

Staffing police services

Getting the right mix to meet citizen needs



To maintain public safety, build community trust, and deliver services that respond to citizen needs, police services must have enough staff. Determining how many staff and what type of staff can be challenging. So can building a business case around those numbers to municipal Councils and Police Service Boards.

Many communities across Canada desire a greater police presence. People want to return to the days when people knew their neighbourhood police officer and it was assumed they would respond to every call.

Current circumstances aren't making this easy. At the very same time municipalities and community organizations want more visibility from police services in their communities, the challenges for police services are on the rise. Nowadays, municipalities across Canada are grappling with many urgent matters, such as crime stemming from social issues (the opioid crisis, housing insecurity, and poverty) and organized crime (fraud, human trafficking, and cybercrime).

As these factors drive demand for police services, the supply of officers is being squeezed. Retirements are increasing, and fewer people are being attracted to policing as a career. High workloads, high-stress calls, and recent negative public sentiment towards policing are contributing to a high rate of mental health leave among police officers. All these factors exacerbate existing staffing challenges.

In Ontario, [legislation](#) regarding presumptive leave states that police officers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder no longer have to prove that the condition results from their work.

They're eligible for leave until determined otherwise. In many ways, this is a positive development for police organizations. More officers can take the time they need to restore and care for their mental health. Sometimes these officers remain active and can be accommodated in other roles, perhaps working in a non-front line policing role. But as the number of officers on leave rises, the number available for active policing work falls.

The combination of higher demand and lower supply further impedes the ability of police organizations to act. In fact, many police organizations are constantly operating below their authorized complement. This results in a vicious cycle, as reduced supply further increases the demand on the remaining officers. The results can be tragic: in its [2019 report](#) on police officer deaths by suicide, the Ontario Coroner's Office observed that the authorized complement model "does not adequately take into account that staffing vacancies occur when recruitment numbers fall short, and also when members are away from the workplace on medical leave or accommodated in other positions. This gap translates to an additional workload for members who are working."

No matter how many officers a policing organization has, they will always be busy, even if it's with less urgent matters.

In recent years, the growing demands on staffing levels have been matched by a rising threshold that warrants having an officer on scene. As a result, police focus on certain incidents and don't show up for others. This has fostered a widespread perception that police services don't care about small crime that doesn't grab headlines. A [2019 survey](#), for instance, showed that a majority of Canadians believe police performance has fallen in areas such as responding promptly to calls, providing crime prevention information, and enforcing laws.

A good starting point for policing organizations looking to address these critical challenges would be getting authorization to hire to the level that they feel is necessary. Given today's social and legal circumstances, however, this is a complicated task. There is no easy equation for determining the staffing complement that meets community needs. The decision demands data-driven evidence, a realistic discussion about service levels, and a shared understanding of expectations. Without these, municipal Councils tend to question the need for increased police budgets.

As policing organizations put more emphasis on their staffing strategies, they need experienced partners that can help gather this evidence for them and drive these discussions. They need partners that understand the issues at hand and can help build a business case for resourcing that takes community specifics into account.

KPMG is available to assist with developing the evidence-based evaluations of police staffing requirements that councils are looking for. We also provide objective recommendations on policing complements to support budget requests to Police Boards and Policing Commissions.

We can also help police services and communities explore and implement expanded resourcing models that incorporate non-police resources and technology in alternative response approaches. These new models can help ensure public safety and provide the funding accountability that municipal councils need.

To discuss police resourcing strategies and opportunities that serve community needs, contact us at KPMG in Canada.

Contact us

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