

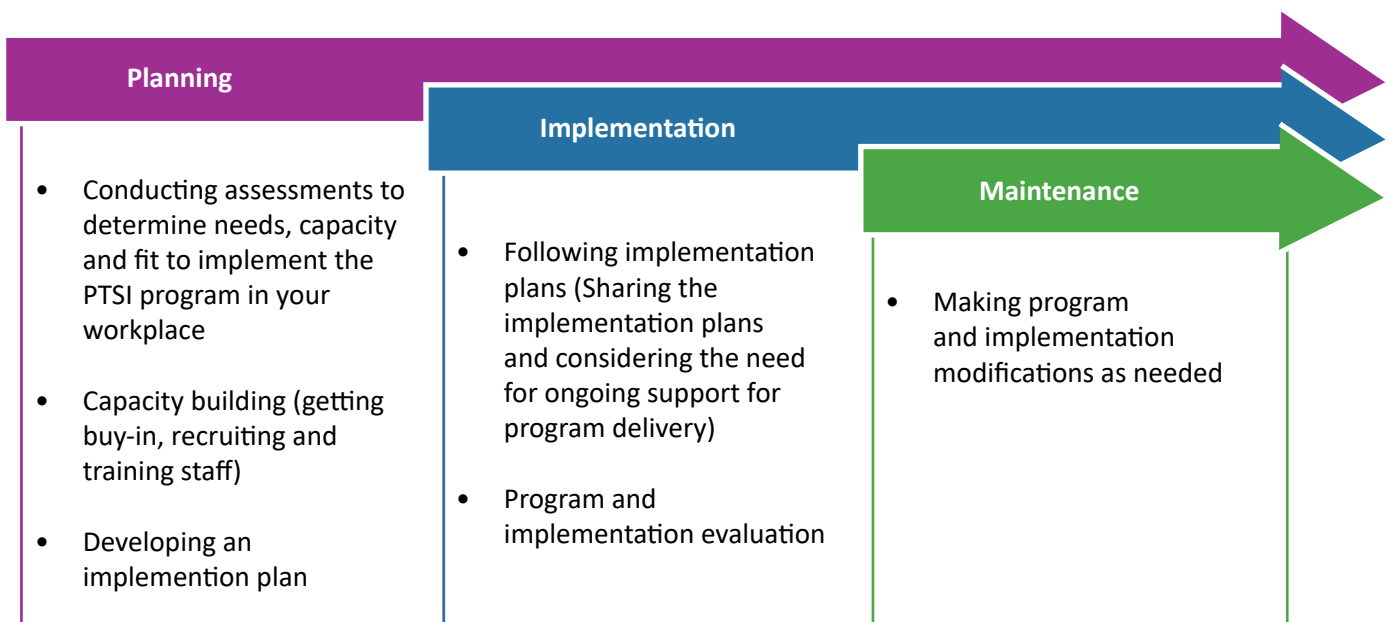
# Implementation strategies for post-traumatic stress injury (PTSI) programs in first responder workplaces

First responder organizations have noted the challenges they face in implementing post-traumatic stress injury (PTSI) programs in the workplace. To better understand these experiences and challenges, an Institute for Work & Health (IWH) research team conducted a study with stakeholders from first responder organizations in Alberta, Canada.

Our research revealed the complexity of implementing PTSI programs in first responder workplaces. Six overarching themes were identified from the interview data:

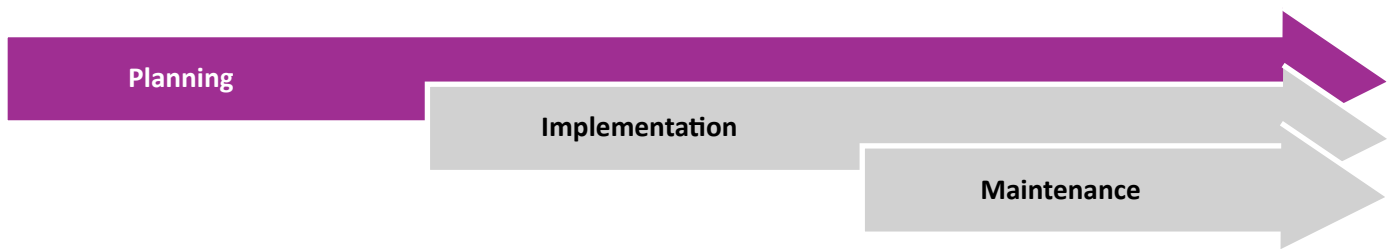
1. the importance of **getting buy-in** from multiple groups in the workplace for program development and delivery
2. the need for **collaboration and program champions** at all phases of program development and implementation
3. the need to **continue awareness building** about psychological injuries and mental health needs of members
4. ensuring **adequate resources** to develop, deliver, and maintain programs
5. the **importance of planning** before developing and delivering a program
6. recognizing that **one-size does not fit all** – in other words, consider the breadth and flexibility of program content, as well as expertise for delivery to address diverse needs of members

Based on our findings, and on existing implementation frameworks<sup>1,2</sup>, we provide an overview of key implementation steps to consider when planning, implementing (delivering) and maintaining/sustaining PTSI programs in the workplace. The figure below summarizes these three implementation components.



# Planning

**Planning** is important in identifying the goals and outcomes of program implementation at the workplace, as well as the steps to achieve these goals.



## Conducting assessments

Consider current **needs and capacity** for implementing the workplace PTSI programs

- Carefully review existing policies/programs at the workplace
- Determine member/workplace needs with respect to reducing PTSI work disability. Include input from all stakeholders
- Establish realistic goals and outcomes of the PTSI program
- Consider who may be left out as well as who benefits from the program
- Consider if there are competing workplace projects/programs that may affect the implementation of the PTSI program

Consider the program **fit** for the workplace

- Identify the program that best fits with the workplace's culture and vision
- Consider whether to implement a new evidence-based program or adapt an existing program
- Consider whether the new program(s) should be adapted to ensure it fits with the member/workplace needs

## Capacity building

**Get buy-in** from both leadership and members

- Develop diverse methods to obtain member/workplace buy-in at all phases of implementation
- Consider how to best involve program champions to promote the PTSI program across the workplace
- Make sure leadership support and commitment is visible to the workplace

**Recruit and train staff** to deliver the program(s)

- Train relevant staff to ensure they have a good understanding about the program they will be delivering and the mental health needs of members
- Consider the breadth of skills needed by staff and address any skill gaps to fit the differing needs of members
- Consider whether program delivery training needs will change over time

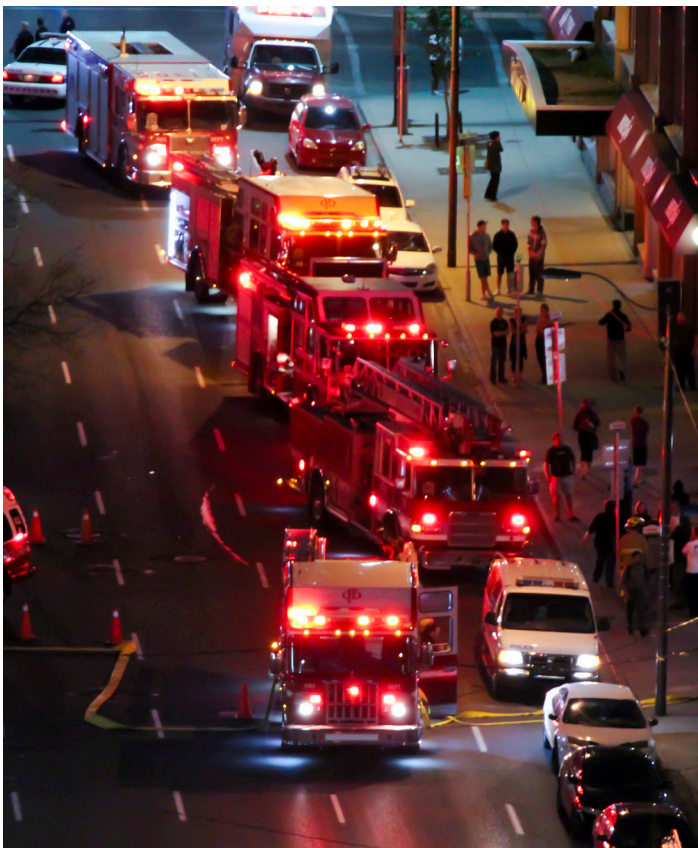
# Developing an implementation plan

## Determine **staffing needs and roles**

- Establish an implementation team and team members' responsibilities, including a timeline for implementation milestones
- Determine who will lead the program implementation
- Consider the number of staff needed to ensure there are enough people to implement /deliver the program to members

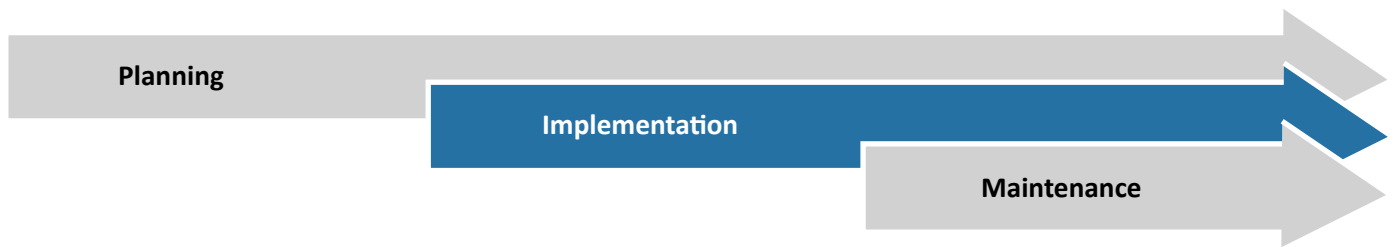
## Consider **additional needs and logistics** for implementation

- Review and revise resource needs (e.g., training and technical support)
- Consider when and where the program will be delivered to reach members with different roles and schedules while protecting their confidentiality
- Consider piloting the implementation (i.e., to a smaller group, units or area) to help troubleshoot prior to implementing the program workplace wide
- Develop a plan to evaluate the program and its implementation. Regular monitoring is important
- Consider factors within or external to the workplace that may positively and negatively affect the implementation of the program



# Implementation (Delivery)

**Implementation** is the delivery of the program to first responder members. Effective implementation increases the likelihood of positive results.



## Following the implementation plan

### Share the **implementation plan**

- Consider how to promote the program broadly to ensure it reaches intended members, both at program initiation and beyond
- Establish timelines to track implementation progress and updates

### Consider **ongoing support** for program delivery

- Determine a feedback process to identify and mitigate barriers affecting program implementation (delivery), including resource needs
- Work with program staff, leadership and members to address implementation and program challenges

## Program and implementation evaluation<sup>3</sup>

### Create and regularly review **evaluation plan**

- Determine a feedback process to identify and mitigate barriers affecting program implementation (delivery), including resource needs
- Work with program staff, leadership and members to address implementation and program challenges
- Be sure to protect confidentiality/anonymity of program users to ensure the integrity of the program
- Consider who will have access to the evaluation information
- Plan to share evaluation details to help promote the program to the workplace and to secure resources needed to maintain the program

# Maintenance

**Maintaining** the program by monitoring and adapting it is critical to ensure it continues to be delivered effectively and meets the future needs of the workplace and first responder members



## Preparing for program or implementation modifications

Consider whether **program or implementation** modifications are required based on evaluation

- Consider various methods to monitor success, challenges and modifications
- Based on evaluations and other input, consider adapting the program to make it more relevant, accessible and flexible for members/workplace
- Develop a plan to address priority changes and assess the resources needed
- Engage in ongoing brainstorming about potential future needs of the program and a process for program improvement if needed

Ensure the program, **if successful**, is sustained overtime:

- Consider promoting the program success to maintain buy-in of the members/workplace
- Ensure adequate funding and training for delivery is maintained
- Continue to reflect on key lessons for further modifications if needed

If the program is **not successful**:

- Consider modifying the program based on evaluation and revisit planning phase steps outlined above

<sup>1</sup> Meyers DC, Durlak JA, Wandersman A. The Quality Implementation Framework: A synthesis of critical steps in the implementation process. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 2012;50(3–4):462–480. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1007/s10464-012-9522-x>

<sup>2</sup> Glasgow RE, Harden SM, Gaglio B, Rabin B, Smith ML, Porter GC, Ory MG, Estabrooks PA. RE-AIM Planning and Evaluation Framework: Adapting to New Science and Practice With a 20-Year Review. *Front Public Health*. 2019 Mar 29;7:64. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2019.00064/full>

<sup>3</sup> Savignac J, Dunbar L. [Guide on the implementation of evidence-based programs: what do we know so far?](#) Ottawa (ON): Public Safety Canada; 2014.

# About this resource

This resource is based on interviews with first responders in Alberta, Canada, and on the expertise of an advisory committee comprised of mental health, first responder, and research experts in this area. Findings were then organized using existing implementation frameworks as a guide.

## Related projects and resources:

- [Implementation of post traumatic stress injuries programs in Alberta first responder organizations](#)
- [Evidence-informed workplace policies and practices for the prevention of PTSD work disability](#)
- [Evidence-informed workplace practices for the prevention of PTSD work disability: A summary of study findings](#)

## Related peer-reviewed publications:

- Van Eerd D, Ragnathan S, Gross DP, Gignac M, Irvin E, Tompa E, McElheran M. Implementation of post-traumatic stress injury programs in Alberta first responder organizations: a qualitative study. *Disability and Rehabilitation*. 2026 May 11:1-16. [doi:10.1080/09638288.2026.2667689](https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2026.2667689).
- Van Eerd, D, Ragnathan, S, Irvin E, Varickanickal J, Tompa E, McElheran M, Brémault-Phillips S. Workplace programs to reduce PTSD work disability: First responder experiences. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*. 2026;36:580–590. [doi:10.1007/s10926-025-10299-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-025-10299-y).

## Other related IWH research on first responders:

- [Return to work in policing: Synthesizing current practices and implementation guidance](#)
- [Return to work in policing: Time to ACT](#)
- Van Eerd D, Le Pouésard M, Yanar B, Irvin E, Gignac MA, Jetha A, Morose T, Tompa E. Return-to-work experiences in Ontario policing: injured but not broken. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*. 2024;34(1):265–277. [doi:10.1007/s10926-023-10135-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-023-10135-1).

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