Peer Support for Public Safety Personnel: Insights from PeerOnCall

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CIPSRT Symposium - March 20, 2024

Presenter(s) Disclosure

PeerOnCall research has been funded by CIHR, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Movember

At this time PeerOnCall has only been available to organizations participating in the research

To facilitate wider access to the PSP community and ensure sustainability, next steps are to explore avenues for ‘commercialization’.

Financial contribution from

Public Health Agency of Canada | Agence de la santé publique du Canada

CIHR IRSC
Canadian Institutes of Health Research | Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada

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Why peer support?

High rates of PTSI and mental health issues in the public safety community

Many barriers to seeking support (stigma, access to skilled provider)

Peer support can be a valuable first line of response

Evidence Summaries

- Value of Peer Support
- Recovery Principles in Peer Support
- Peer Support for Families
- Evaluating Peer Support
- Training Methods
- Supporting Peer Supporters
- Skills and Abilities
- Ethical Practice

https://atlasveterans.ca/knowledge-hub/peer-support/

Why consider App-based Peer Support?

- Request from the PSP community
- Privacy/anonymity
- Customization
- Accessibility (rural/remote areas)
- Choice of who/when/how to reach (phone & text)
- Track service delivery metrics
- Opportunity for anonymous feedback
- Connect to information as well as peer support

Co-designing PeerOnCall

Co-Design
Interviews & focus groups (n=61)

Testing
PSP in Alta, Sask & Ont
OnCall n=58, OnCall Support n=35

Peer Support training

Implementation research

May/19-Mar/20

Mar/20–Dec 2021

Jan-June 2021

Mar/22-Mar/23

Nov/22–Mar/23

Mar/23-Mar/24

Prototype Development

Tech dev & funding challenges

Peer OnCall Version 2.0

Design Challenges

- Privacy/Anonymity vs managing risk
- Diversity of issues across sectors
- Varied models of peer support
- Varied levels of digital literacy
- Reliability of technology
- Security of data
- Building supports for peer supporters
- Sustainability

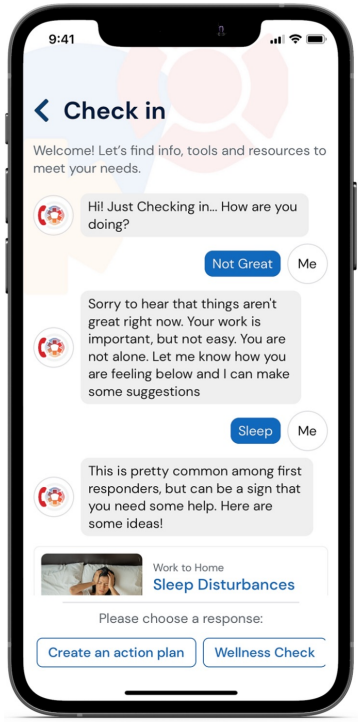
PeerOnCall

PeerOnCall *Support*

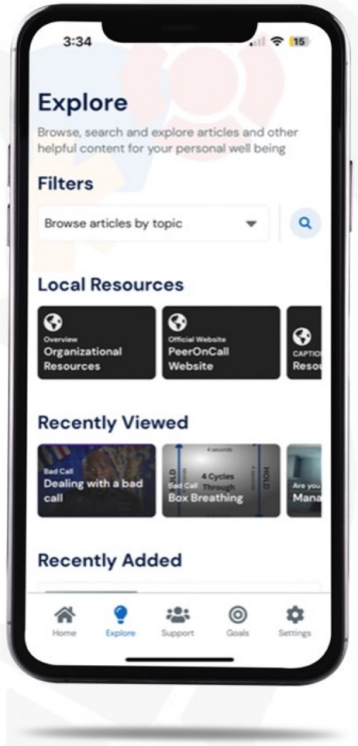
App-based peer support designed by and for the Canadian Public Safety community

PeerOnCall

Features of PeerOnCall

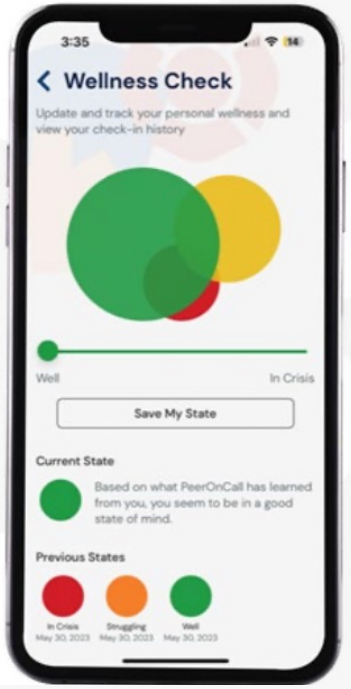


Get Support
Chatbot check-in or
Link to peer support



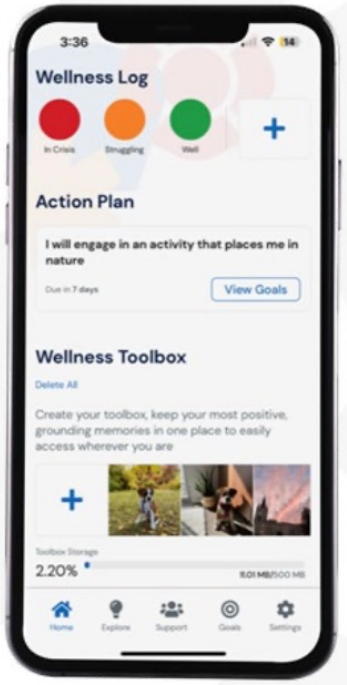
Explore

Find articles, peer wisdom videos, and local resources on your choice of topics (sleep, work to home transitions, bad calls, and more).



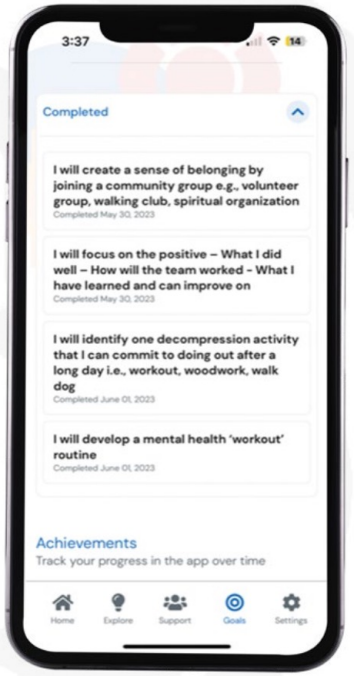
Wellness Check

Rate and track your wellness using the sliding wellness scale. Watch for patterns of orange and red as indicators to seek support.



Wellness Toolbox

Create a personal, private wellness kit with cherished memories and photos of loved ones or things that bring joy.

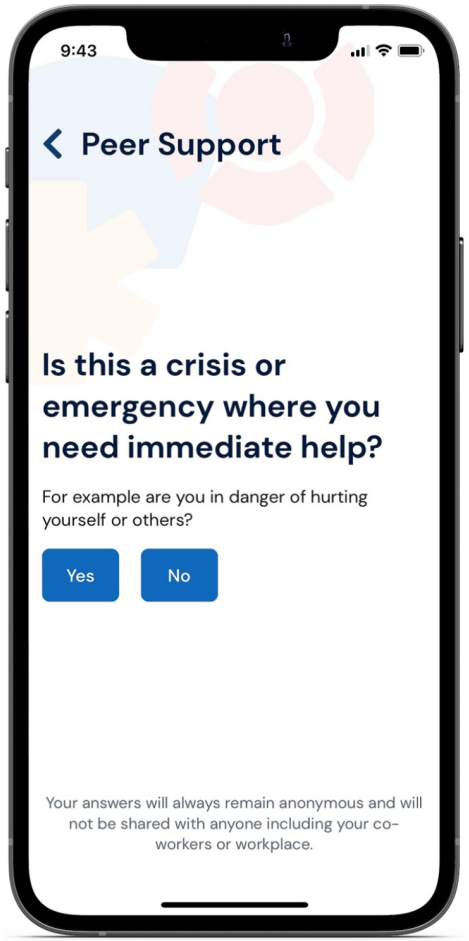


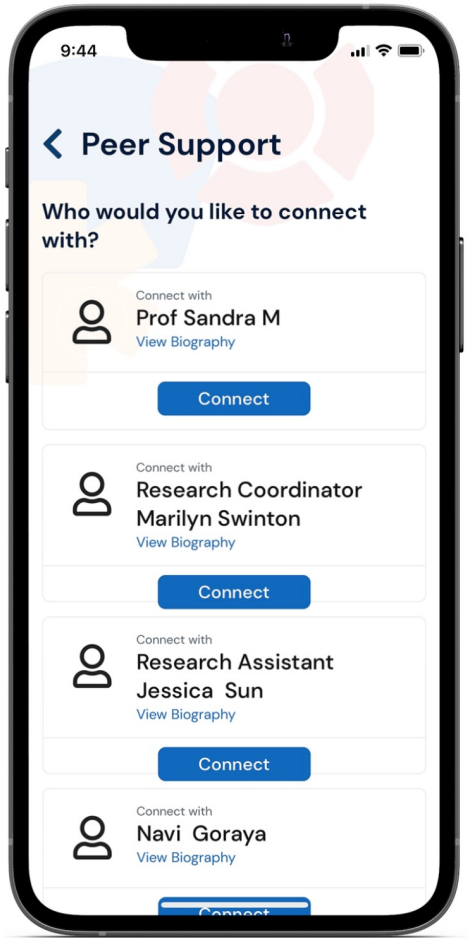
Goals

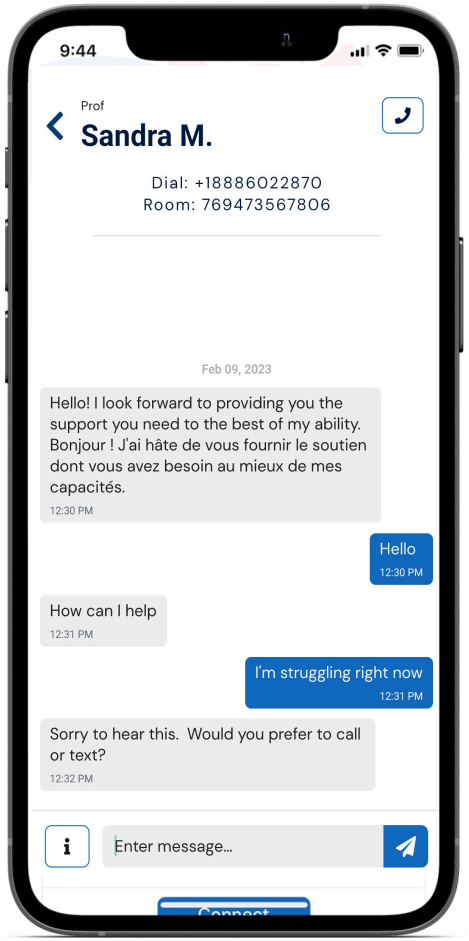
Create an action plan for better health and well-being. Choose from a list or create your own goals for personal growth. Earn badges to track progress!

PeerOnCall

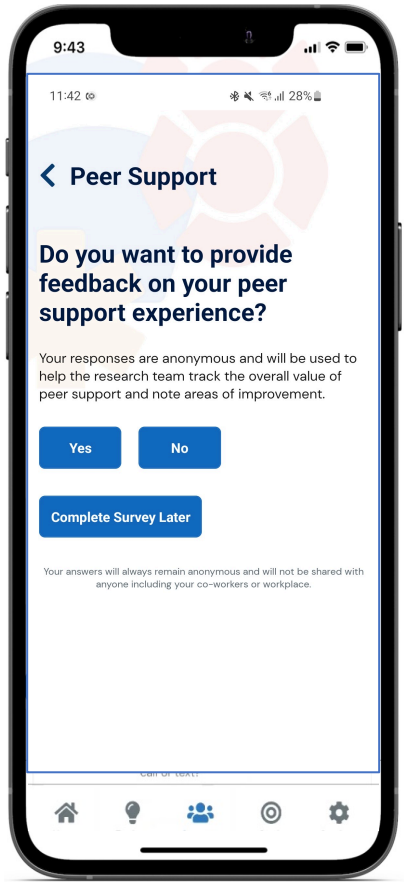
Connecting to Peer Support

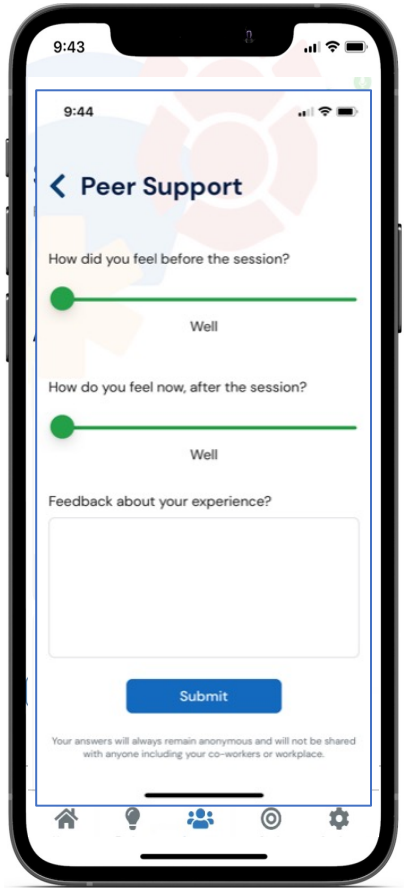






Feedback on experience



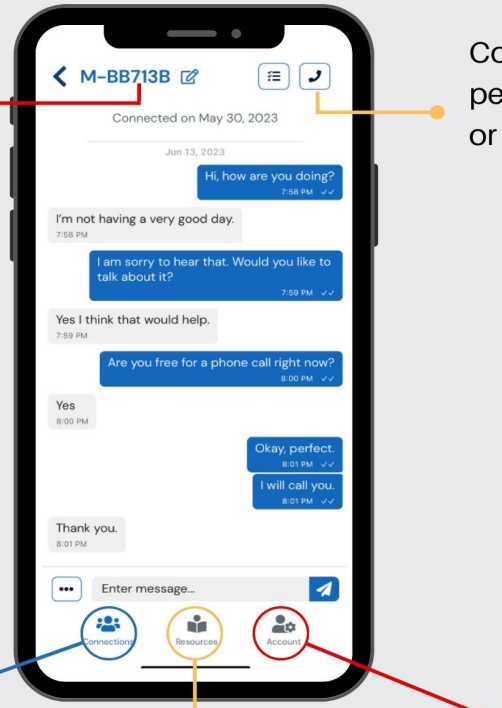


PeerOnCall Support

App-based peer support designed by and for the Canadian Public Safety community

Supporting your peers, one connection at a time

Masked peer connections helps maintain the privacy of those in need



Connect with peers using talk or text

Maintain your peer network; call, chat, request feedback, book follow-ups, and file reports

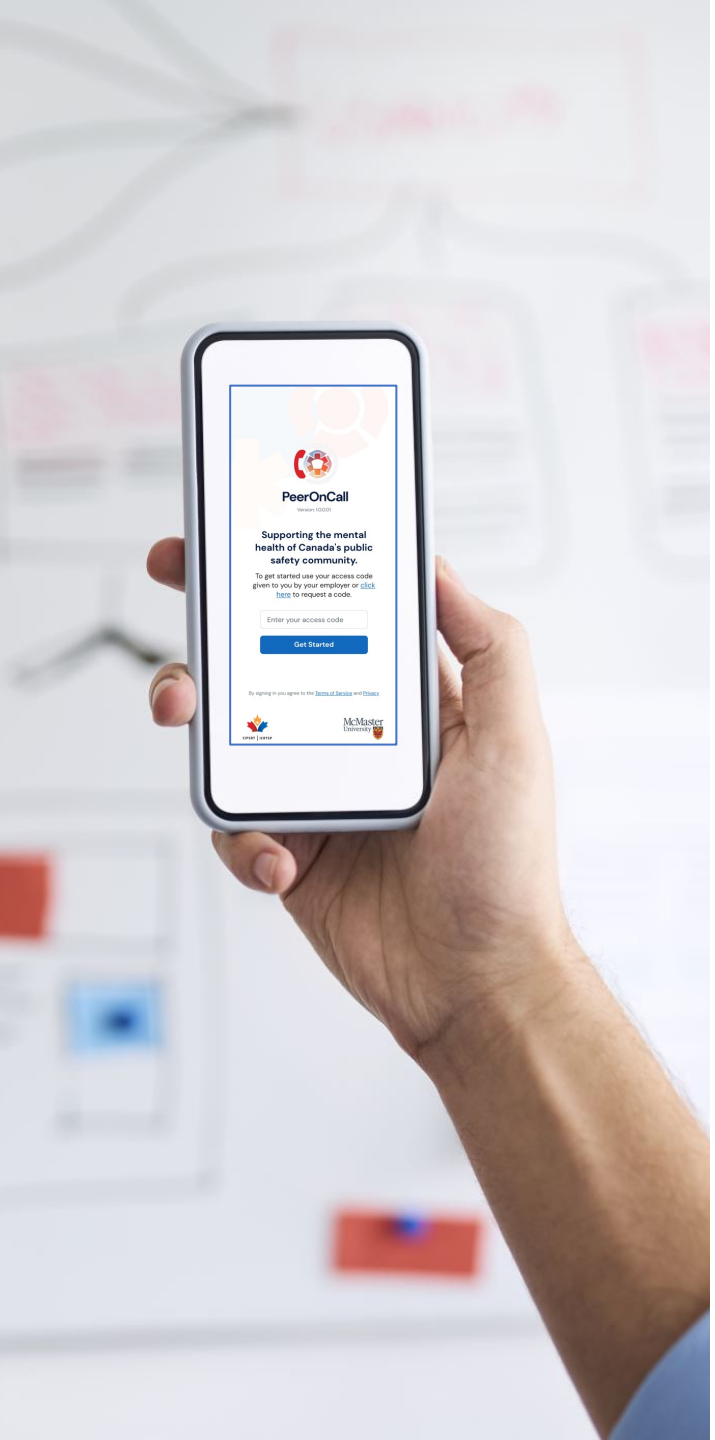
Useful tips, tools, and resources that peer supporters may find helpful

Set your visibility to your peer network, set up your profile, and fill in your contact information

www.oncallapp.ca

PeerOnCall Support

- Personal profile & bio
- Availability indicators
- Opportunity to block/unblock users
- Tools to manage risk
- Access to resources
- Post-call reporting



Implementation Research

Movember funded project (2022- Aug 2024)

- Implementation trial in 6 organizations x 3-6 months (2 Paramedic, 2 Police, 2 Fire services)

PHAC-Funded project (2022-March 2024)

Build capacity for app-based peer support across four sectors (Corrections, Emergency Communications, Paramedic, Fire Services)

Implementation trial in 30-40 organizations across Canada

Analysis: ***What works for whom in what context?***

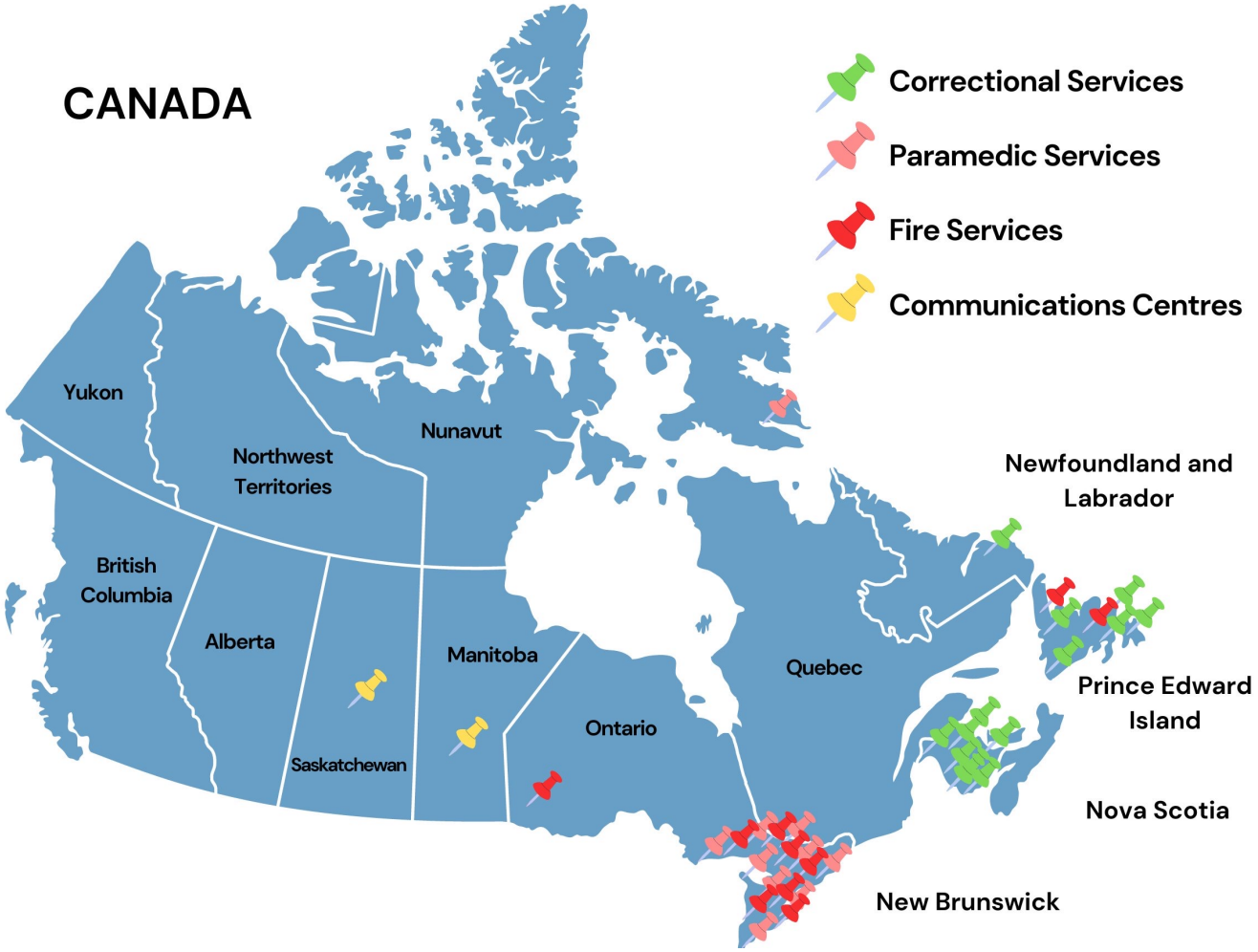
CIHR Research Hub (2023-2025)

- Supporting external researchers to advance science re: PeerOnCall
- Creating technology, implementation & research infrastructure

PeerOnCall Implementation

Launched in May 2023
Currently implementing in over 35 organizations across Canada (access for over 5000 employees)

- Correctional Services (n=14)
  - 1117 employees
- Emergency Communications (n=2)
  - 118 employees
- Fire Services (n=12)
  - 2069 employees
- Paramedic Services (n=9)
  - 1867 employees



Implementation Trends

- App downloads (as of Mar 11): 926 in total which represents approx. 18% of employees [range from 12% in Corrections to 46% in Comms]
- App opens: 6583
- Peer Supporters accessible in the app: 326 overall [61 Corrections; 142 paramedics, 116 Fire; 7 Comms]
- Peer support connections via app (as of Feb 26): 180 in total among 152 unique users (18% of app users)

Feedback about PeerOnCall

Access to information

Anonymity

- *I love the anonymity of the app. There is still a stigma you face coming forward. But the ease of picking up your phone and being able to connect with someone by text through the app is good.*

Customized to PSP

- *I like the … 24/7 access to resources. … It is great that it can be easily updated so information is always current and customizable for a range of organizations.*

What influences uptake of PeerOnCall?

People:

- Leadership buy-in
- Role of organizational champions
- Establishing trust

Processes:

- Customized communication strategies
- Sustaining engagement over time

Organizational context

- Culture of peer support
- Relative advantage of app-based peer support

Key Challenges

Lack of anonymity in small communities

Restricted access at work

- Not able to carry phones at work (corrections)
- Limited time in day to seek support limits timely access

Pockets of resistance – Generational differences

Resources/Sustainability

- Need is there, but not always the resources to support implementation
- Concerned about investing time into app if not sustainable

Time to build trust & integrate

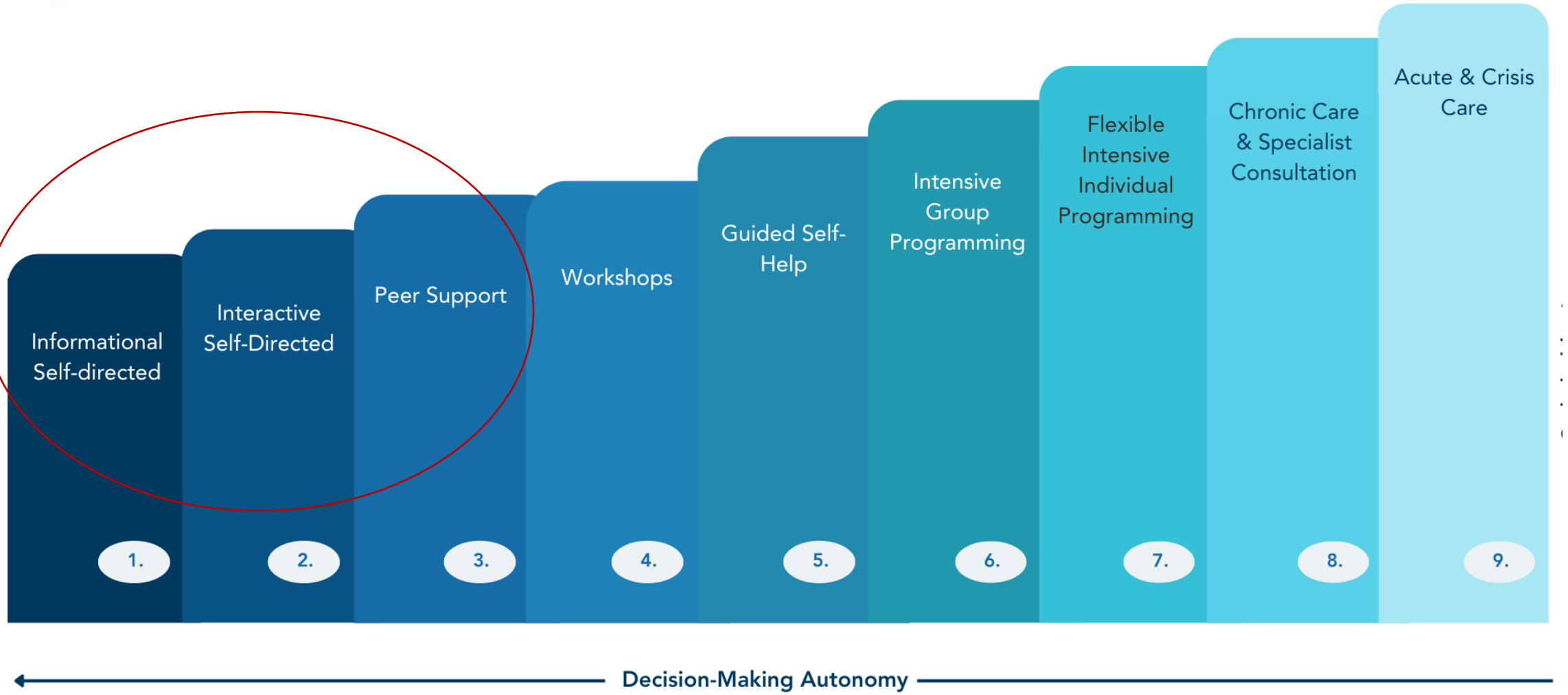
"I think when you're trying to get people to buy into a new way of thinking, a new system, a new app, there's so much marketing that needs to go in, confidence building, and trust… I think if we had longer with it, I'm sure its use would even be greater."

Overall Findings

- Positive responses to the app & value of app-based peer support
- Important tool in the toolbox, but not a silver bullet
- Privacy and data security are primary concerns across all sectors (mental health stigma)
- Peer support training inconsistent; resources needed to build capacity nationally
- Implementation requires a unique understanding of workplace culture and established connections in the PSP community
- Time needed to secure trust & support for implementation at all levels of the organization

PeerOnCall

Stepped Model of Care



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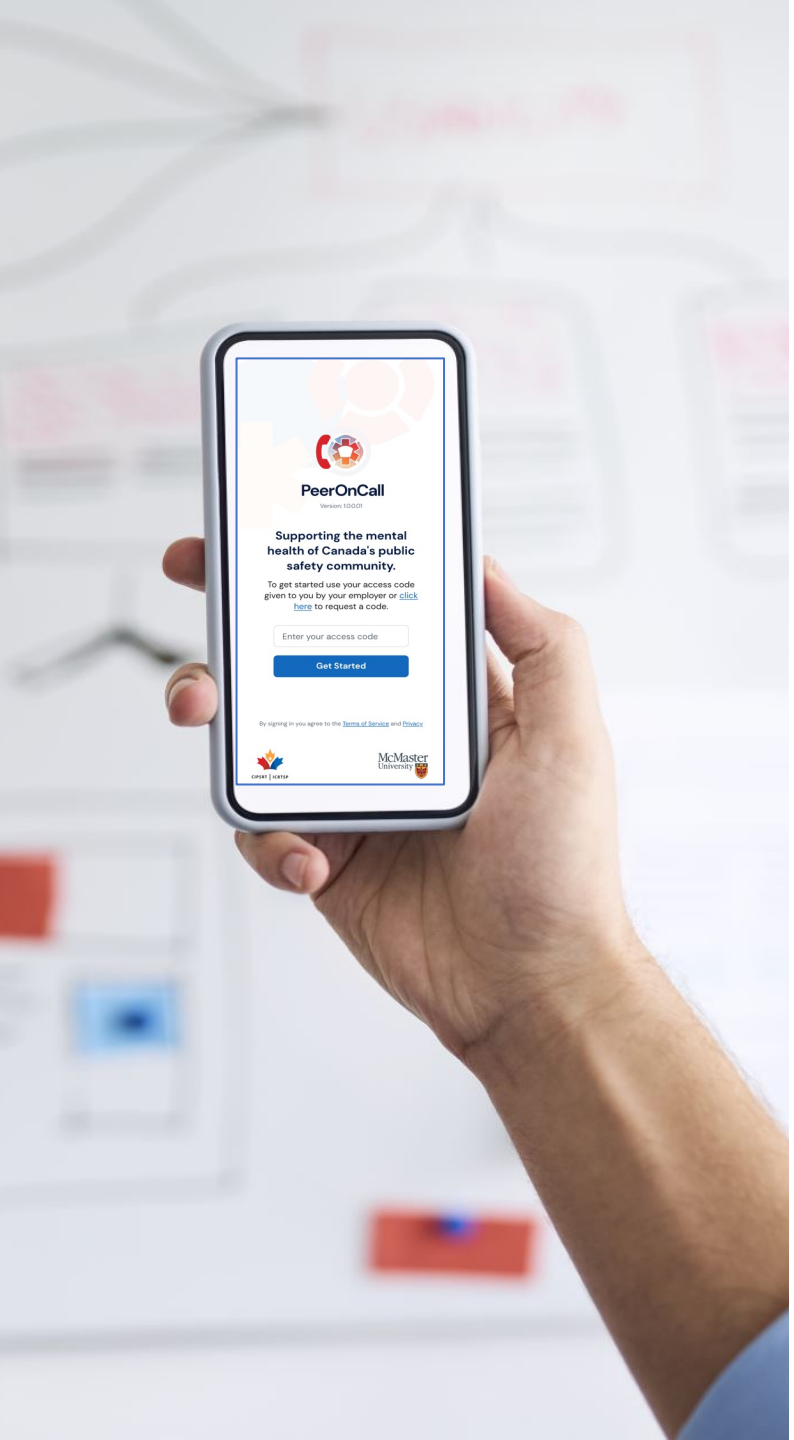


Recommendations

1. Build peer support infrastructure (within and outside the organizations)
2. Scale implementation with low/no cost to those who need it
3. Secure stable funding and distribution model
4. Continue to build trust and sustain momentum
5. Account for sector-specific needs in future implementation

Principles of Implementation & Sustainability

Peer on Call implementation and sustainability efforts are based on the following principles which state the app will:

MAINTAIN USER PRIVACY & SECURITY

The app maintains user privacy and securely stores data.

BE EVIDENCE-BASED

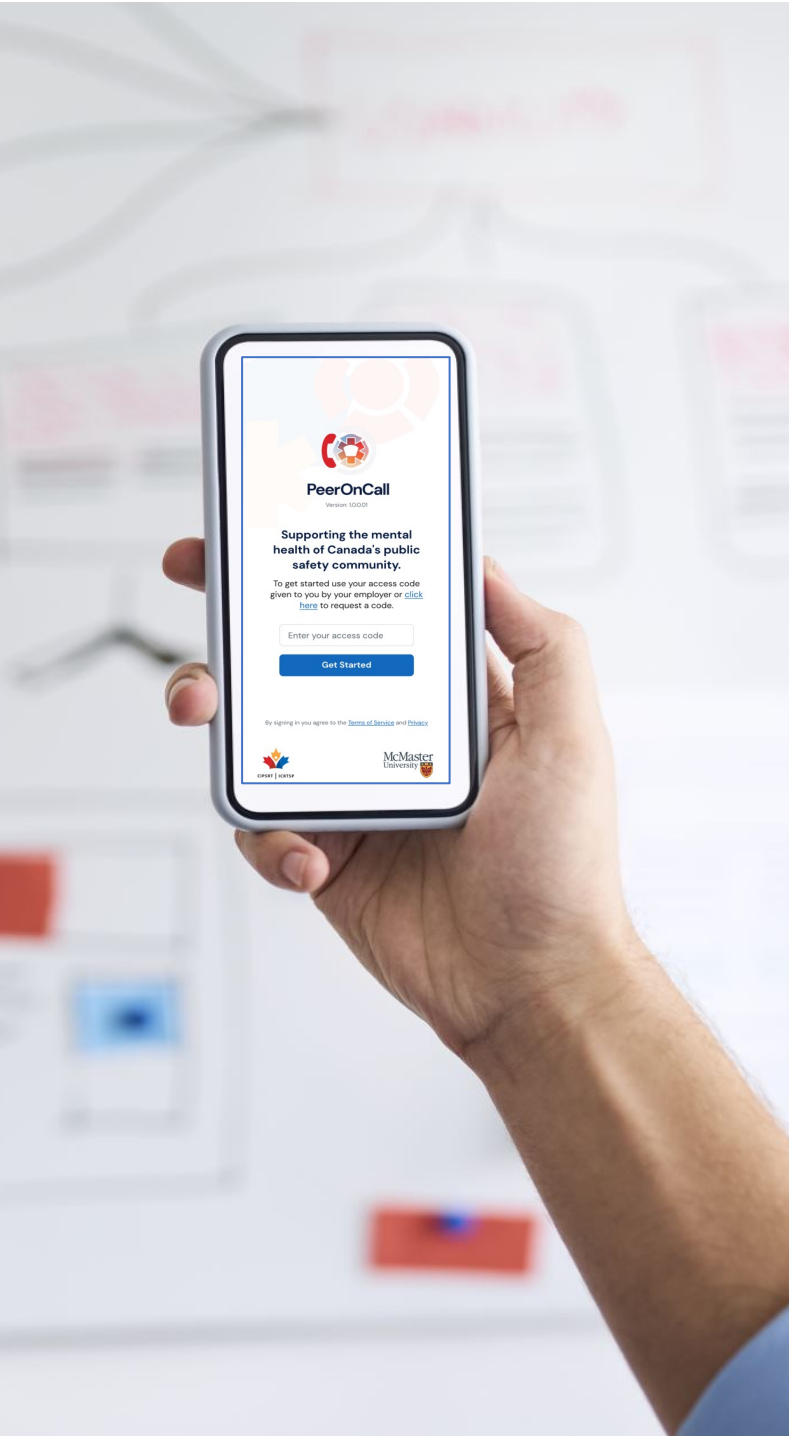
The app is evidence based, integrating leading practices.

BE A SOCIAL GOOD

The app is offered as a social good. With a focus on cost recovery through not-for-profit model if full funding is not possible.

BE RESPONSIVE & RELEVANT

The app is responsive to the community needs. It is designed by and for the first responder community and evolves with new information.



Next Steps

New partnership announcement….

For more information, email us at: oncall@mcmaster.ca

Acknowledgements

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Thanks also to the research team who have spent many hours gathering input from PSP organizations across Canada:

McMaster University Health Sciences
Western University · Canada
Laurier Inspiring Lives
Memorial University
University of Regina
CIPSRT Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment
ICRTSP Institut canadien de recherche et de traitement en sécurité publique
Marine Institute

For more information, check out our website at www.oncallapp.ca
or email us at: oncall@mcmaster.ca

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