

OPP consulting community to develop Mental Health Strategy

As part of the process for developing a comprehensive Mental Health Strategy: Police Interactions With People With Mental Health Issues, Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) is visiting communities in each of the regions they police, seeking input from mental health consumers, care providers and advocates.

The goal is to improve police interaction with people with mental health issues and the professionals who provide care.

"I am very pleased and grateful for the positive response and valuable input we have had from the community so far," said Chief Superintendent John Tod, commander of OPP's Central Region and the executive lead for this initiative. "Our comprehensive mental health strategy will be based on community collaboration through Ontario's Mobilization and Engagement Model for Community Policing. Improved education for all our officers on mental health issues and crisis response will also be an important part of the strategy."

The consultations take place as a day-long event, with an invited list of guests who either work in the region's mental health field or access services there. OPP facilitators explain the goals of the Strategy and then lead a discussion on barriers and solutions for improved collaborative response.

Sessions have been held in north east region and central region of the province. Future consultations will be held soon in the remaining parts of Ontario. Input from all of the sessions will be used to develop and refine the OPP's mental health strategy.

"Police officers are not mental health clinicians, but they are often the first point of contact for someone experiencing a mental health crisis," Tod observed. "How we respond can significantly affect outcomes, so we need to get better in this regard."

As a first step, OPP and some other Ontario police services recently started using the InterRAI Brief Mental Health Screener, which helps officers record and articulate the behaviours of people in crisis and communicate them to the receiving hospital.