



# Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association

## Peer Support

October 2023 ■ Toronto ■ Program Information

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## Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association 2023 Peer Support Program Information

### Costs & Inclusions

The Peer Support training is a two-day interactive course, team-taught by firefighters who are experienced peers. A maximum of thirty registrants can participate in the training.

This program is being offered by the OPFFA and is funded in part through the Ministry of Labour’s Skills Development Funding. This funding, combined with the OPFFA’s negotiated discounts, provides a unique opportunity to receive top notch training at a significantly discounted rate. The cost to participate in this training would normally be more than \$1,500 however the OPFFA has set the registration fee at \$565.

Please refer to the chart below and contact OPFFA Executive Director Marcia Kim at [mkim@ontariofirefighters.org](mailto:mkim@ontariofirefighters.org) with any questions.

Item	Non-Subsidized*	OPFFA Subsidized
<b>Cost per person to attend training session for 2 days (8:30-4:30pm) – materials &amp; pre-requisite included.</b>	\$420 Course cost only – excludes food, accommodation, parking	Included
<b>OPFFA Event Package Fee – includes admission to the OPFFA General Session on Monday, 3 nights accommodations (based on double occupancy), 3 breakfasts, 2 lunches, &amp; light refreshments</b>	\$1160	\$565
<b>Event Parking</b>	\$34/day	Included (3 days/nights)
<b>Subtotal Savings: \$1110</b>		
<b>Travel to/from Toronto</b>	Participant Cost	Participant will be responsible for costs associated with traveling to/from event.
<b>Shift Coverage</b>	Shared Cost	Replacement coverage subsidies are available upon request up to a maximum of 50%. Please contact <a href="mailto:mkim@ontariofirefighters.org">mkim@ontariofirefighters.org</a> for pre-approval and/or information.

\*Calculated with OPFFA preferred group rates.



## Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association 2023 Peer Support Program Information

### Peer Support

There is growing concern about behavioural health issues and the significant impact on wellness. The stresses faced by firefighters throughout the course of their careers – incidents involving children, violence, inherent dangers of firefighting and other potentially traumatic events – can have a cumulative impact on mental health and well-being. When not addressed, these stressors can negatively affect job performance, friends and family, and physical health. Peer support programs are an effective method for providing support to firefighters, and proactively addressing mental health concerns.

Peer support is the process by which a trained member of the fire service provides confidential support to another member who is experiencing personal, emotional, or work-related problems while acting as a bridge to outside professional services. Peer support builds off an existing rapport and mutual trust between two members of the same department or occupation.

Most union locals that are affiliated with the OPFFA have a peer support program which is comprised of a team leader and a support team. The team will identify a behavioural health clinician to provide oversight, establish a referral network, and conduct regular outreach to promote greater awareness of the program, and identify those in need of support.

The Peer Support training is a two-day interactive course, team-taught by firefighters who are experienced peers. A maximum of thirty registrants can participate in the training. The training focuses on active listening skills, suicide awareness and prevention, crisis intervention, how to identify local resources, and how to build relationships with local behavioral health providers.

After completing the training, members are Trained Peer Supporters and have the necessary knowledge and skills to (1) provide support to their peers; (2) have a basic understanding of common behavioural health issues affecting the fire service, (3) serve as a bridge to behavioral health programs and community resources; and (4) build or enhance their Local's Peer Support programs.



## Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association 2023 Peer Support Program Information

### Program Objective

In 2021, Ontario's Ministry of Labour introduced funding to address skills and workforce development challenges in the labour market. In January 2023, the OPFFA submitted two applications for funding to offer training and development to its members. Funding was granted for two programs: Fire Ground Survival Train-the-Trainer, and Peer Support training.

Professional development and capacity building are core value propositions the OPFFA offers to its members. The Association plays a unique role in assessing the continuing education needs of its members; and delivering programs to meet those needs.

Municipalities within Ontario - particularly the smaller ones - have competing priorities as to where funds are best allocated. In addition to ensuring firefighters have the appropriate functioning equipment, the employer must also focus on health and safety, risk management, and employee retention. Training tends to be directed towards firefighter certification.

Firefighters deal with many stresses throughout the course of their careers all of which can have a cumulative impact on mental health and well-being. The impact is not limited to PTSD and addiction, but other mental health problems, including major depression, panic disorder, generalized anxiety, and complicated grief. While personal support can vary from firefighter to firefighter, professional support has traditionally been lacking. Peer support programs have proven to be an effective method for providing support to firefighters.

The OPFFA has received funding to host a Peer Support course at the DeFazio Taylor Health and Safety Labour seminar offered October 2023, in Toronto, Ontario. Participants, upon successful completion of the course, will have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide support to their peers, have a basic understanding of common behavioral health issues affecting the fire service, can serve as a bridge to community resources or behavioral health treatment when indicated, and are able to build or enhance their peer support programs.

The overarching objectives of this program are to:

1. Reduce economic barriers to municipalities across the province to access professional development for their employees that otherwise would be inaccessible.
2. To facilitate a permanent skills transfer.
3. To offer highly targeted training: evidence-informed, peer-to-peer, skill-building programs designed by and for professional firefighters.
4. To support and help develop a resilient workforce and build capacity for employers.

The OPFFA will prioritize interested applicants for this program using the objectives listed above as guidelines.



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### The Training Program

The 2023 Peer Support course will utilize two Peer Support Trainers to provide two consecutive days (8:30am-4:30pm) of in-person training to 30 qualified firefighters.

Participants must first complete the online Behavioral Health Awareness Course prior to the in-person event. The two-hour course is self-paced and tailored for the fire service.

The peer support curriculum focuses on active listening, confidentiality, general assessment and suicide assessment, crisis intervention, action planning, outreach, self-care and building an effective peer support program.

The curriculum includes how to:

- Approach a colleague of concern,
- Establish trust and confidentiality,
- Provide support,
- Determine whether a crisis is developing,
- Refer the person to available resources,
- Educate others about behavioral health (e.g., PTSD and resilience)

The program is highly interactive and gives participants multiple opportunities to practice newly learned skills. Instructors use small group learning methods and skill-building exercises to encourage student participation and mastery of the material.