



MARCH 2025



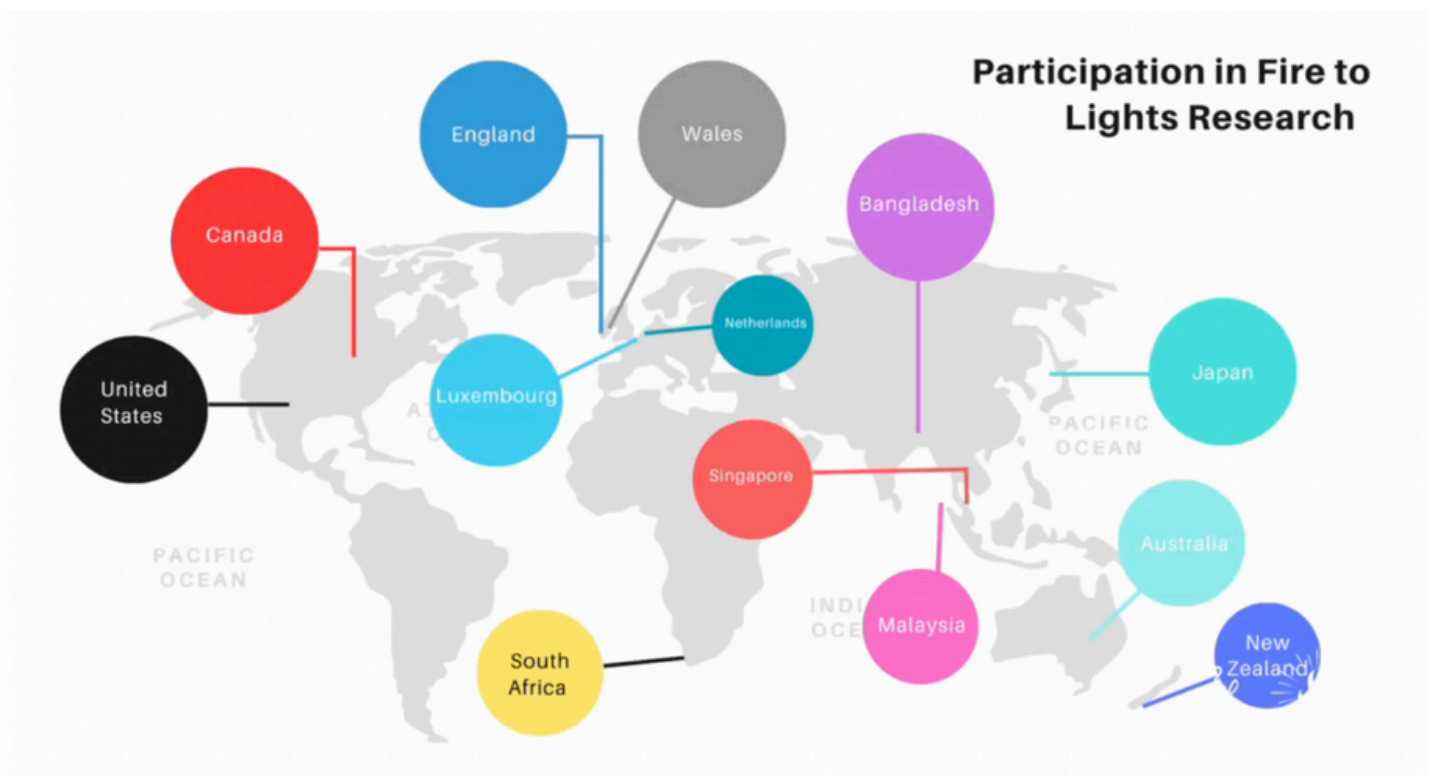
Webinar Series



ESF Webinar - Worldwide Insights: Fire Chiefs on Mental Health Challenges in the Fire Service

The Emergency Services Foundation welcomed Brandon Evans from Ontario, Canada, as part of our ongoing webinar series. A former firefighter turned international researcher, Brandon shared thought-provoking insights into the global state of mental health within fire services. Drawing from his 'Fire to Light' research across five continents, he highlighted the most effective strategies in use by fire service leaders to better support mental health and wellbeing in their teams.

After personally experiencing post-traumatic stress during his time as a firefighter, Brandon became passionate about shifting the emergency services sector toward a preventative mental health approach. He now advocates for mental fitness programs to be readily available and actively utilised across all departments.



Continents of Participation in the Fire to Light Research

Brandon began the session by sharing eye-opening data from his research, underscoring the urgent need for resilience-building and proactive mental health support. Viewers learned first responders “will experience somewhere between 100 to even over 900 traumatic events” in their career - compared to just 3 to 4 for the average person. This means that emergency service workers will “experience somewhere between roughly 1000 to 25000 percent more trauma in [their] career than the average person [...] does in their lifetime”. Furthermore, he noted that over 77% of the Fire Chiefs interviewed knew someone at work who had committed suicide.

Despite these staggering statistics, Brandon revealed that 86.6% of departments only provide mental health training once or twice throughout a firefighter’s entire career. He stressed that mental health and resilience training should be treated with the same importance as physical training for PPE, CPR, and medical calls. Just as firefighters routinely train to protect their physical health, Brandon proposes they should also spend at least one hour per month building mental fitness to safeguard their psychological wellbeing.

This kind of regular, preventative training not only benefits individual first responders but also improves team performance and department-wide outcomes. In fact, 64% of departments are reporting an increase in firefighter leave, with psychological injuries now surpassing musculoskeletal ones. By training resilience, departments can better equip their teams to manage traumatic events and reduce the long-term impacts of mental stress.

In sharing his insights, Brandon suggested a range of tools that agencies should consider.



The graphic features a blue background with a white wave-like shape on the left. In the top left corner is the ESF logo: 'ESF' in large, colorful letters (blue, red, yellow, green) above 'EMERGENCY SERVICES FOUNDATION' in blue, with the tagline 'Sharing wisdom. building knowledge' below it. To the right of the logo, the text 'Webinar Series' is written in a large, bold, blue font. Below this, a black rectangular box contains the text 'Tools & Strategies' in white. Underneath the box, the words 'Prevention' and 'Broader Thinking' are listed in a smaller, italicized white font. The main title 'Treating your Fire Department Like a Pro Sports Team' is centered in a larger, italicized white font. Below the title, the words 'Story Telling' and 'Consistency' are listed in a smaller, italicized white font. On the right side, there is a circular inset photo of a man with dark hair, wearing a pink shirt and blue headphones, looking towards the camera. In the bottom right corner, there are two small logos: one with the letters 'Be' and the name 'BRANDON EVANS' below it, and another featuring a stylized sunburst or flame icon.

ESF
EMERGENCY
SERVICES
FOUNDATION
Sharing wisdom.
building knowledge

Webinar Series

Tools & Strategies

Prevention
Broader Thinking

Treating your Fire Department Like a Pro Sports Team

Story Telling
Consistency

Be
BRANDON EVANS



1. Prevention and Broader Thinking

Throughout the webinar, Brandon shared a range of actionable tools that emergency service organisations can begin implementing. A key recommendation was to take a broader approach—learning from other industries, consistently reviewing existing programs, and eliminating outdated or ineffective policies. He called on leaders to think beyond traditional structures and embrace innovation in their mental health strategies. His passion is in researching preventative methods for mental health, something he believes all fire departments should begin to invest in.

2. Treating your Fire Department Like a Pro Sports Team

One of the most compelling ideas Brandon introduced was the concept of treating fire departments like professional sports teams. Drawing comparisons between the two, he highlighted shared values such as team identity, uniform culture, and recovery practices. Just as athletes train consistently to prevent physical injuries, firefighters and other first responders should engage in routine mental fitness to prevent psychological harm.

Brandon shared examples of fire chiefs in the U.S. and U.K. who consulted with elite sports teams to understand how they manage injury and performance. These insights helped shape a new way of thinking—one that prioritises the health and sustainability of the workforce.

3. Power of Storytelling

A recurring theme in ESF's own research, the power of storytelling was again emphasised in Brandon's presentation. Storytelling fosters connection, breaks stigma, and builds trust. Brandon noted that when leaders are willing to share their personal experiences, it creates space for others to do the same—shifting culture and encouraging open conversations about mental health. This concept is upheld in our upcoming [Lived Experience project](#), which will curate a library of videos from emergency service workers who have experienced post-traumatic growth, offering a beacon of resilience and hope for others in the sector and hopefully diminishing the stigma of seeking help.

4. Consistency is Key

Finally, Brandon identified consistency as the single most important element for successful mental health initiatives. Training shouldn't be a one-off event, but a regular and integrated part of every department's operations. His findings show

that the most effective approach is monthly training (1 hour), yet currently only 2.06% of departments are doing this. The second most effective model, 8 hours annually, is followed by just 7.2% of departments.


This insightful and impactful webinar left attendees with a clear message: mental fitness must become a core component of emergency services. Brandon's research demonstrates how consistent, proactive support not only protects individual wellbeing but also improves organisational outcomes—keeping more firefighters at work and reducing leave due to mental health issues.

Our audience—which included wellbeing leaders from FRV, CFA, other member agencies, as well as frontline emergency service workers and volunteers—left feeling inspired and motivated to drive change.

FRV Deputy Commissioner Michael Morgan shared that he “really enjoyed the research, findings and learnings around the interaction, systems, and particularly the trust and change in culture within the fire service,” and was especially moved by the statistics from Fire to Light's research.

We hope Brandon's research continues to spark meaningful change across the sector.

To listen to more of Brandon's findings and compelling insight, you can [watch the webinar here](#). You can also access his *Fire to Light International Research* report [here](#), which captures perspectives on the current state of mental health in fire services worldwide — featuring insights from 104 Fire Chiefs across 13 countries and 5 continents.

 **Save the Date:** Our next webinar, *The personal firestorm after the fires – experiences of LA responders*, will take place on Thursday 29th of May, discussing the impact of the LA fires on the wellbeing of emergency management workers. Pre-registrations are open now, with more details to come shortly.