



# Policing and public health in 2019: Knowledge and collaboration top selections on the menu at Calgary and Edinburgh

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*This article is related directly to the Law Enforcement & Public Health (LEPH) Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, October 2019.*

## Calgary in August

It has long been a high point on my professional calendar to attend the annual Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) conference and annual general meeting. This August marked my 18th consecutive attendance, hosted this year by the Calgary Police Service. In my mixed roles as a professional advisor, program director, and editor-in-chief, it often seems that more work gets done in those six days of formal meetings and informal networking than throughout the rest of the year.

Of course, that is not entirely accurate. Each new productive season that follows owes much of its workload to the new directions and initiatives that take shape around those many tables. This year, virtually every table was set for discussions on two themes that mark a significant evolution in policing since my earliest conferences: an almost insatiable hunger for knowledge and an omnipresent desire to collaborate with others outside the policing sector.

The latter stems from a growing appreciation among police professionals at all levels. Virtually none of the most pressing issues affecting the safety and well-being of Canadians can be addressed alone through the traditional core functions associated with the police. One defining example is the current opioid crisis, alongside other illicit drugs, manifesting as lethal epidemics affecting our communities. Only a few years ago, almost any gathering of police would have betrayed an ingrained bias for enforcement, often with zero tolerance for people who partake. Today, police have become widely convinced that criminal sanctions have been unsuccessful and even misguided, and that illicit drug use and its associated vulnerabilities represent a public health issue of epic proportions.

Solutions to the current drug crisis can only be found and operationalized in close partnership with health services, addiction services, social services, education authorities, and community-based organizations. This same observation was repeated at multiple committee tables addressing issues including intimate partner violence,

cybercrime and child exploitation, guns and gangs, CSWB planning, mental health responses, and even the well-being of policing's own members.

Amid this growing array of collaborations-by-necessity enter the most imperative piece of modern kit: *knowledge*. I am always impressed by the professionalism and preparedness with which police members approach their jobs, and as they seek to engage across multiple sectors, it is in their very nature to come prepared. Thus, their appetite and their respect for learning and research have never been stronger. Instinct and street smarts will always have their place in policing, to be sure. But many have recognized that if police are to engage effectively outside their sector and contribute fully to shaping public policy and practices with confidence, collaborative solutions will require validity, evidence, and authenticity.

## Edinburgh in October

As I outlined in an earlier editorial, in our Issue 4(2), I am scheduled to attend the Law Enforcement Public Health 5th International Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in mid-October (LEPH2019). The Journal will present a moderated session tracing the rapid uptake of collaborative public health approaches to community safety and well-being occurring across Canada. Our distinguished panellists will share their insights on the challenges and successes they have encountered, each of them as a recognized leader behind this movement.

I have very fond recollections of my time in Glasgow and Edinburgh nine years ago, where our study team from Saskatchewan encountered some very promising practices and some striking outcome improvements in violence and a host of other risk factors and indicators of well-being across Scottish society and, in particular, among the nation's most marginalized population groups. At the time, we were contemplating whole-of-system approaches for similar indicators in Canada, but we had no idea then whether the "partnership working" that defined the Scottish innovations would gain

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any traction back home, where siloed behaviour and systems-serving-systems were well entrenched. As it turns out, there was a pretty strong appetite for change. Who knew?

Unlike the CACP in Calgary, this will be my first full attendance at an LEPH event. I dropped by for the opening in Toronto, but health issues precluded my attendance beyond that evening. Much of what we will showcase about CSWB in Canada has been driven initially from the policing sector, albeit with the widespread and sustained participation of multiple human services once mobilization has been achieved. I am very much looking forward to a different conference experience in Edinburgh, one in which delegates and presenters from policing and justice have important roles to play, but where health, mental health, addiction, housing, education, and social services professionals and scholars appear to dominate the program, bringing perspectives and experience from multiple countries.

I recall some very good meals when I was last in Scotland. This time, while we look forward to sharing our Canadian story for 90 minutes on the Tuesday, I think our whole delegation is looking forward to a feast of learning from others throughout the several days of the event. And I strongly suspect those same two key selections from Calgary, the desire to collaborate and that hunger for knowledge, will once again top the menu at every table.

### *The Journal of CSWB at LEPH2019*

Our Journal is an increasingly credible and global vehicle for the exchange of knowledge in the service of solutions to a wide range of policing and public health challenges and opportunities. The only peer-reviewed journal founded on the mission of multi-sector collaboration, our over 75 articles published to date sit firmly on the interfaces among these interacting human service systems. We are pleased that, in this current Issue 4(3), four of our papers have a clear connection to LEPH2019, with their authors serving as delegates, presenters, and panellists. We also have obtained a number of papers coming into the editorial process before and after the event, and we look forward to carrying the LEPH theme forward in several upcoming issues.

As always, we encourage our authors and readers in all CSWB and LEPH sectors to help us grow this global body of knowledge together.

Hope to see you in Scotland!

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The author has continuing business interests that include providing advisory services to communities, police services, and related human service agencies.

#### AFFILIATIONS

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