



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS
Fire Chiefs on the Hill, November 2019

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of Budget 2020

**Between 7 minutes and 17 years: From state of the
nation to state of the art in the fire service**

By: The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs

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Recommendations

1. That the Federal Government consider the formation of an entity similar to the US based Federal Emergency Management Agency's US Fire Administration (i.e. a national fire advisor)
2. That the Federal Government invest \$2.5M to provide all firefighters with mental health awareness training; and that it continues to support and clarify the expected outcomes from the federal framework for PTSD and the \$30M/five years dedicated in Budget 2018 to public safety research and treatment.
3. That the Federal Government earmark \$50M per year to ensure that fire departments are equipped to respond to innovation
4. That the Federal Government earmark an additional \$30M for the re-introduction of a modified Joint Emergency Preparedness Program, while maintaining the stable ongoing funding for Heavy Urban Search and Rescue.

Between 7 Minutes and 17 Years: From state of the nation; to state of the art for public safety

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) represents the country's 3,500 fire departments, whether they be volunteer, career, composite; whether they be in first nations, small, large, urban or rural communities; whether the departments' firefighters are unionized or not. Our representation is through both the individual chief fire officers and through our National Advisory Council, which brings together all of the provincial and territorial chief associations as well as the national affiliate organizations. There are about 155,000 firefighters and 3,500 departments in Canada. About 85% of firefighters and departments are volunteer or paid on call.

CAFC commends the Finance Committee for undertaking consultations in advance of Budget 2020, even as an election is being called. Whether you are returning or stepping down; whether you are reading this before or after the election, we thank you and your family. We look forward to helping support the safety of your riding and our country.

We have entitled this submission *Between 7 minutes and 17 years*. It reflects the fire service tradition of a 7-minute response and the known lag time of about 17 years when it comes to traditional research to practice efforts ([ref 1](#)). Our recommendations are designed to help straddle this gap through budget and policy measures at the federal level that support public safety, moving us from the current state of the nation, to the eventual state of the art. The areas covered are mental health, responding to innovation, and building capacity in rural and remote areas. We will also ask you to consider the US based Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and US Fire Administration as a potential model for bringing it all together. We'll begin there.

A National Fire Advisor Secretariat

Recommendation 1: That the Federal Government consider the formation of an entity similar to the US based Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)'s US Fire Administration

In 1974, the US Federal Government established FEMA. FEMA's mission is "helping people, before, during and after disasters" ([ref 2](#)). Under FEMA the "US Fire Administration" has five functions: (1) training and professional development; (2) fire prevention and public education; (3) operations management and safety; (4) data publications and library; and (5) grants and funding ([ref 3](#)). There are four reasons to consider both a FEMA type structure and the US Fire Administration type structure.

First, we are seeing an increased number of climate change events occurring. Many municipal emergency managers are fire chiefs. A robust national approach to Emergency Management could allow for maximum coordination.

Second, many federal departments are involved in the fire service. For example, the National Research Council houses the Canadian Commission for Building and Fire

Codes. Transport Canada regulates Dangerous Goods and Rail Safety. Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada work on issues like opioids and oversee CIHR which is managing significant funding for public safety research and treatment. Public Safety Canada is building out the Public Safety Broadband Network, the public alerting system, critical infrastructure considerations, the Memorial Grant Program, national search and rescue framework and more. Canada Revenue Agency, administers a volunteer firefighter tax credit. There are other examples from environment and natural resources to industry. What the federal government does for fire and emergency services is very important. CAFC endeavours to help you communicate this directly to fire departments and across all the provincial and territorial chief associations. With a formalized national entity, we could work together more deliberately and closely.

Third, close to 85% of the country is covered by volunteer fire departments. Failure to maintain these, means that we will have vulnerabilities in our social, democratic, safety and security fabric. Finally, each of the five functions that are undertaken by the US Fire Administration are needed here in Canada. We illustrate these in what follows.

Mental Health in First Responders

Recommendation 2: That the Federal Government invest \$2.5M to provide all firefighters with mental health awareness training; and that it continues to support and clarify the expected outcomes from the federal framework for PTSD and the \$30M/five years dedicated in Budget 2018 to public safety research and treatment.

The Federal Government has made important investments to help address the mental health of first responders. Never before have we seen this attention, political will, funding, or the convergence of so much expertise in this area. As a reminder, in 2018 the federal government dedicated a total of \$30M over five years to the Canadian Institutes for Health Research and the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT) to advance research, treatment and knowledge mobilization in this area. Public Safety Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada are also working on the federal Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Framework. We commend all of this.

There are three reasons we raise these in our prebudget submission for 2020. First, we commend and encourage the journey forward. This is an urgent and important issue. Particularly as an election is called, we need to strengthen, not lose focus. The number of suicides and mental health injuries in our sector is unacceptable and will compromise the safety and security of the country. Second, we are in the early days of the \$30M dollar spend and federal framework development. Now's the time to get them right. Finally, there are short term actions that can be taken.

What is required? (1) leadership and accountability; (2) vision and conceptual clarity; and (3) short term returns on investment as longer-term initiatives are in place. Mapping the relationship between inputs, outputs and outcomes is paramount. Significant proportions of first responders are believed to have mental health issues ([ref 4](#)). This is

complex, but it is also an opportunity to rise to the occasion. Success can be accomplished by staying focussed on near term returns in addition to longer term capacity building.

An example is in ensuring that every first responder has mental health awareness training. There are many ways to do this. The Department of National Defence (DND) developed a version of mental health awareness training (R2MR). Through the efforts of CIPSRT and partners, R2MR was tailored for delivery to public safety personnel.

Following this, a pilot study was funded by Public Safety Canada through CIPSRT to train 9 fire sector master trainers in the R2MR program. This small investment has had tremendous impacts across the country because of the “pay it forward” willingness across the first responder community. However, there is more to do.

CAFC would like to see the federal government finish the job on mental health awareness training in the fire sector. In 2017, CAFC estimated that this could be achieved across our 3500 departments with \$2.5M, using the Mental Health Commission of Canada approach. Whichever the mechanism, providing baseline training is important. While CAFC can't do it on its own, we are certainly willing to help.

Ensuring Emergency Response is Keeping Up with Innovation

Recommendation 3: That the Federal Government earmark \$50M per year to ensure that fire departments are equipped to respond to innovation.

The fire service, by necessity, is an early adopter and first responder to all anticipated consequences of innovation, particularly when it pertains to the fire safety of buildings. We often develop experience in what needs to be changed well before the data is generated. Unfortunately, these very real experiences constitute anecdote in an evidence informed system ([ref 5](#)). Fire departments for the most part simply don't have the mandates or resources to generate research grade evidence. As a sector, we are seeking ways to partner with researchers to overcome this issue ([ref 6](#)).

However, we need a more reliable and regular mechanism to respond to innovation. We ask the federal government for a research and innovation fund directed by the fire sector to test and develop fire hazard responses to building code innovations ([ref 7](#)). Here are examples of how it could be used.

1. Canada is home to one of the world's tallest mass timber construction buildings ([ref 8](#)). Once source posits there are only 28 tall wood buildings in the world ([ref 9](#)). Tall wood building construction will be part of the national model building code. Whether these buildings are truly as safe as traditional construction is actually unknown to us. What we know is that there will be more. We know some departments are better resourced to handle these than others. We know this where we will send our men and women in the event of disaster. As such, we are asking the federal government to build on Canada's leadership in this area by expanding

our knowledge and capacity for safety hazards identification and response. This could be done through a research and innovation fund.

2. The value of insured home losses in Canada exceeded \$4B in 2016 ([ref 10](#)). The homes we are building, once ignited, are reaching flash points and ignition temperatures faster than older homes. Even if residents escape, the property is often unsalvageable. Implementing sprinkler systems will avoid economic loss and grief. To incent homebuilders, a tax rebate for homebuilders installing sprinklers in new construction could be implemented. As this may require a cost-benefit study and socialization, resources from a research and innovation fund could be used.
3. The legalization of Cannabis will bring building code and fire department considerations that are not currently reflected in the regulations. Canada has the opportunity to explore the lessons learned from our colleagues in Colorado and at the National Fire Protection Agency ([ref 11](#)) to ensure we respond safely.

Re-instating a Modified Joint Emergency Preparedness Program

Recommendation 4: That the Federal Government earmark an additional \$30M for the re-introduction of a modified Joint Emergency Preparedness Program, while maintaining stable ongoing funding for Heavy Urban Search and Rescue.

The Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP) was established in October 1980 to enhance capacity to respond to all types of emergencies and to enhance the resiliency of critical infrastructure ([ref 12](#)). This program offered matched funding for equipment, training, and other infrastructure needed by the country's fire departments. It was an especially important program for volunteer departments. This program was terminated for reasons that are unclear to us. The issue may have been a lack of applicants because of the matching funding component. The sector is now better positioned to negotiate and prepare such applications. A modified version of the program could reflect improvements to the original version.

Concluding Remarks

Our submission speaks to the important work the government is championing in our sector. We thank you for the opportunity to present these recommendations.