

Mental health

- **Get a mental health tune-up** — Take advantage of your current benefits to talk to a mental health professional about any concerns or areas you want to work through to maintain good mental health in retirement. Building a trusting relationship with a mental health professional can take time. It's good to start even when there aren't any problems so you know who to go to when there are.
- **Address mental health challenges** — As a first responder, you may be at increased risk for temporary or ongoing mental health conditions due to the nature of your work. Common conditions include anxiety, depression, substance misuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Seeking support now can make these conditions manageable and can provide you with strategies for coping with the transition to retirement.
- **Talk to your loved ones** — It's essential to discuss your hopes, dreams, and plans for retirement with your immediate family members. Communication can help maintain healthy relationships as you make the transition into retirement.
- **Plan for social connection** — Humans are social beings who don't do well in isolation. Maintaining connections with family, friends, and community is crucial for a happy and healthy retired life. Consider ways to stay in contact with your first responder peers and community. Find ways to meet new friends and reconnect with old ones.
- **Consider ways to replace work routines** — Work provides a structure for day-to-day living, and the loss of that structure can make you feel lost yourself. Create new routines that combine mental, social, and physical activities.
- **Find a new purpose** — Think about interests, hobbies, and learning opportunities that will bring new meaning and purpose to your life when you're no longer working.

One of the most important keys to mental health is **social connection**.

Thinking about retirement?

Retirement may be a reward for years of hard work, but it's also a major life transition that can have physical and mental health impacts if you're not prepared.

As a first responder, you likely identify strongly with the work you do and feel a deep connection to your profession. When you retire, disconnecting from your profession may feel like a loss — of identity, meaning, and purpose — and result in a complex array of other feelings and emotions.

Whether you're just starting to think about retiring, actively planning, recently retired, or even long retired, there are many things you can do now to make retirement work for you. Preparing now will put you on the path to continue to live with intention, meaning, and purpose.

Remember: It's never too soon to start mapping out the rest of your life. If you're already retired, it's not too late to think about how to live in a more healthy and meaningful way.

Finances

- **Check your benefits** — Find out what's available now and what won't be available to you when you retire. Knowing about the supports you'll have access to can reduce anxiety.
- **Make a financial plan** — Especially if you have projects or dreams for retirement, you need to know that your financial resources will cover them.

Physical health

- **Get a physical tune-up** — Take advantage of your current benefits to get assessed from head to toe and have any physical health needs (dental, hearing, physiotherapy, etc.) tended to so you'll be in great shape going into retirement.
- **Maintain continuity of care** — Talk to your health practitioners about how to meet your treatment needs in retirement.
- **Plan for healthy habits** — If you don't already get plenty of physical activity, healthy foods, and sleep, start making new habits now so you can carry them with you into retirement.

For more detailed tips and information see *A Guide for Retirees* available on BCFirstRespondersMentalHealth.com.

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