected from retaliation. Taken together, these contribute significantly towards employees feeling psychologically safe in the workplace. The policies are directed at increasing respectful interactions and opportunities for employees to have meaningful dialogue and intervention, and reduce workplace conflicts.

There is also an HRM EFAP. Full-time HRP employees who are non-union, NSGEU or CUPE, are eligible to seek assistance from the HRM EFAP program. Similar to the HRP EFAP, it offers confidential, short-term counselling, advisory and information services designed to encourage employees and their family members to voluntarily seek assistance with issue that may impact their well-being.

In the 2023/24 budget process, HRP requested two new positions, and these were approved: Psychologist and Occupational Health Nurse. These requests highlighted a need for such capability and capacity across HRM, so the positions were transferred to Human Resources to create the HRM positions of Director of Employee Wellbeing and Occupational Health Practitioner. The Director of Employee Wellbeing is focusing on foundational work by completing a current state assessment of the corporate occupational health and safety program and an audit of existing policies and practices, to understand gaps and opportunities and where HRM is in terms of a psychologically healthy workplace, compared against the national standard.

[6] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383241976_Maslow's_Hierarchy_of_Needs

[7] https://www.redcross.ca/training-and-certification/course-descriptions/psychological-first-aid

This work is underway but is complex and long-term. The Occupational Health Practitioner has recently been hired and will be working with all business units to support management from both a frontline and prevention perspective.

HRP recognizes the benefits of these new positions and is committed to a collaborative partnership for the benefit of all employees. It is felt that HRP would still benefit from an in-house psychologist, including that they would complete all psychological assessments during the hiring process for both new and experienced police officers rather than this process being contracted out. The position would also be readily available for advice to the existing health and wellness team, and liaison with other treatment providers, thereby reducing potential delays in the return to work or recovery process. This will be a potential consideration in future budget discussions.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications were identified when creating this report.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required for the purpose of creating this report.

## LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Nova Scotia *Police Act*. 2004, c. 55:

Section (3), states:

> (3) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), a board shall…
> (c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;
> (d) ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;
> (e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers;

Section 53(1), states:

> 53(1) The Board shall annually cause the chief to prepare a budget for the police department.

Halifax Charter, section 35(1), states:

> 35(1) The Chief Administrative Officer shall (b) ensure that an annual budget is prepared and submitted to the Council.

## ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments to this report.

Report Prepared by: Joanne Smith – Research & Development Coordinator, Halifax Regional Police

Report Approved by: Chief Don MacLean – Chief of Police, Halifax Regional Police

Attachment 2

PARTNERS IN POLICING

HALIFAX

# HRP Victim Services

Dolly Mosher, Coordinator, HRP VS

# HRP Victim Services

- Police-based victim support unit
- Established in 1996 to provide supportive services to victims of a crime
- Special emphasis: victims of domestic violence and sexualized violence
- Office location:

  7 Mellor Ave., Burnside

  East Division

# Victim Services Team

- Victim Services Coordinator
- Sexual Assault Case Worker
- Domestic Violence High-Risk Case Coordinator (DVCC)
- Domestic Violence Police Officer (DVO)
- Domestic Violence Offender Navigator (DVON)
- Volunteer Mobile Outreach Team (15 Volunteers)
- Business Support Person

# Victim Services Goals

- **Enhance** the services provided by police to victims
- Provide a **coordinated trauma-informed response** to victims in cooperation with community agencies
- **Increase awareness** of community-based services through education
- **Increase supports** and healing for victims through research and education

# Who Do We Support?

Victim Services supports victims of **all crimes** and tragic circumstances, including:

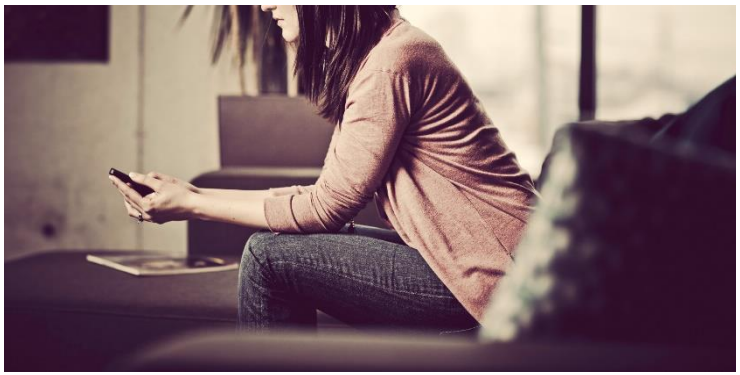
- Domestic Violence
- Sexual Assault
- Robbery
- Sudden death/suicide
- Homicide
- Officer led referrals

# What do we do?

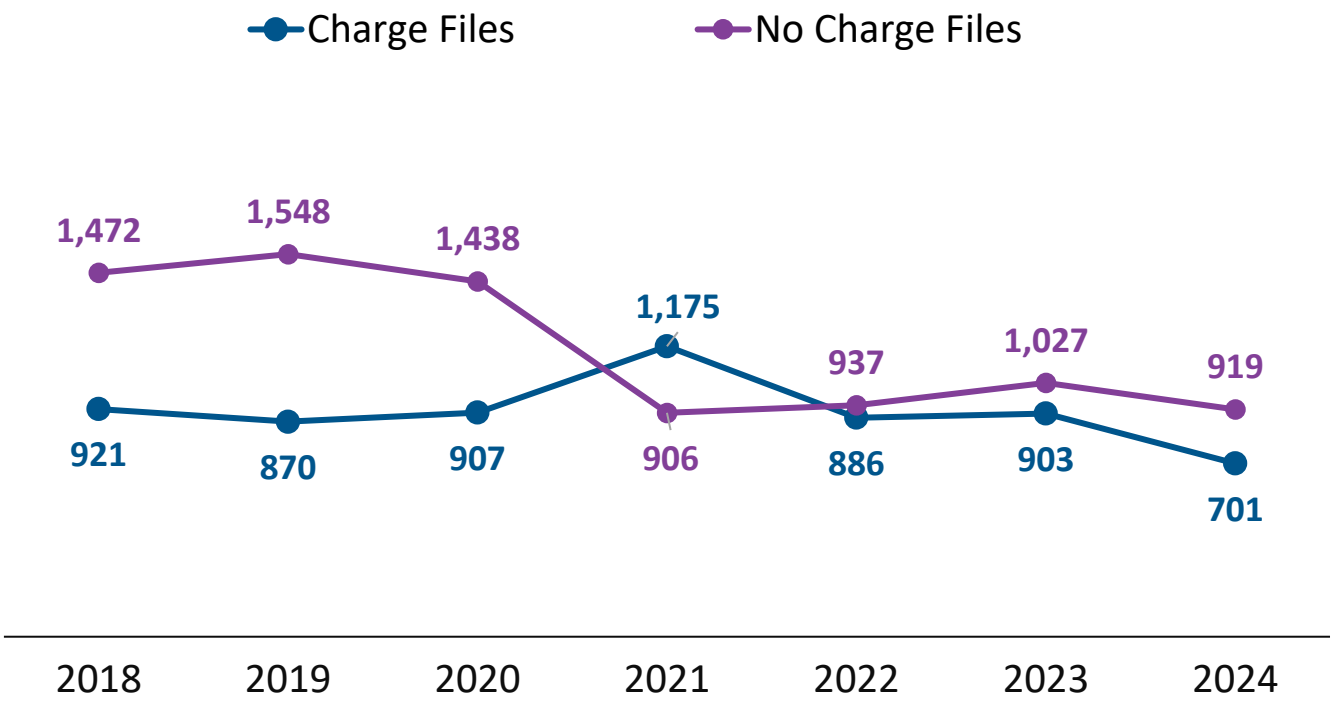
- Crisis intervention
- Police case information
- Emotional support/short-term counseling
- Safety planning
- Advocate for victims
- Referrals
- Liaison between the police and victim
- Crisis on-scene support

# How Do We Get Referrals?

- Victim Services work queue
- Direct referrals by police officers
- Client-initiated contact
- Community agencies



# Total files involving domestic violence reported to Halifax Regional Police 2018-2024 (YTD: Nov. 28, 2024)



# High-Risk Case Coordination

- Team approach – DV Officer/DVCC/DVON
- Attempts to contact victim – DVCC and DVO may go out if not successful by phone
- Domestic Violence Alarm Program (DVAP) may be offered
- Risk/case management with high-risk partners:
  - Department of Justice Victim Services
  - Child and Family Wellbeing program
  - Bryony House
  - New Start Counselling
  - Correctional Services
  - Public Prosecution Service
  - Domestic Violence Court
  - Risk Unit within Nova Scotia Sheriff Services

# 8 Stages of Domestic Homicide

1. Pre-relationship history of stalking/abuse
2. The relationship develops quickly
3. Signs of coercive control are obvious
4. Perpetrator is triggered
5. Escalation
6. Perpetrator pivots
7. Premeditative planning
8. Homicide

Source: https://www.dvact.org/post/do-you-know-the-8-step-timeline-in-domestic-abuse-homicides

# Strangulation/Choking

- Victim Services automatically designates an Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) file as high-risk if a choking charge is laid
- Contact with the victim includes asking pertinent questions with regard to symptoms that may require the immediate need for medical attention, including:
    - Incontinence
    - Loss of consciousness
    - Swelling internally of the throat
    - Loss of voice

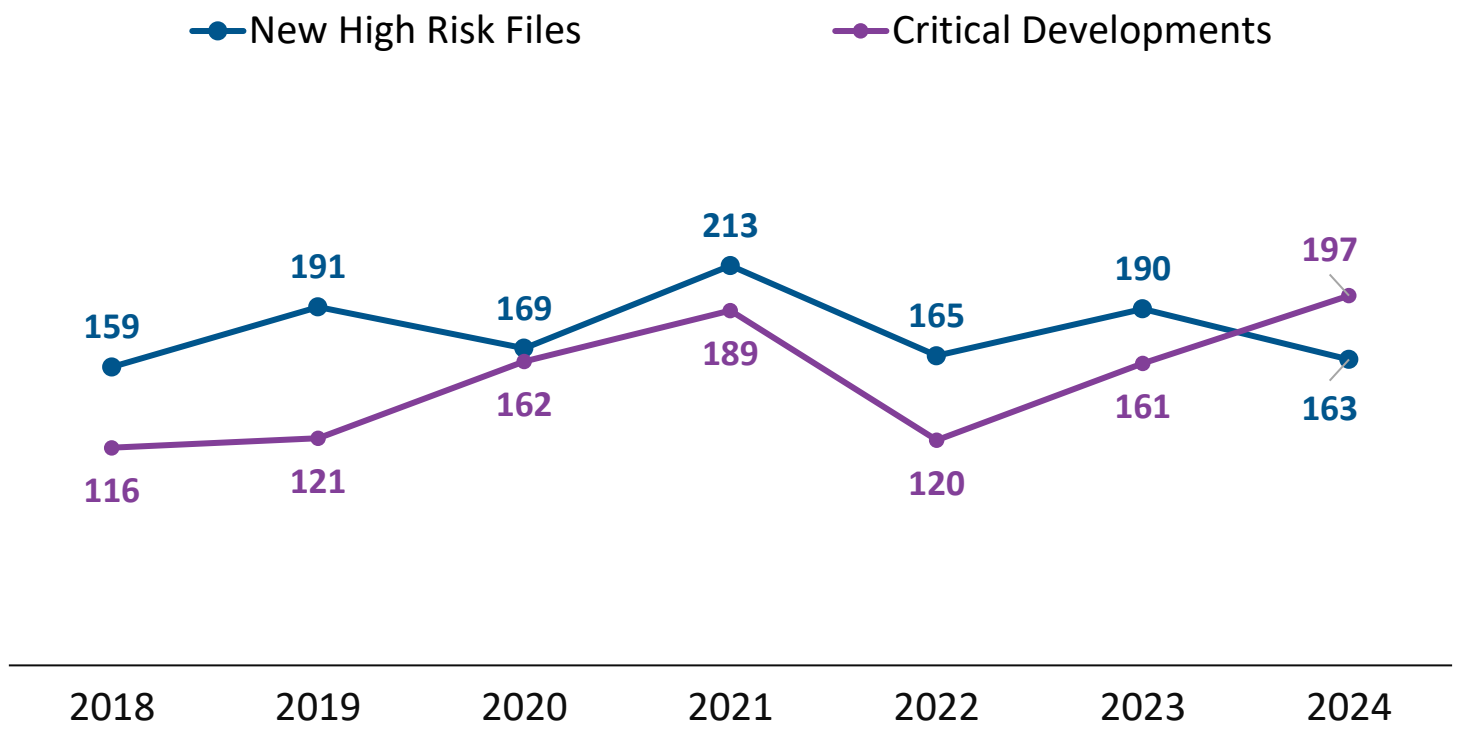
# Jacquelyn Campbell Danger Assessment (JCDA)(Lethality)

- HRP Victim Services staff are all certified in the use of the Jacquelyn Campbell Danger Assessment (JCDA), an instrument designed to assess the likelihood of lethality or near lethality occurring in a case of intimate partner violence
- The Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) is a tool used to predict the risk of future intimate partner violence and assess the likelihood of re-offense by individuals who have assaulted their partners
  - ODARA scores of five or six are given immediate call status and victim is offered the risk assessment
  - Score of 18 or higher indicates extreme risk of lethality in that relationship and given a high-risk designation

# Highest Risk Domestic Violence Table (HRDVT)

- HRDVT is a multi-agency partnership working in collaboration to tackle the DV cases assessed as being at the highest risk for lethality
- The group meets weekly and includes HRP, the Department of Heath and the Public Prosecution Service
- Cases of highest risk are referred to HRDVT
- HRP presently has five cases

# Total files involving domestic violence reported to Halifax Regional Police and designated as high risk 2018-2024 (YTD: Nov. 28, 2024)



# Domestic Violence Offender Navigator Program (DVON)

- History
- Theory
- Why?
- The DVON program started as a pilot project in 2019 and is an upstream primary resource to high-risk domestic violence offenders
- Through early intervention, they work with the offender, with the shared objective of the offender taking responsibility, acknowledging the harm of their abuse, and accepting help

*"Offenders need to access services as soon as possible to reduce the possibility of repeat behaviour and further harm."*

*"SOONER RATHER THAN LATER"*

# Domestic Violence Offender Navigator (DVON)

DVON Process:

- In high-risk files, accused is informed and referred by the DVO
- Accused is contacted directly by the DVON (cold call)
- Referral by DVCC/Victim Services worker
- Voluntary program; access to community resources
- DVON accompanies DVO to speak with the accused in person, when appropriate

# “A day in the life of a DVON”

- Stay connected with the offender to offer ongoing supports
- Advocate for offender rights, but also reinforce the importance of taking responsibility
- Document contact with offender
- Case discussed by all parties involved

*All of this happens before a plea is entered, with an option of accessing Domestic Violence Court*

# Sooner Than Later Conference 2023

- Funding through Canadian Women's Foundation
- 95 Police/ Corrections/ Victim Services workers from Atlantic Canada and Regina

Highlights:

- Dr. Nancy Ross (Dalhousie School of Social Work)
- DVON program beginnings and status
- Police panel
- Dr. Allan Wade Ph.D - Violence, Resistance and the Power in Language

# How do we measure success?

- Offenders going through the DV court process, accepting responsibility and the victim not required for Criminal Court
- Offenders are **NOT** re-offending
- Victim and offender either reconciling or co-parenting safely
- Program has been funded successfully through:
  - Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women
  - Canadian Women's Foundation
  - Proceeds of Crime Fund
- Police agencies from NL, Ottawa, Calgary, Regina and NB seeking information on starting the program

# Officer Training Initiatives

- Trauma-informed approach to policing:
  - HRP Criminal Investigation Division (CID) Course
  - Recruits with the Police Science Program (two days)
  - New police officers who join HRP
- ODARA Training – Developed a new add-on exercise now being used in other police jurisdictions
- Victim Services 1-9 p.m. shifts (within divisions)
- Introduction to Coercive Control – What is it, is it family violence? Impacts and how to recognize it

# Other Victim Services Programs

- Peace Bond Navigators Program
- Emergency Protection Order Support
- Safe Space/Safe Place Workshops
- Translated brochures & access to interpreters for victim support
- Medical Examiners Office referrals
- Public education presentations

**Dolly Mosher**
**mosherdo@halifax.ca**
**902-817-5832**

# Item No. 3

**Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality**
**September 4, 2024**

| | |
|---|---|
| **TO:** | Chair Kent and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality |
| **FROM:** | Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer |
| **DATE:** | August 22, 2024 |
| **SUBJECT:** | Halifax Regional Police – Gender-Based Violence Information Report |

## INFORMATION REPORT

## ORIGIN

February 28, 2022, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality motion (Item No. 11.2.4):

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners invite subject matter experts in the areas of gender-based violence, family violence, sexual violence, and intimate partner violence (collectively, "gender-based violence") to give presentations to the Board at a special consultation meeting.

THAT the Chair of the Board of the Police Commissioners direct the chief officer of the Halifax Regional Police to, ahead of the special consultation meeting, draft a staff report outlining policies, procedures, statistics and other relevant information relating to the issue of policing and gender-based violence.

THAT the Chair of the Board of the Police Commissioners advise the chief officer of the Halifax District RCMP to do the same.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

## BACKGROUND

Canada's national action plan to end gender-based violence[1] defines gender-based violence as violence against a person because of their sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender. It is a human rights violation which either results or is likely to result in suffering and multiple types of harm.

[1] https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intergovernmental-collaboration/national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence/first-national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence.html

Gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls.
In February 2022, the Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC) for Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) directed Halifax Regional Police (HRP) to produce a staff report outlining policies, procedures, statistics, and other relevant information relating to the issue of policing and gender-based violence.

## DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this report, HRP is providing information on the following crime types involving harm or the threat of harm, where women and girls are disproportionately affected – domestic violence, sexual violence and exploitation, human trafficking, and hate crimes and incidents where gender was the targeted characteristic.

### Victim Services

It is worth noting at the outset of this report the substantial and important work carried out by HRP Victim Services in relation to all reports of crime where a victim is involved, including gender-based violence. The Victim Services team is staffed by highly trained and skilled employees and volunteers, who provide support to victims of crime, and particularly intimate partner violence and spousal abuse. The team includes the permanent positions of Domestic Violence Case Coordinator (DVCC) and Sexual Violence Caseworker, and a temporary position of Domestic Violence Offender Navigator (DVON).

Victim Services attempts to contact all victims of crime within 48 hours of the incident, to provide emotional support, police case information, and to connect victims with other supports in the community, to provide them with the tools necessary to seek additional help and support. The team is connected with multiple community partners with different specialist areas, including the Chebucto Family Centre and the YWCA Gender-Based Violence Settlement Sector. All staff and volunteers are familiarized with the services offered by all partners through introductory meetings, professional visits, and ongoing communication, to assist their knowledge of existing and new programs and services offered by partners.

Victim Services staff and volunteers use a trauma-informed and victim-centred approach when working with victims of violence. They deliver training to officers on the use of a trauma-informed approach, with an emphasis on meeting victims where they are, and the importance of understanding that victims may present in a range of ways, such as being non-responsive or not remembering details. Interactive exercises are used in the training to emphasize the importance of understanding the range of responses a victim may have.

Victim Services also delivers ‘Safe Place – Safe Space’ workshops to external organizations. The workshops are designed for supervisors and HR departments and address safety planning in the workplace, with not only victims of domestic violence, but also with accused persons who have taken responsibility for the violence and need support and accommodation for court and counselling. The content of the workshops includes the importance of safety planning, accommodations for work schedules, and arrival and departure times, as well as provision of a safe place to disclose for both the victims and offenders.

Lastly, but very significantly, Victim Services also has a Domestic Violence Offender Navigator (DVON) role. The DVON program started as a pilot project in 2019, and is an upstream primary resource to high-risk domestic violence offenders. Through early intervention, the DVON initiates conversations with the offender, with the shared objective of the offender taking responsibility, acknowledging the harm of their abuse, and accepting help.

The two highly trained and specialized roles of the DVON and the DVCC work closely together with the team’s Domestic Violence Officer (DVO) to share information and adopt a problem-solving approach, to ensure the safety of the victim and deliver support to the offender to mitigate the risk of further harm. For many offenders, who truly want to change and are struggling with the outcomes of their abuse, such as the

loss of their parenting role, it is the first time they have been offered help and support.
Funding for the DVON role has recently been extended through a provincial grant, and a request to make the role permanent will be included in the HRP budget process for 2025/26.

The above is a summary of the relevant points in relation to gender-based violence and Victim Services, however the services they provide are extensive and reach far beyond this summary. Further information is available to the Board of Police Commissioners upon request. Information relating to Victim Services[2], domestic violence[3], and sexual assault[4], is also publicly available on the HRP section of the HRM website.

**Domestic Violence**

HRP has policies in the following areas:

- Domestic Violence Intervention Act (DVIA) – this legislation creates a system for granting orders to victims of domestic violence in an expedited manner;
- Emergency Protection Order (EPO) – the DVIA also permits the Justice of the Peace to grant an EPO to ensure the immediate protection of a victim;
- Domestic Violence Alarm Program (DVAP) – this is coordinated by the HRP Victim Services Unit as a means of providing security to high-risk victims of domestic violence;
- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) – this policy outlines the responsibilities and processes involved in the response to an IPV incident, additional to the standard response and investigation.

Under the IPV policy, the HRP response includes that the incident is flagged as domestic violence on the HRP Records Management System (Versadex RMS), any child welfare referrals are completed, and the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) tool is completed[5].

Nova Scotia has a pro-arrest, pro-charge policy regarding domestic violence, which means that where there is reasonable evidence that an offence took place, the investigating officer must lay charges. This removes the onus from victims, whereas previously it was not uncommon for them to feel fearful about pressing charges, or receive threats or intimidation from the abuser in an effort to prevent them for asking for charges.

Victim Services will be informed in all IPV cases and, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, may attend the scene. Where the risk assessment indicates a high risk of serious harm, the DVCC is utilized, to manage the file and coordinate information sharing among all primary service providers. Depending on the severity and complexity of the incident, the investigation will either remain with the Patrol member who originally attended, or be transferred to the Integrated Criminal Investigation Division (ICID). Further detail on HRP processes can be found in the IPV policy at **Attachment 1**.

The following statistics outline the number of domestic violence files reported to HRP[6] since 2018, broken down by charge and those which were designated high risk for serious harm. Files marked as 'critical development' are those originally designated as high risk and where a new incident has occurred, triggering the requirement for the high risk process of notification to all protocol partners, to be repeated.

---

[2] https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/what-victim-services-unit; https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/victim-services-team

[3] https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/domestic-violence

[4] https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/sexual-assault; https://www.halifax.ca/fire-police/police/programs-services/victim-services-halifax/sexual-assault-reporting-process

[5] All Nova Scotia police agencies are mandated to utilize this risk assessment tool

[6] Where an HRP file is transferred to the integrated CID, which is made up of both HRP and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment members, it may be investigated by an RCMP member

**Table 1 – Total files involving domestic violence reported to Halifax Regional Police**

| Year | Charge files | No Charge files |
|---|---|---|
| 2018 | 921 | 1472 |
| 2019 | 870 | 1548 |
| 2020 | 907 | 1438 |
| 2021 | 1175 | 906 |
| 2022 | 886 | 937 |
| 2023 | 903 | 1027 |
| 2024 (to June 30) | 658 | 473 |

**Table 2 – Total files involving domestic violence reported to Halifax Regional Police and designated as high risk**

| Year | New High Risk Files | Critical Developments |
|---|---|---|
| 2018 | 159 | 116 |
| 2019 | 191 | 121 |
| 2020 | 169 | 162 |
| 2021 | 213 | 189 |
| 2022 | 165 | 120 |
| 2023 | 190 | 161 |
| 2024 (to June 30) | 42 | 28 |

**Sexual Violence & Exploitation**

HRP has a policy on Sexual Assault Investigations[7], which outlines how sexual assault investigations are complex in nature and require a trauma-informed response (TIR). Where possible, officers trained in TIR will be dispatched to these reports. The policy also outlines the specific actions required of call-takers, dispatchers, responding members, supervisors, the integrated Sexual Assault Investigation Team (SAIT) within the ICID, and other specialist positions when dealing with reports of sexual offences. The SAIT is staffed by detectives who have received specialist training in the areas of sexual violence and child abuse.

Depending on the severity and complexity of the incident, the investigation will either remain with the Patrol member who originally attended, or be transferred to the SAIT. These include files where the victim is younger than 16, the investigation is historical in nature, or unusually complex.

The following statistics outline reports of sexual violence and exploitation reported to HRP since 2019[8].

[7] This policy is currently under review and therefore is not publicly available, however it can be made available to members of the BoPC upon request

[8] Where an HRP file is investigated by the integrated Sexual Assault Investigation Team (SAIT), which is made up of both HRP and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment members, it may be investigated by an RCMP member

**Table 3 – Total files involving sexual violence and/or exploitation reported to Halifax Regional Police**

| Year | Sexual Violence & Exploitation Files |
|---|---|
| 2019 | 306 |
| 2020 | 236 |
| 2021 | 315 |
| 2022 | 325 |
| 2023 | 300 |
| 2024 YTD (to July 31) | 155 |

## Human Trafficking

HRP has a policy on Human Trafficking and Missing Persons (HTMP)[9], and investigations into these types of incidents are conducted by the integrated HTMP unit in the ICID. The HTMP unit is made up of detectives who have received specialist training in the areas of human trafficking and missing persons.

Incidents where human trafficking may be present are rarely reported at the outset as 'human trafficking', they will often be received as a different type of call for service, such as assault, or domestic violence. Where the investigation reveals a broader picture and police may identify or suspect that human trafficking is occurring, the investigation will transfer to the HTMP unit[10].

The HTMP policy outlines the indicators of human trafficking, some of the complex factors to be recognized and considered in these investigations, the importance of a trauma-informed response, and the actions required of responding members, supervisors, and other specialist positions when dealing with suspected human trafficking.

Human trafficking offences in Canada are addressed by the Criminal Code of Canada (CCC), and also the Immigration and Refugee Protect Act (IRPA). The CCC addresses trafficking within Canada, and the IRPA addresses trafficking into Canada from another country.

The following statistics outline the CCC and IRPA offences recorded as occurring within HRP areas[11].

**Table 4 - Total files involving human trafficking investigations recorded by HRP**

| Year | CCC | IRPA | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2019 | 11 | 14 | **25** |
| 2020 | 15 | 13 | **28** |
| 2021 | 27 | 1 | **28** |
| 2022 | 17 | 0 | **17** |
| 2023 | 12 | 11 | **23** |
| 2024 YTD (to July 31) | 4 | 14 | **18** |

[9] This policy is currently under review and therefore is not publicly available, however it can be made available to members of the BoPC upon request

[10] Where the integrated HTMP is made up of both HRP and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment members, the file may be investigated by an RCMP member

[11] Where available, the primary location will be recorded. The geographical span and complexity of human trafficking investigations means identifying a primary location is not always possible

### Hate Crimes and Incidents

HRP has a policy on Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents[12], which outlines the additional responsibilities and expectations required when responding to a report where hate is suspected to be a motivating factor. These include that any such reports will be flagged as hate-motivated on the Versadex RMS, and referred to the HRP Hate Crime Unit (HCU) for review.

The HCU is currently staffed by one detective who has received specialist training in the area of hate crime and violent extremism, and is due to expand to two positions after an additional investigator position was approved in the 2024/25 budget process.

Depending on the severity and complexity of the incident, the investigation will either remain with the Patrol member who originally attended, or be transferred to the ICID. The HCU will assist with the hate-motivated aspects of any investigation as appropriate and, where charges are laid, shall work with the investigating officer and the prosecutor to ensure the hate motivation is raised as an aggravating factor at court.

As part of HRP's progress in responding to hate crimes and hate incidents, the HCU was implemented in January 2022 and there has been a focus on improved data collection. The following statistics outline the number of hate crimes and hate incidents where gender identity and/or expression was the targeted characteristic, including those classified as misogynistic and transphobic.

**Table 5 - Total files involving confirmed or suspected hate motivation reported to Halifax Regional Police, where gender identity or expression was the targeted characteristic**

| Year | Hate Crimes | Hate Incidents[13] |
|---|---|---|
| 2022 | 5 | 2 |
| 2023 | 10 | 38 |
| 2024 YTD (to July 31) | 5 | 16 |

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required for the purpose of creating this information report.

## LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Under subsection 55(1) of the Police Act, the function of a board is to provide:

> (a) civilian governance on behalf of the council in relation to the enforcement of law, the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of crime in the municipality; and
> (b) the administrative direction, organization and policy required to maintain an adequate, effective and efficient police department

[12] https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/fire-police/police/hate-crime-and-hate-incident-response.pdf

[13] Hate Incidents are hate-motivated behaviours which are not criminal acts

Without limiting the generality of the functions noted in subsection 55(1), under subsection 55(3) the Board has the following specific duties: …

> (c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;
> (d) ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;
> (e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers.

Section 52 reads:

> On behalf of the board, the board chair or the chair's delegate may give advice or direction, in writing, to the chief officer on any matter within the jurisdiction of the board under this Act, but not to other members of the police department and, for greater certainty, no other member of the board shall give advice or direction to a member of the police department.

## ATTACHMENTS

**Attachment 1** – Intimate Partner Violence Policy, Halifax Regional Police.

---

Report Prepared by: Acting Deputy Chief Andrew Matthews – Halifax Regional Police

Report Approved by: Chief Don MacLean – Halifax Regional Police

---

Attachment 4

# Item No. 10.2.1
**Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality**
**December 4, 2024**

**TO:** Chair Kent and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality

**FROM:** Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** November 12, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review – Halifax Regional Police

---

## RECOMMENDATION REPORT

## ORIGIN

October 4, 2023, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality motion (Item No. 10.2.2):

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners defer Item 10.2.2 to a future meeting of the Board in order for Halifax Regional Police to provide further information on the progress of the implementation of the Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review Model including identification of the police resourcing required to implement the model.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

March 4, 2024, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality motion (Item No. 10.3.1):

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality direct the Chief Officer of Halifax Regional Police (HRP) to prepare a staff report which should include:

a. A breakdown of the number of allegations of sexual offences investigated by SAIT which do not lead to charges being laid; and

b. A recommendation as to whether or not the Board should direct the direct the Chief Officer of HRP to implement the Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review (VACR) program as proposed by Sunny Mariner at the Board's June 20, 2022, meeting.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

## RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality direct the Chief Officer of Halifax Regional Police and advise the Chief Officer of Halifax Regional Detachment to participate in the RCMP H Division (Nova Scotia) Sexual Assault Investigations Review Committee process for a trial period of 12 months, and return to the Board in February 2026 with an update and a recommendation as to continued participation.

## BACKGROUND

The August 7, 2024, meeting of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Board of Police Commissioners received an Information Report from Halifax Regional Police: *"Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review – Halifax Regional Police."*[1] That report can be found at Attachment 1, and fulfilled part (a) of the above motion, dated March 4, 2024.

The report outlined how the Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review (VACR) model seeks to improve equitable access to the criminal justice system of sexual violence survivors, through the review of sexual assault investigations which do not result in a charge.

The Board had previously recommended in June 2022 that Halifax Regional Police (HRP) and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment (HRD) explore options for the implementation of VACR in Halifax[2]. This report addresses that recommendation and part (b) of the above motion dated March 4, 2024.

## DISCUSSION

The benefits of a review model for sexual violence investigations are recognized and acknowledged by HRP. In exploring the options for such a model in Halifax, HRP has been working collaboratively with the RCMP on integrating files investigated by the Integrated Sexual Assault Investigation Team (SAIT) into the RCMP H Division (Nova Scotia) Sexual Assault Investigations Review Committee (SAIRC) process.

SAIRCs are being established in all RCMP contract policing divisions to provide investigative oversight, to ensure investigations are thorough, timely, impartial, and properly classified, as well as to identify any systemic gaps and barriers.[3]

The SAIRC is comprised of provincial independent subject matter experts across governmental and non-governmental organizations, all of whom are required to sign a non-disclosure agreement. An RCMP Sergeant attends the meetings on behalf of RCMP but does not participate in the file review process; their role is to answer any questions from SAIRC members.

Investigations are selected at random prior to each SAIRC meeting, with the un-vetted file material securely and completely prepared and transferred. No sexual assault investigations are excluded from being selected from review, including those involving children.

The SAIRC meets three times per year to review sexual assault investigations. Each committee member reviews a file individually and in depth, against an agreed set of standards. Following the review, the SAIRC

---

[1] August 7, 2024, Board of Police Commissioners | Halifax

[2] June 20, 2022, Board of Police Commissioners | Halifax

[3] https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/the-way-forward-ii-an-update-the-implementation-the-rcmps-sexual-assault-review-and-victim-support

may find that the investigation was completed in accordance with best practice, or they may make recommendations, including (but not limited to) that the investigation be re-opened for additional investigative steps to be taken, or that the investigating officer receive feedback.

To prepare for potential HRP and HRD participation in the SAIRC process, viewing access to the Records Management System (Versadex RMS) was extended to RCMP analysts, a SAIT supervisor attended a SAIRC meeting to observe the review process, and evaluated requirements for information-sharing, resources, and logistics. The assessment process determined it would be beneficial for HRP to leverage the policing partnership with HRD and participate in the RCMP H Division SAIRC process, thereby providing a continuity of service between law enforcement agencies and benefitting all survivors of sexual violence within HRM.

Participation in the SAIRC process also addresses the potential legal obstacle which had been identified with the VACR model, namely the sharing of personal information. Investigations involving sexual assault contain extremely sensitive information, with legislation between provinces differing in how they address the sharing of personal information in sexual assault cases with third parties. This is not an area of concern with the SAIRC process.

HRP has prepared a number of SAIT investigation files for submission to the next set of review meetings, which are scheduled to take place in December. A SAIT supervisor will attend to respond to any questions the committee may have.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with HRP participating in the RCMP SAIRC.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required for the purpose of creating this report.

## ALTERNATIVES

The Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality could choose not to approve the recommendation.

## LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Under subsection 55(1) of the Nova Scotia *Police Act*. 2004, the function of a board is to provide:

> (a) civilian governance on behalf of the council in relation to the enforcement of law, the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of crime in the municipality; and
> (b) the administrative direction, organization and policy required to maintain an adequate, effective and efficient police department

Without limiting the generality of the functions noted in subsection 55(1), under subsection 55(3) the Board has the following specific duties: …

> (c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;

(d) ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;
(e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers.

Section 52 reads:

> On behalf of the board, the board chair or the chair's delegate may give advice or direction, in writing, to the chief officer on any matter within the jurisdiction of the board under this Act, but not to other members of the police department and, for greater certainty, no other member of the board shall give advice or direction to a member of the police department.

## ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Information Report to the HRM Board of Police Commissioners, dated July 12, 2024: Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review – Halifax Regional Police

---

Report Prepared by: A/Deputy Chief Andrew Matthews – Halifax Regional Police

Report Approved by: Chief Don MacLean – Chief of Police, Halifax Regional Police

---

**Attachment 1**

# Item No. 3

**Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality**
**August 7, 2024**

**TO:** Chair Kent and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** July 12, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review – Halifax Regional Police

## INFORMATION REPORT

## ORIGIN

October 4, 2023, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality motion (Item No. 10.2.2):

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners defer Item 10.2.2 to a future meeting of the Board in order for Halifax Regional Police to provide further information on the progress of the implementation of the Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review Model including identification of the police resourcing required to implement the model.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

March 4, 2024, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality motion (Item No. 10.3.1):

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality direct the Chief Officer of Halifax Regional Police (HRP) to prepare a staff report which should include:

a. A breakdown of the number of allegations of sexual offences investigated by SAIT which do not lead to charges being laid; and

b. A recommendation as to whether or not the Board should direct the direct the Chief Officer of HRP to implement the Violence Against Women Advocate Case Review (VACR) program as proposed by Sunny Mariner at the Board's June 20, 2022, meeting.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

This information report is meant to respond to part a) of the March 4, 2024 motion. A recommendation in response to part b) will not be brought forward until a permanent Chief for Halifax Regional Police is in place and has the opportunity to provide input.

## LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Under subsection 55(1) of the Police Act, the function of a board is to provide:

> (a) civilian governance on behalf of the council in relation to the enforcement of law, the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of crime in the municipality; and
> (b) the administrative direction, organization and policy required to maintain an adequate, effective and efficient police department

Without limiting the generality of the functions noted in subsection 55(1), under subsection 55(3) the Board has the following specific duties: …

> (c) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing priorities, objectives, goals, programs and strategies;
> (d) ensure that police services are delivered in a manner consistent with community values, needs and expectations;
> (e) act as a conduit between the community and the police service providers.

Section 52 reads:

> On behalf of the board, the board chair or the chair's delegate may give advice or direction, in writing, to the chief officer on any matter within the jurisdiction of the board under this Act, but not to other members of the police department and, for greater certainty, no other member of the board shall give advice or direction to a member of the police department.

## BACKGROUND

At the June 20, 2022, meeting of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Board of Police Commissioners ("the Board"), a presentation was delivered on the Violence Against Women Case Advocate Review (VACR) by Sunny Mariner, the VACR Project Lead[1].

The presentation outlined how only one in five of all sexual violence cases which are reported to police result in a charge and, of those, only half make it to trial.

The VACR model was developed through the federally funded 'Improving Institutional Accountability Project' (IIAP), and seeks to improve equitable access to the criminal justice system of sexual violence survivors, through the review of sexual assault investigations which do not result in a charge.

The VACR reviews are undertaken by independent experts from local sexual assault support centres, who

[1] https://www.halifax.ca/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions/june-20-2022-board-police-commissioners

can identify cases which may require further investigation by police.

VACR was endorsed by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) in 2020 and has been included as best practice in the Canadian Framework for Collaborative Police Response on Sexual Violence.

## DISCUSSION

Following the meeting on June 20, 2022, the Board recommended that Halifax Regional Police (HRP) and RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment (HRD) explore options for the implementation of VACR in Halifax.

At the July 12, 2023, meeting of the Board, an information report was delivered which outlined three options for the implementation of VACR in Halifax; full implementation of the model as proposed, a hybrid model, or maintenance of the status quo (do nothing)[2].

At the request of the Board, a further information report was delivered at the October 4, 2023, meeting which outlined the details of an environmental scan on VACR[3]. The report concluded that *"[t]he responses received from participating agencies affirm the positive impact of the VACR initiative. Notable improvements in investigative outcomes, coupled with enhanced collaboration with community partners, demonstrate the significance of this program. While increased workload and resource allocation challenges were acknowledged, agencies unanimously emphasize that the benefits far outweigh any associated drawbacks."* (p.2)

The benefits of a review model for sexual violence investigations are recognized and acknowledged by both HRP and HRD. Therefore, the third option presented at the July 2023 meeting, of maintaining the status quo – doing nothing – is not considered to be a viable option.

The exploration process has included identification of potential barriers to the sharing of personal information for the purpose of the review. Cases involving sexual violence contain extremely sensitive information, with legislation between provinces differing in how they address the sharing of personal information in sexual assault cases with third parties.

At the meeting of the Board on March 4, 2024, Superintendent Andrew Matthews of the Integrated Criminal Investigation Division explained that HRP is seeking advice from Halifax Regional Municipality's legal department regarding any possible legislative concerns.

In the meantime, HRP has been working collaboratively with RCMP on integrating files investigated by the Integrated Sexual Assault Investigation Team (SAIT) into the RCMP H Division (Nova Scotia) Sexual Assault Investigations Review Committee (SAIRC) process.

SAIRCs are being established in all RCMP contract policing divisions to provide investigative oversight, to ensure investigations are thorough, timely, impartial, and properly classified, as well as to identify any systemic gaps and barriers.[4]

Through the integrated HRM policing model, HRP will leverage its policing partnership with HRD in order to participate in the RCMP H Division SAIRC process, thereby providing a continuity of service between law enforcement agencies and benefitting all survivors of sexual violence within HRM.

---

[2] https://www.halifax.ca/media/82854

[3] https://www.halifax.ca/media/83747

[4] https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/the-way-forward-ii-an-update-the-implementation-the-rcmps-sexual-assault-review-and-victim-support

For the purpose of HRP participation in the SAIRC process, HRP has extended viewing access to its Records Management System (Versadex) to RCMP analysts, observed the review process, and is evaluating requirements for information-sharing, resources, and logistics. This assessment process remains ongoing. The next SAIRC meeting is scheduled for September 16 and 17, 2024.

The below table illustrates the number of investigations into sexual offences undertaken by SAIT[5] since 2020, where charges have not been laid i.e. those which could be eligible for a review process.

SAIT is an integrated unit therefore the numbers below include both HRP and HRD files.

**Table 1 – Number and charge status of sexual offences investigated by SAIT[6]**

| | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 YTD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Sexual Offence Investigations** | 398 | 454 | 488 | 433 | 233 |
| **Charges laid** | 79 (20%) | 66 (15%) | 84 (17%) | 73 (17%) | 22 (9%) |
| **Charges not laid** | 319 (80%) | 388 (85%) | 404 (83%) | 360 (83%) | 211 (91%) |

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this time. Should Halifax move forward with implementation of a third party review model, financial implications will depend on the components required to implement the model by way of staffing, coordination, and implementation recommendations (policy changes).

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required for the purpose of creating this information report.

## ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments to this report.

[5] As well as sexual offences, the SAIT mandate includes other types of investigations, including physical child abuse. It should also be noted that while SAIT is responsible for the majority of investigations into sexual offences, a limited number remain at the Patrol level where the criteria to do so are met

[6] These numbers are accurate as of the current date and are subject to change as investigations progress and conclude. For the more recent files, a larger proportion remain still under investigation

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: A/Deputy Chief Andrew Matthews – Halifax Regional Police

Report Approved by: A/Chief Don MacLean – Halifax Regional Police

A/Superintendent Don Moser – RCMP Halifax Regional Detachment