

# Families and occupational health: A bidirectional perspective

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**Canadian Academy of Health Sciences Forum**

Supporting the Mental and Physical Health of Public Safety Personnel

**September 8, 2022**

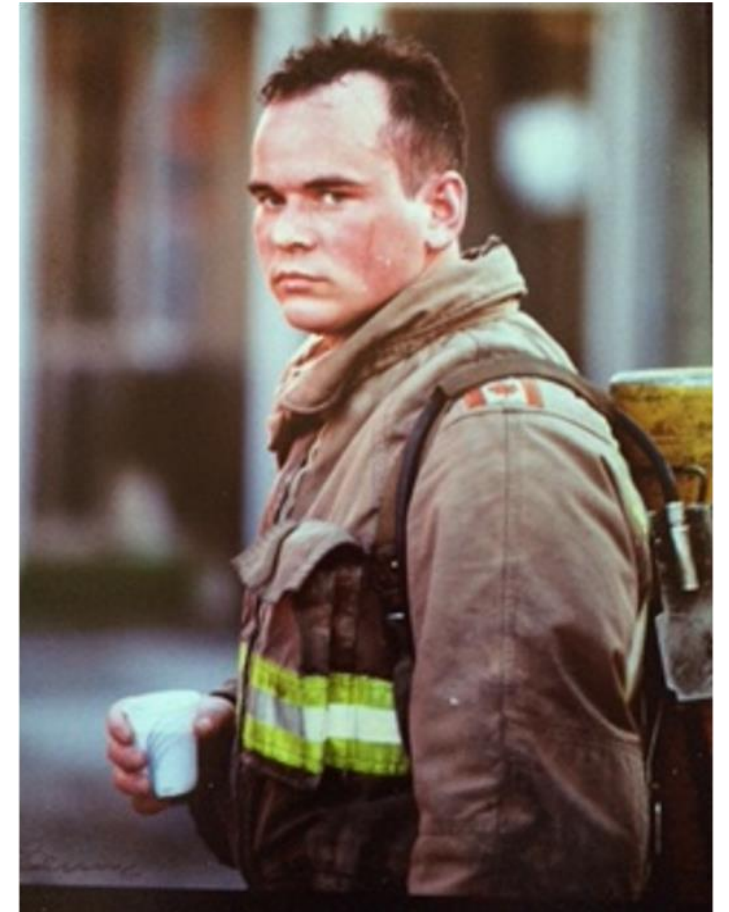


Canadian Academy of Health Sciences  
Académie canadienne des sciences de la santé



# Disclosures & Acknowledgements

- Associate Professor
- Occupational Therapist
- Member of CIPSRT ARC-NAC
- Member of CIPSRT Knowledge Translation Committee
- Research Lead, Families Matter Research Group
- No relationships with commercial interests
- No conflicts of interest to declare
- Research is supported through
  - Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)
  - Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
  - Atlas Institute for Veterans & Families
  - Mitacs partnered with Vanier Institute of the Family, Wounded Warriors Canada
  - Public Health Agency of Canada
- Thanks to philanthropic supporters
  - Medavie Foundation
  - The Citrine Foundation of Canada
- Long-time PSP spouse



# Families & occupational health?

- Traditionally, the scope of occupational health has focused on the employee
- In the military, there is an explicit recognition that families are the “Strength Behind the Uniform”
- Military spouses in particular have been formally recognized as essential for operational effectiveness



Anita Anand ✓  
@AnitaAnandMP

🇨🇦 Canada government official

Military families are the strength behind the [@CanadianForces](#) uniform. Without them, our Armed Forces could not accomplish their crucial missions at home and abroad. Today, I met with Montréal-area military families to thank them for their devotion and sacrifices for our country.







# Building the Evidence

Leroux et al. *Systematic Reviews* (2021) 10:258  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-021-01807-1>

## Systematic Reviews

### PROTOCOL

### Open Access

## Experiences of families of public safety personnel: a systematic review protocol of qualitative evidence

Janette Leroux<sup>1</sup>, Rachel Richmond<sup>1</sup>, Sara Fitzpatrick<sup>1</sup>, Hannah Kirkland<sup>1</sup>, Deborah Norris<sup>2</sup>, Alyson Mahar<sup>3</sup>, Joy MacDermid<sup>4</sup>, Rachel Dekel<sup>5</sup> and Heidi Cramm<sup>1\*</sup>

### Abstract

**Background:** Public safety occupations are well-recognized to be dangerous and stressful. Despite recent attention on post-traumatic stress injuries among public safety personnel, there has been considerably less attention paid to the ongoing ways in which the risks and requirements associated with those occupations shape family life, and how families respond and adapt to those lifestyle dimensions. This systematic review aims to understand how day-to-day family life is affected and shaped when a family member works in a public safety sector, such as fire, police, paramedic, corrections, and emergency communications.

**Methods:** Qualitative studies that examine the experiences of families or family members of public safety personnel will be included in this review, with no date or language restrictions. An initial search of Embase and CINAHL will be conducted, followed by an analysis of text words contained in the title and abstract, and of the index terms used to describe the articles. Databases to be searched for published studies include MEDLINE, Embase, Web of Sciences, CINAHL, PsycINFO, and Sociological Abstracts. Titles and abstracts will be screened by two independent reviewers. The full texts of selected studies will be assessed in detail, and findings and their illustrations will be extracted and aggregated. Any disagreements between the reviewers that arise at each stage will be resolved through discussion, or by a third reviewer. Further analysis of the synthesized findings will be informed by family systems theory.

**Discussion:** The ways that occupational risks and requirements shape family life have been better investigated within other high-risk occupation groups, which has led to productive advancements in organizational policies and supports in the respective sectors. An understanding of the experiences which typify family life ongoing within PSP sectors is a critical gap in the development of meaningful family-informed occupational initiatives and supports.

**Systematic review registration:** Submitted to PROSPERO for systematic review registration: CRD42020208126

**Keywords:** Family, Public safety, Relationships, Qualitative study

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International Journal of  
Environmental Research  
and Public Health



### Review

## Public Safety Personnel Family Resilience: A Narrative Review

Marilyn Cox<sup>1</sup>, Deborah Norris<sup>1</sup>, Heidi Cramm<sup>2</sup>, Rachel Richmond<sup>2</sup> and Gregory S. Anderson<sup>3,\*</sup>

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**Abstract:** The families of public safety personnel (PSP) face demands that are unique to these occupations. Nonstandard work, trauma exposure, and dangerous work environments affect both workers and the families who support them. This narrative review aims to identify the stressors that PSP families experience and the support and resources needed to enhance family resilience. Due to a lack of research on PSP families, this review is a necessary first step to summarizing and interpreting a diverse body of research. The studies included addressed structural and emotional work-family conflict with reference to PSP sectors. A framework from the military family resiliency literature interprets the findings. Factors influencing family functioning and the availability and accessibility of resources provide clues about the type of skills and supports that PSP families rely on. Meaning-making, collaboration, a sense of coherence, and communication were identified as themes associated with intrafamilial processes. Extrafamilial themes included public perceptions, a lack of recognition for the roles families fulfill, and the need for information and education. The results suggest that the vulnerability of PSP families is variable and extrafamilial resources in the form of formal and informal supports are necessary to enhance family resiliency.

**Keywords:** family resiliency; public safety personnel; nonstandard work; work-family conflict; family time; instrumental support; emotional support; social support; family capabilities; trauma exposure



Citation: Cox, M.; Norris, D.; Cramm, H.; Richmond, R.; Anderson, G.S. Public Safety Personnel Family Resilience: A Narrative Review. *Int. J.*

## PLOS ONE

### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The mental health and wellbeing of spouses, partners and children of emergency responders: A systematic review

Marie-Louise Sharp<sup>1\*</sup>, Noa Solomon<sup>2</sup>, Virginia Harrison<sup>3,4</sup>, Rachael Gribble<sup>1</sup>, Heidi Cramm<sup>5</sup>, Graham Pike<sup>6,7,8</sup>, Nicola T. Fear<sup>1,9</sup>

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### OPEN ACCESS

**Citation:** Sharp M-L, Solomon N, Harrison V, Gribble R, Cramm H, Pike G, et al. (2022) The mental health and wellbeing of spouses, partners and children of emergency responders: A systematic review. *PLOS ONE* 17(6): e0269659. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269659>

**Editor:** Marianna Mazza, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Sede di Roma, ITALY

**Received:** July 16, 2021

**Accepted:** May 26, 2022

**Published:** June 15, 2022

**Peer Review History:** PLOS recognizes the benefits of transparency in the peer review process; therefore, we enable the publication of all of the content of peer review and author responses alongside final, published articles. The editorial history of this article is available here: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269659>

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**Data Availability Statement:** All data are available by accessing original journal articles included in the systematic review. Additionally Supporting

### Abstract

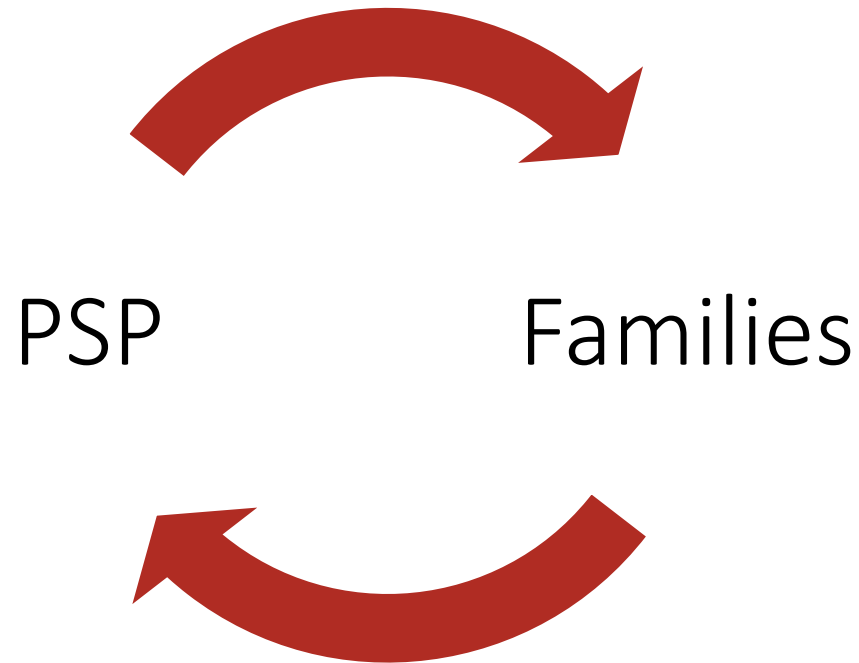
Emergency responders (ERs), often termed First Responders, such as police, fire and paramedic roles are exposed to occupational stressors including high workload, and exposure to trauma from critical incidents, both of which can affect their mental health and wellbeing. Little is known about the impact of the ER occupation on the mental health and wellbeing of their families. The aim of the current study was to investigate what mental health and wellbeing outcomes and experiences have been researched internationally in ER families, and to examine the prevalence and associated risk and protective factors of these outcomes. We conducted a systematic review in accordance with an *a priori* PROSPERO approved protocol (PROSPERO 2019 CRD42019134974). Forty-three studies were identified for inclusion. The majority of studies used a quantitative, cross-sectional design and were conducted in the United States; just over half assessed police/law enforcement families. Themes of topics investigated included: 1) Spousal/partner mental health and wellbeing; 2) Couple relationships; 3) Child mental health and wellbeing; 4) Family support and coping strategies; and 5) Positive outcomes. The review identified limited evidence regarding the prevalence of mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Family experiences and risk factors described were ER work-stress spillover negatively impacting spousal/partner wellbeing, couple relationships, and domestic violence. Traumatic exposure risk factors included concerns family had for the safety of their ER partner, the negative impact of an ER partners' mental health problem on the couples' communication and on family mental health outcomes. Protective factors included social support; however, a lack of organisational support for families was reported in some studies. Study limitations and future research needs are discussed. Progressing this area of research is important to improve knowledge of baseline needs of ER families to be able to target interventions, improve public health, and support ER's operational effectiveness.



## Mapping the Field

- What services and supports are currently available for PSP families?
- How and where are families considered or included in PSP associations and organizations?
- Activating a partnership of partners that study, serve, and support the families of military, veterans, and PSP

# A bidirectional relationship





# Families **Matter** Research Group

We envision a Canada where the families of military, veterans, and public safety personnel who serve alongside thrive in a caring and compassionate society, in an inclusive and vibrant culture, and a safe and sustainable environment.



A few of our team

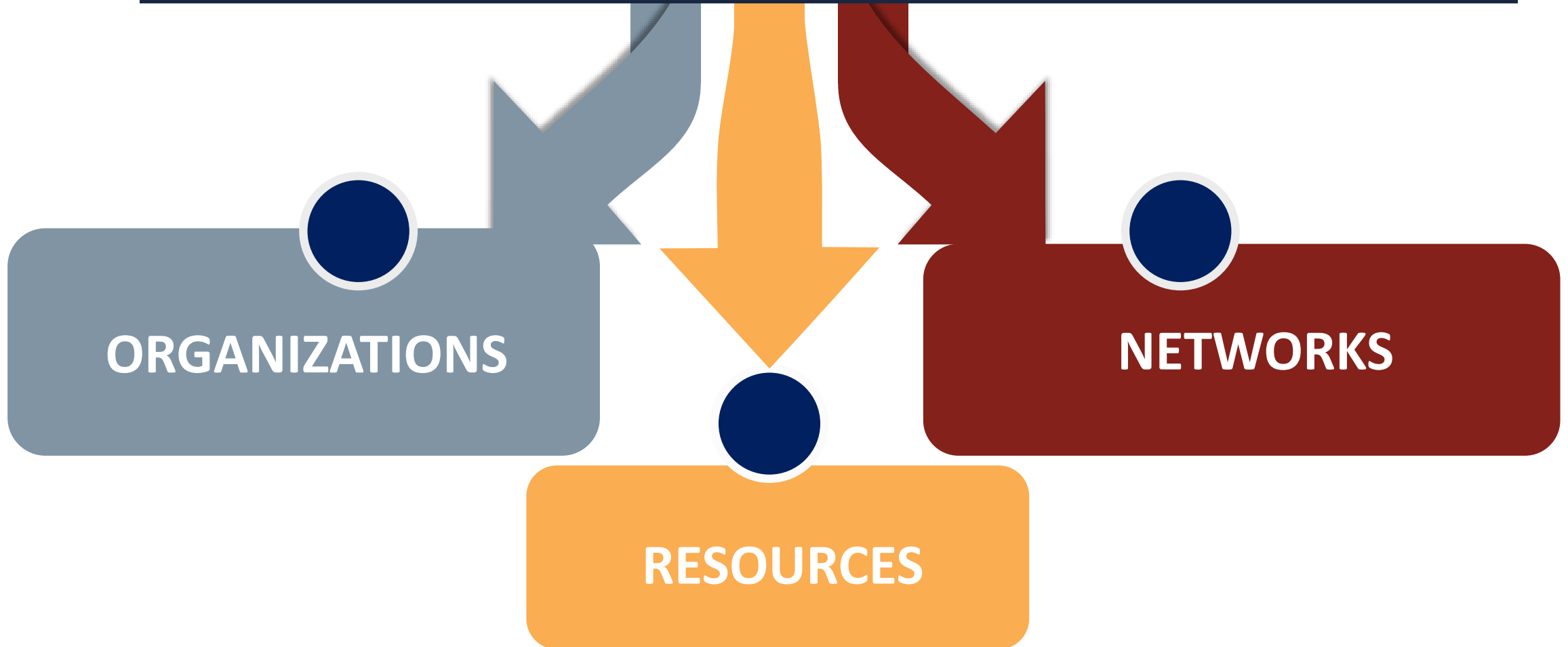


# Building Partnerships

- We are leading a SSHRC Partnership Development Grant to activate a partnership of partners to study, serve, and support the families of military, veterans, and public safety personnel.
- We gratefully acknowledge financial support by Medavie Foundation and The Citrine Foundation of Canada



# A Three-Pronged Approach



# ORGANIZATIONS

Where are the opportunities to include families and to support them directly and indirectly?

- Where to start? How do we begin?
- Who is doing it well?
- What are the lessons learned?



Dr. Heather Hadjistravopoulos



Dr. Nathalie Reid



Dr. Heidi Cramm

# R E S O U R C E S



PSPNET FAMILIES | FAMILLES

## Serving alongside the public safety personnel – Supporting PSP Families

Families of public safety personnel (PSP) experience unique lifestyle demands that challenge them every day. **PSP families grapple with dynamic requirements related to shiftwork, traumatic exposure, and being out-of-sync with the broader community.** Serving alongside their loved ones to ensure the safety and security of our communities, PSPNET Families will offer them trauma-informed, evidence-based mental health promotion resources and supports delivered with rich foundation in what it means to be “on the job.”

The PSPNET Families Wellbeing Hub, developed through **funding by Public Health Agency of Canada**, complements PSPNET, a federally-funded online platform that offers Internet-delivered Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (ICBT) for PSP.

**Now available for Spouses or Significant Others (SSO) of PSP, is the SSO Wellbeing Course**, an evidence-based ICBT program designed to help SSO of PSP with low mood, depression, worry, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. The free, self-guided, and confidential course, takes into account the unique experiences of being the SSO of a PSP. Stay tuned for the Families Resources and Couples Toolkit which are coming fall of 2022.



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

Financial contribution from

## Aux côtés du personnel de la sécurité publique – soutenir les familles des membres du PSP

Les familles du personnel de la sécurité publique (PSP) sont confrontées à des impératifs de vie qui les mettent au défi à chaque jour. En effet **les membres du PSP sont aux prises avec des dynamiques liées aux horaires de travail atypiques, à l'exposition à des situations traumatiques et de se sentir parfois en décalage avec la communauté.**

Le réseau pour le bien-être des Familles du PSPNET leur offrira un ensemble de ressources et de soutiens en matière de promotion de la santé mentale, fondés sur des données probantes et adaptées à leur réalité particulière. Pendant qu'elles sont aux côtés de leurs conjoints, qui assurent la protection et la sécurité des communautés, les familles du PSP méritent un soutien adaptés à leur réalité tout en tenant compte des traumatismes.

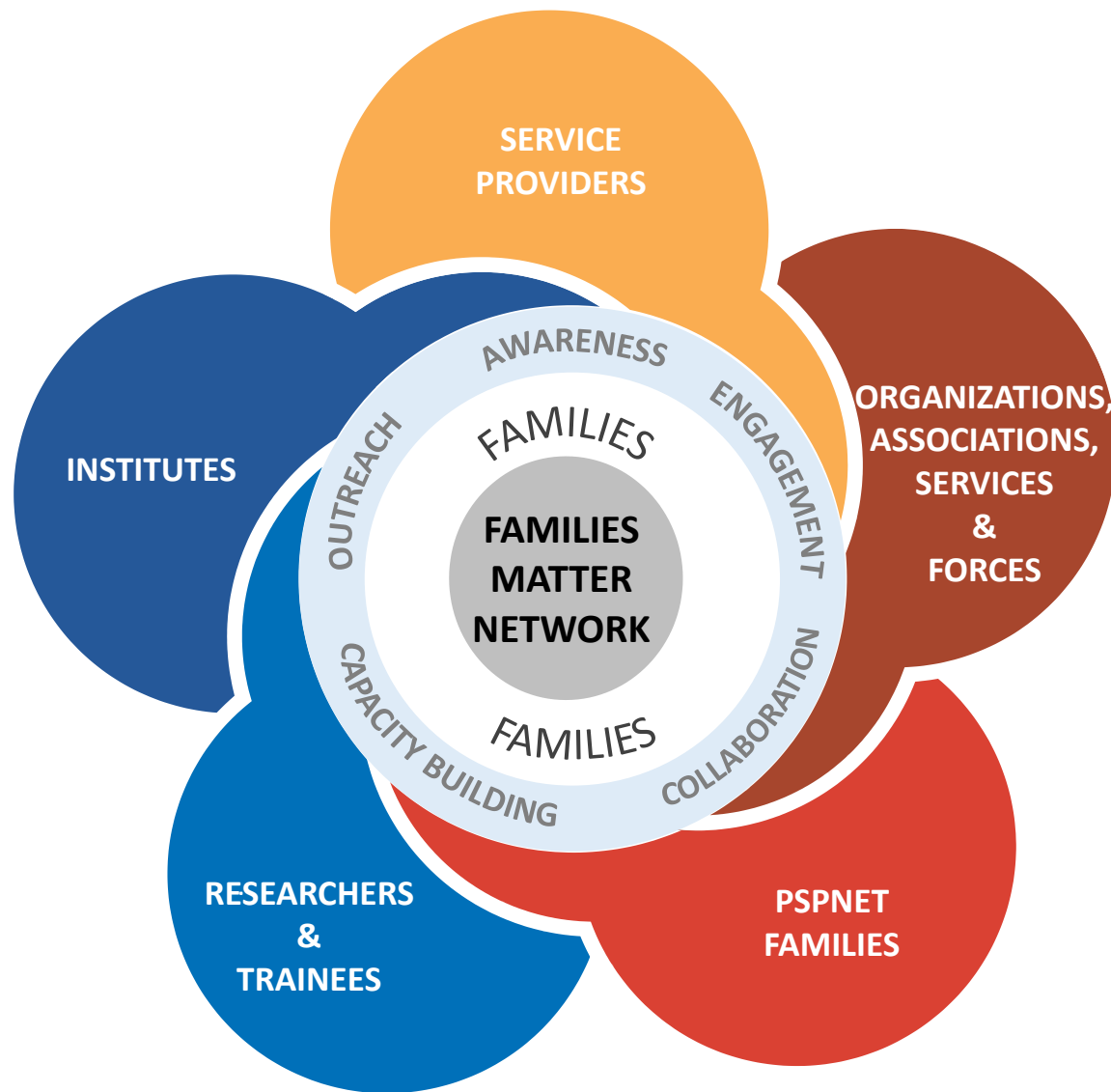
Le réseau pour le bien-être des familles du PSPNET a été développé grâce au financement de **l'Agence de la santé publique du Canada** et s'ajoute au PSPNET, une plateforme en ligne qui offre une Thérapie cognitive comportementale sur Internet (TCCI) pour les membres du PSP.

La **démarche Développement du bien-être pour les conjoints des membres du PSP** est un programme de thérapie cognitive comportementale en ligne (TCCI) fondé sur des données probantes pour aider les conjoints des membres du PSP qui souffrent d'humeur dépressive, de dépression, d'inquiétude, d'anxiété ou de trouble de stress post-traumatique. La démarche autonome, gratuite et confidentielle, tient compte des expériences particulières que vivent les conjoints des membres du PSP. Restez à l'affût pour la démarche et les boîtes à outils contenant des ressources pour les familles et les couples, à venir à l'automne 2022.



Agence de la santé  
publique du Canada





# FAMILIES MATTER NETWORK

# NEXT STEPS

- Organizations
  - Face to face engagement starting this fall
  - Creating resources for organizations
- Resources
  - PSPNET Families is LIVE – check out the Spouse or Significant Other Wellbeing Course <https://www.pspnet.ca/families/>
  - Additional layers are coming online with the Families Resources and Couples Toolkit this fall
- Network
  - FMRG Quarterly interactive series, in partnership with CIPSRT
    - Organizations & Families Sept 22, 2022
    - PSPNET Families Dec. 1, 2022

# STAY TUNED

- <https://www.pspnet.ca/families/>
- <https://fmrg.ca/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/familiesrsch>
- [https://twitter.com/families\\_rschr](https://twitter.com/families_rschr)