



Canadian Police Association Legislative Conference 2024

2024 Legislative Fact Sheet

OVERVIEW

The Canadian Police Association (CPA) serves as a unified body representing nearly 60,000 frontline law enforcement professionals in Canada, encompassing civilian and sworn personnel from various police services nationwide, including First Nations agencies and railway police. Operating in a non-partisan manner, we collaborate with Members of Parliament from all political affiliations to advocate for policies that enhance public safety and prioritize the well-being of those serving their communities.

As an association, we regularly provide expert testimony before Parliamentary Committees and facilitate discussions between our member associations and Parliamentarians in their constituencies, to offer a localized policing perspective on significant issues of community safety. Recent global and domestic events have spotlighted the multitude of roles civilian and sworn police personnel regularly take on, which highlights the ongoing trust and confidence Canadians place in our law enforcement institutions. While acknowledging the need for evidence-based reforms benefiting both our members and communities, we also celebrate successes in our sector while always remaining open to constructive improvements.

From navigating discussions around defunding the police, to addressing the unique mental health issues among first responders, and adapting to modern challenges such as the ongoing recruitment and retention difficulties being faced by police services across the country, the CPA is dedicated to collaborating with elected officials at all levels to uphold Canada's progressive and accountable law enforcement standards.

Policing in Canada is subject to rigorous regulation and oversight, reflecting our commitment to transparency and public trust. Our members understand and expect scrutiny of their decisions, ensuring accountability to both the public and independent oversight agencies.

The cost of policing remains a topic of debate, yet the invaluable contributions of our members extend beyond monetary value. According to the most recent data from Statistics Canada, police are asked to respond to approximately 11.6 million calls for service annually, many of which occur in challenging and dynamic circumstances. This averages out to 1,320 calls every hour, and the vast majority of those are resolved without incident, or notice by the general public. As the primary responders to societal challenges, police personnel are trained and available round-the-clock to address diverse community needs. While advocating for alternative responses to reduce officer workload, we emphasize the importance of maintaining community well-being.

As we continue to work with all members of the 44th Parliament, we look forward to maintaining and enhancing collaboration with MPs and Senators to safeguard communities through evidence-based strategies and professional policing. We appreciate your time and welcome

ongoing dialogue on public safety concerns and policy matters, both in Ottawa and within your constituencies.

OUR ISSUES

National Framework for Police Response to Protests and Demonstrations

The freedom to protest is a crucial element of Canadian democracy, guaranteed by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, in recent years, the frequency and disruptive nature of protests have escalated alongside societal polarization. This presents a complex challenge for frontline police officers who must balance the rights of protesters with community expectations regarding safety. Large-scale demonstrations can severely impact citizens' freedom of movement and disrupt local economies.

Moreover, the rising frequency and confrontational tone of these protests have placed a considerable strain on frontline law enforcement. Officers face increased fatigue due to extended and unpredictable shifts, as well as heightened stress from verbal and physical confrontations. This comes at a time when studies have consistently highlighted the mental health challenges confronting our nation's first responders.

Criticism of law enforcement's response to protests has varied, with some accusing officers of being overly aggressive while others perceive a 'hands-off' approach as taking sides. To address these concerns and maintain public trust, our Association advocates for the federal government to lead in establishing a national framework for managing public disruptions and protests. This framework should involve key stakeholders to ensure impartiality and uphold Canadians' confidence in their police services.

SOLUTION

The CPA recommends a national summit convened by the federal government, bringing together police executives, frontline law enforcement representatives, government officials, and community organizations experienced in event organization. This summit would aim to establish a cohesive framework for managing protests, encompassing resource deployment, use-of-force guidelines, health and safety protocols, and funding mechanisms for additional personnel. Ensuring public accessibility of this framework is essential to fostering understanding and trust between law enforcement and communities.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Police services across Canada are encountering significant challenges regarding the recruitment and retention of officers, a trend that has been particularly pronounced in recent years. These challenges stem from a variety of factors, ranging from changing societal attitudes towards law enforcement to shifts in the nature of police work. According to the most recent data from Statistics Canada, the rate of police strength was 178 officers per 100,000 population, down almost 2% from 2022 and the lowest rate since 1970. In fact, Canada already has the lowest police to population ratio of any G7 or comparable country.

The fact is our current officer shortage is one of the most significant drivers of cost with respect to policing. When police services have fewer officers available to meet minimum staffing levels, officers must be called in during their off hours, leading to increased overtime expenses. Furthermore, this cycle has proven negative consequences for existing staff, with more hours worked leading to more mental and physical health challenges, burnout, and worsening work/life balance, which can impact not just police personnel, but their families as well.

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One of the primary challenges faced by police services is the evolving perception of law enforcement careers among younger generations. Historically, policing was often seen as a prestigious and respected profession, attracting a steady stream of candidates. However, in today's climate, there has been a noticeable shift in attitudes, with younger individuals expressing concerns about the complexities and potential risks associated with police work. Negative media portrayals and increased scrutiny of law enforcement practices have contributed to a decline in interest in pursuing a career in policing among some demographics.

Additionally, the nature of police work itself has evolved, presenting new challenges for recruitment and retention. Modern policing requires a diverse skill set that goes beyond traditional law enforcement duties. Officers are now expected to be well-versed in areas such as community engagement, crisis intervention, de-escalation techniques, and cultural sensitivity. The demanding nature of these responsibilities, coupled with the inherent risks and stresses of the job, can make it difficult to attract and retain qualified candidates.

Furthermore, the labor market dynamics play a role in recruitment and retention challenges for police services. In recent years, there has been increased competition from other sectors offering competitive salaries, better work-life balance, and less exposure to physical and emotional risks. This has led to difficulties in attracting candidates with the desired qualifications and retaining experienced officers who may seek alternative career paths or early retirement options.

Another critical factor impacting recruitment and retention is the need for diversity and inclusivity within police services. There is a growing recognition of the importance of having a police force that reflects the communities it serves in terms of demographics, cultural understanding, and language proficiency. However, achieving diversity goals requires targeted recruitment efforts, inclusive hiring practices, and ongoing support and opportunities for advancement for underrepresented groups within the force.

Moreover, the demanding nature of police work can take a toll on officer well-being, leading to burnout, stress-related issues, and mental health challenges. The exposure to traumatic incidents, long hours, shift work, and high-pressure situations can contribute to job dissatisfaction and impact retention rates. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive support systems, access to mental health resources, and proactive measures to promote officer wellness and resilience.

In response to these challenges, police services are implementing various strategies to improve recruitment and retention outcomes. This includes enhancing recruitment efforts through targeted outreach programs, leveraging social media and digital platforms to reach younger audiences, offering competitive salary and benefits packages, providing opportunities for career development and advancement, fostering a positive and inclusive work culture, prioritizing officer wellness and mental health support, and engaging with communities to build trust and collaboration.

Despite these efforts, the recruitment and retention landscape for police services remains complex and multifaceted. Continued collaboration between law enforcement agencies, government entities, educational institutions, community stakeholders, and industry experts is essential to address these challenges effectively and ensure the sustainability of police forces in the future.

THE SOLUTION

While policing in Canada is largely a provincial responsibility, the CPA believes there is a role for the federal government to play to help address these recruitment and retention challenges.

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We believe the federal government should prioritize establishing a comprehensive strategy aimed at enhancing police recruitment nationwide. This strategy must encompass multifaceted initiatives to address the challenges currently facing law enforcement agencies and to counteract the negative media portrayals that have contributed to recruitment difficulties.

Firstly, the government should allocate resources to support targeted recruitment campaigns that highlight the positive aspects of a career in law enforcement. These campaigns can utilize various platforms, including social media, digital advertising, and community outreach programs, to reach potential candidates and showcase the diverse opportunities available within police services. Emphasizing the rewarding nature of serving communities, opportunities for career advancement, competitive benefits packages, and the importance of diversity and inclusion within the force can help attract a wider pool of qualified applicants.

Additionally, the federal government should collaborate with law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and industry experts to develop and implement recruitment strategies tailored to address specific challenges facing policing. This should include initiatives aimed at attracting candidates from underrepresented communities, such as Indigenous peoples, visible minorities, and women, to promote diversity and inclusivity within police forces. Providing targeted support, mentorship programs, and scholarships for individuals interested in pursuing a career in policing can help remove barriers and encourage greater participation from diverse backgrounds.

Moreover, a dedicated effort is needed to counteract high-profile negative media portrayals of policing that have contributed to public skepticism and reluctance among potential recruits. The government should work closely with media outlets, community leaders, and advocacy groups to promote balanced and accurate representations of law enforcement, highlighting the essential role police officers play in maintaining public safety, supporting communities, and upholding the rule of law. Encouraging positive storytelling, showcasing officers' positive interactions with the community, and transparently addressing issues of concern can help enhance trust and improve perceptions of policing as a noble and respected profession.

By investing in a comprehensive strategy that addresses recruitment challenges and counters negative media portrayals, the Canadian federal government can play a pivotal role in strengthening law enforcement agencies across the country, attracting diverse and qualified candidates, and ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of police forces in safeguarding communities and upholding public safety.

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