



## **TOWN OF MINTO**

**DATE:** February 22, 2016  
**REPORT TO:** Mayor and Council  
**FROM:** Chris Harrow, Fire Chief  
**SUBJECT:** PTSD Presumptive Legislation

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### **STRATEGIC PLAN:**

6.4 Maintain and enhance the local volunteer fire fighter model in Minto, and take a leadership role in setting the standard for forces for municipalities this size by ensuring training, equipment and vehicles available to volunteers equivalent to any full time fire service.

### **BACKGROUND:**

In May 2007, Presumptive Legislation was announced for full time Firefighters in the Province of Ontario covering 8 different types of Cancer that would be covered by WSIB. Then in 2009 the coverage was rightfully extended to the Volunteer Firefighters as well. The Cancers covered Primary-site esophageal, ureter, kidney, brain, colorectal, and bladder; Primary acute myeloid leukemia, primary chronic lymphocytic leukemia or primary acute lymphocytic leukemia, and Primary non-Hodgkin's lymphoma

In April 2014, the Province added six more cancer types that would be a phased in over a four year period Multiple Myeloma, Testicular and Breast cancers (2014), Prostate (2015), Lung (2016), and Skin (2017). All of the above cancers have designated years of service attached to them. For example, to qualify for benefits after being diagnosed with Esophageal Cancer, Firefighters must have served 25 years in the Fire service. The range is from a low of 10 years to a high of 25 years. All of the cancers listed above are retroactive to January 1, 1960.

Recently, the Provincial Government announced that the condition known as PTSD or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and its related conditions will be put on the track to be passed as Presumptive Legislation. The time frame for the legislation has not been announced nor have the details of the Legislation. The term used to group all of the conditions together is Occupational Stress Injuries (OSI).

### **COMMENTS:**

The new Legislation will extend to all full time and volunteer Firefighters from the beginning with no minimum years of service. It offers protection to all of our Firefighters, who are subjected to many stressors throughout their career. It offers peace of mind to the families of the Firefighters knowing there will be coverage if their partner has a diagnosis of PTSD.

It is hoped the new Legislation will make it easier for those Firefighters diagnosed with an Occupational Stress Injury to be able to obtain the help they need quicker. The purpose of Presumptive Legislation should be to streamline the ability to receive care and return the Firefighter back to work. Our Firefighters need the care, because it not only affects their role as Volunteer Firefighters, but it also hampers them from working their full time jobs. It is the Town's responsibility to look after the Volunteer Firefighters so that they can return to their regular job; it is not their full time employer's responsibility.

The new Legislation also requires each municipality have a PTSD prevention plan in place. There are indications Public Services Health and Safety Association (PSHSA) will be releasing some materials to assist in creating a plan. The Chief will ensure the plan is written and released for all of the Firefighters once there is clear direction on the contents. Council will be asked at the appropriate time to review and endorse the plan.

As Vice President of the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) this emerging issue was discussed long before the Legislation. The O AFC has brought a program to Ontario called the Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR). The program started in the military and has been adopted by the Police and now the fire service. It is a program that teaches all Firefighters how to recognize the signs and symptoms of an OSI and what treatments are available. It identifies where to refer the person and emphasizes to not ignore the situation. There are two trainers in Wellington County prepared to roll out the training to all Firefighters.

The Wellington County Fire Chiefs Association is meeting to put together a peer support team. The team would involve individuals from each Fire Station in the County trained to be able to work with individuals who are identified as suffering an OSI. They would be equipped to refer the individual to medical professionals and ensure they receive the care they require. This training is planned for this year and when finished will ensure a trained individual in each Station. Staff will report further on the peer support team in the future.

#### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

The new Legislation will affect the WSIB rates moving forward, which already grew 26% as a result of the increase in Firefighter cancer claims. A similar increase might occur in the next few years due to the new Legislation as well as ongoing claims. The AMO correspondence attached to the Council agenda states "It can be expected that Schedule 1 municipalities will experience increased WSIB rates..." Further information on this will come forward as the legislation is implemented and budget needs are known.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council receives as information the Fire Chief's February 22, 2016 report entitled PTSD Presumptive Legislation.

Chris Harrow, Fire Chief