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## MEDIA RELEASE

# New program for first responders tackles Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

*SFU's First Responders Trauma Prevention and Recovery program will equip emergency and military personnel to combat trauma-induced mental illness*

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A new program aimed at preventing the tragedy of first-responder deaths by suicide is being launched at Simon Fraser University.

Offered this fall by SFU Continuing Studies, and a first of its kind in Canada, the **First Responders Trauma Prevention and Recovery** certificate program will support those on the front lines of Canadian emergency and military services and train them to protect themselves from the impact of workplace trauma.

The program is being launched as tragedies related to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) continue to make national headlines. In 2015, 39 Canadian first responders and 12 military members died by suicide, while 2016 has already seen its first two incidents.

"The people in our emergency services and military put their lives at risk daily in order to ensure our safety and security," says Larry White, director of career and professional programs at SFU. "I am very proud that SFU has been able to respond, in turn, to the needs of these brave men and women."

Taught by active and retired first responders and related professionals, the program will provide first responders with the specialized knowledge and skills they need to mitigate the effects of trauma before, during and after an incident occurs.

The program was developed in partnership with the **Tema Conter Memorial Trust**, Canada's leading provider of support and education for public safety and military personnel dealing with trauma-induced mental illness, including PTSD.

"There is a national mental health crisis among first responders and military personnel," says Vince Savoia, founder and executive director of the Tema Conter Memorial Trust and a former paramedic. "One of the best ways to respond to this crisis is to give these brave men and women the specialized knowledge and skills they need to mitigate the emotional toll of their work. This program is the first in Canada to provide ready access to learning that is critical to the mental wellbeing of those who are frequently exposed to suffering and tragedy."

The program will be delivered as a series of online part-time courses beginning in the fall of 2016. Applications are currently being accepted. The program will be available to police officers, firefighters, paramedics, correctional workers, military personnel and other professionals in similar fields.

"We structured the program to be pragmatic and collaborative," adds Savoia. "Participants will not only benefit personally, but they will also acquire leadership skills to support their colleagues and their organizations as a whole."

**FAST FACTS:**

- One in 10 Canadians suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder.
- Emergency personnel experience PTSD at twice the rate of the average population in Canada.
- Mental health issues cost the Canadian economy \$51 billion annually.

Source: [Tema Conter Memorial Trust](#)

**ABOUT TEMA CONTER MEMORIAL TRUST:**

The Tema Conter Memorial Trust was established in 2001 to offer resources and support to emergency services and military personnel. Through research, education, training and the provision of peer and psychological support, the organization aims to help these men and women when they need it most. Among its programs, Tema organizes the Heroes Are Human cross-country tour to raise awareness about PTSD and suicide among the ranks of Canada's public safety, correctional and military organizations.

**ABOUT SFU CONTINUING STUDIES**

For over 40 years, Continuing Studies at Simon Fraser University has been offering flexible learning opportunities to adult students of all ages. In addition to public lectures and events, SFU Continuing Studies delivers hundreds of courses and a wide variety of professional certificate and diploma programs online and at SFU's campuses.

**ABOUT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY:**

As Canada's engaged university, SFU is defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research and far-reaching community engagement. SFU was founded 50 years ago with a mission to be a different kind of university—to bring an interdisciplinary approach to learning, embrace bold initiatives, and engage with communities near and far. Today, SFU is Canada's leading comprehensive research university and is ranked one of the top universities in the world. With campuses in British Columbia's three largest cities—Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey—SFU has eight faculties, delivers almost 150 programs to over 35,000 students, and boasts more than 135,000 alumni in 130 countries around the world.

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