

# Evaluation of RCMP Police Dog Services

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Final Report



Royal Canadian Mounted Police  
Gendarmerie royale du Canada

Canada

Aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Évaluation des Services cynophiles de la GRC

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# Acronyms

C&IP	Contract and Indigenous Policing
CPS	Calgary Police Service
DHT	Dog Handler Training
ERT	Emergency Response Team
ERT-TL	Emergency Response Team - Team Leads
NCO i/c	Non-commissioned Officer in charge
OIC	Officer in charge
OPP	Ontario Provincial Police
PDS	Police Dog Services
PDSTC	Police Dog Service Training Centre
PROS	Police Reporting and Occurrence System
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RM	Regular Member



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Context

In 1935, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) purchased its first puppy, marking the beginning of the RCMP's Police Dog Services (PDS). Since then, PDS has grown to over 150 teams across the country.

In 1937, a canine training school was established for the RCMP. Currently, the Police Dog Service Training Centre (PDSTC) is responsible for providing the requisite training and quality control for all RCMP PDS teams. The PDSTC is also the location of the RCMP's breeding and imprinting programs, as well as the PDS policy centre.

## Evaluation Objective and Scope

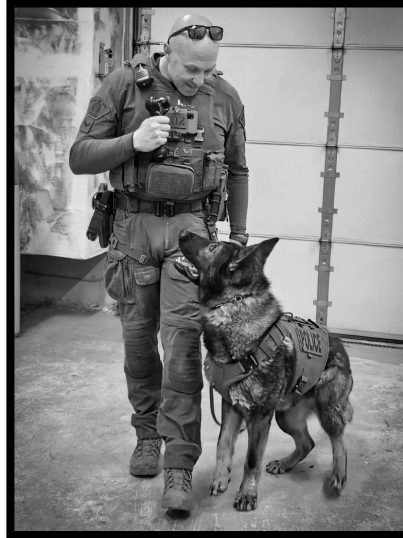
The objective of the evaluation conducted by RCMP National Program Evaluation Services was to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the RCMP's PDS in accordance with the Treasury Board Policy on Results.

The evaluation examined the governance and delivery of PDS, including the role of the PDSTC, and considered opportunities for continuous improvement.

## Evaluation Questions

The evaluation focused on three questions:

1. Is the current PDS governance structure effective and efficient?
2. Is PDS delivered in a manner that supports modern (high quality and effective) policing?
3. Does PDS operate in a manner that maximizes resources and is consistent with identified best practices in other organizations?



## Key Takeaways:

Overall, the evaluation found that PDS is a unique service that is valued by front-line RCMP members. The positioning of PDS under Depot Division poses challenges with respect to supporting PDS handlers in the field, because PDS training is considered in-service training and its alignment with Depot is less clear. As a result, PDS operations are treated like an output of PDSTC instead of the priority. PDS supports front-line RCMP members and, as such, may benefit from reporting to a policy centre that is more responsive to the needs of PDS teams in the field.

The breeding program is essential to PDS and provides a sufficient number of dogs to support the program. However, there are a number of challenges with imprinting and training, including the lengthy imprinting process, a lack of resources to support imprinters and the provision of PDS training, the limited frequency and types of courses available, and poor infrastructure at the PDSTC. The challenges identified within PDS pose a significant risk to the health and safety of employees and dogs, and limit the ability of PDS to fulfil its mandate.

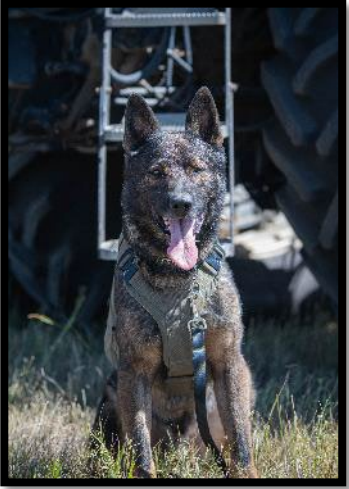
A lack of human resources was identified as a major issue for the PDSTC, as the number of staff across all functions of the program was insufficient to properly meet the demand for dog teams in the field.

The also evaluation found that there are barriers for members joining PDS, and these barriers may be amplified for women members.

Various recommendations were suggested to ensure the sustainability of the program. In particular, it was suggested the current PDS reporting structure be realigned to better meet the needs of the program. It was also suggested that the program needs to ensure appropriate human resources moving forward to meet the dog team needs of divisions.

# Approach

# Evaluation Objective and Scope



- The objective of the evaluation was to examine the performance (effectiveness and efficiency) of the RCMP's Police Dog Services (PDS) in accordance with the Treasury Board Policy on Results.
- This evaluation was national in scope and focused on the governance and delivery of the PDS\* between 2018-19 and 2023-24. RCMP divisions and the Police Dog Service Training Centre (PDSTC) were engaged through interviews and a survey.

## The evaluation focused on three questions:

1. Is the current PDS governance structure effective and efficient?
2. Is PDS delivered in a manner that supports modern (high quality and effective) policing?
3. Does PDS operate in a manner that maximizes resources and is consistent with identified best practices in other organizations?

# Data sources

Interviews: 42	Document/Literature Review: over 120 documents	Performance and Financial Data Analysis
<p>In person and video interviews were conducted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program managers and handlers = 23</li> <li>▪ PDSTC staff = 12</li> <li>▪ Senior management = 2</li> <li>▪ Internal stakeholders (maintenance staff and contractors) = 3</li> <li>▪ External stakeholders = 2</li> </ul> <p>*an additional 4 interviews were completed during scoping</p>	<p>Internal documentation was reviewed, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy and guidance documents</li> <li>▪ Annual reports</li> <li>▪ Strategic plan / mission and vision documents</li> <li>▪ Reviews and assessments</li> <li>▪ Business cases</li> </ul>	<p>Internal performance data from the PDSTC was reviewed; key data fields were related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Breeding</li> <li>▪ Imprinting</li> <li>▪ Training</li> <li>▪ Field operations</li> </ul> <p>Financial data was collected and analyzed.</p>
Site Visits: 3	Survey of PDS Clients: 57	Review of External PDS: 4
<p>Site visits were conducted during the conduct phase of the evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ K Division (AB) – PDSTC (Innisfail)</li> <li>▪ K Division (AB) – Red Deer Detachment</li> <li>▪ K Division (AB) – Calgary Detachment</li> </ul>	<p>An online survey of PDS clients was conducted from December 11 to 22, 2023 (10 business days).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A survey invitation was sent to 368 potential participants and 64 recipients opened the survey link, giving a response rate of 17%.</li> </ul>	<p>An analysis was completed of other organizations that have a PDS program in order to learn about their service delivery models and best practices. Interviews were conducted with the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and the Calgary Police Service (CPS), and a document review was conducted regarding the dog program within the Correctional Service Canada and Canada Border Services Agency.</p>



# Limitations

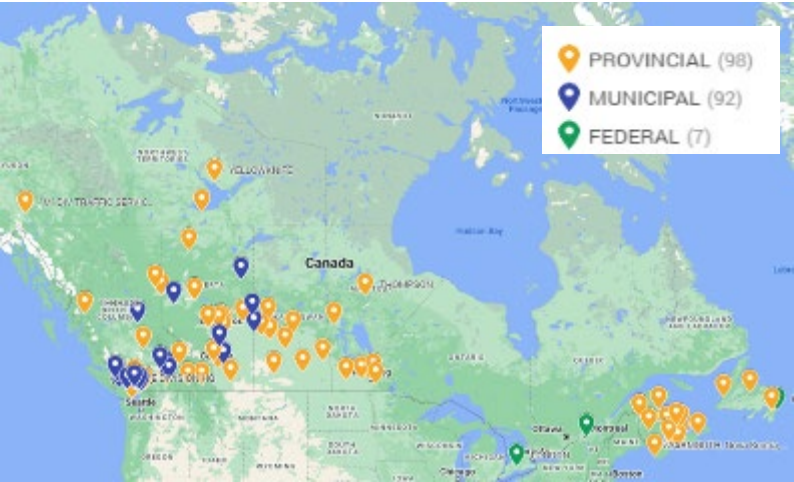
Limitations	Mitigation strategies
<b>Survey</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low response rate given the survey was conducted around the holiday season in December.</li> <li>• Issues with email addresses being incorrect/no longer in use.</li> <li>• Sent to general duty members who may not use PDS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reminder emails were sent out.</li> <li>• Addresses were corrected and the survey link was resent.</li> <li>• Used PDS call logs to identify detachments that often use PDS.</li> </ul>
<b>Financial Data</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial data is not easily accessible or verifiable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The data analytics team within Internal Audit, Evaluation and Review collected and analyzed financial data related to PDS.</li> <li>• Used financial data from annual reports.</li> </ul>
<b>Performance Data Review</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Metrics tracked are not captured using a consistent methodology and are not collected centrally for decision making purposes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Samples of performance data were gathered from multiple divisions and data sources (Police Reporting and Occurrence System (PROS), PDSTC employees).</li> <li>• Multiple data requests were made to internal RCMP teams for PDS related information including Contract and Indigenous Policing (C&amp;IP) and National Operational Information Services.</li> </ul>

# Context

# Program overview

## PDS

- In 1935, the RCMP purchased its first puppy marking the beginning of the RCMP's PDS. Since then, PDS has grown to over 150 teams across the country (see map for location of PDS teams).
- **Police service dogs** within the RCMP are all pure-bred German Shepherds. Their versatility, strength and courage, combined with their physical stature and adaptability to work in various climates, makes them an ideal choice to support operations all across Canada. The RCMP uses both male and female German Shepherds that display specific characteristics including: an even temperament, a keen hunting instinct, intelligence, and trainability.
- **PDS handlers** are RCMP members who typically have at least two years of general duty experience. These individuals volunteer to be a quarry for at least one year. Being a quarry involves assisting dog handlers in refining the skills of the dog team. Individuals then complete the Potential Police Service Dog Imprinting Course and raise puppies for at least two years before they complete the basic Dog Handler Training (DHT) course. PDS handlers must complete the basic DHT course with their police service dog. Each team then completes one of four specialty profile courses:
  1. Avalanche Search and Rescue
  2. Explosive Detection Course
  3. Human Remains Detection Course
  4. Narcotics Detection Course



- After training at the PDSTC is complete, teams will be placed in a division to:
  - assist police investigators;
  - protect crime scenes and other sensitive areas;
  - protect very important persons;
  - participate in recognized crime-prevention and community-relations programs; and/or,
  - assist tactical troops and emergency response teams.
- Specific tasks may include searching for:
  - suspects (e.g., persons who have fled the scene of an investigation or who are attempting to evade apprehension);
  - persons (e.g., missing, overdue);
  - controlled substances; and or,
  - explosives.

- According to the RCMP's *Police Intervention Options Report (2022)*, police dog responses make up 10.2% of all police intervention options used (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Intervention Options**

Intervention	Count	%
Police firearm	2,732	39.4%
Conducted energy weapon	1,657	23.9%
Physical control hard	900	13.0%
<b>Police service dog</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>10.2%</b>
Physical control soft	363	5.2%
Oleoresin capsicum spray	308	4.4%
Extended range impact weapon	112	1.6%
Specialty munitions	78	1.1%
"Other" intervention options	43	0.6%
Baton	36	0.5%

## Police Dog Service Training Centre

- In 1937, an RCMP canine training school was established and, in 1965, Innisfail, Alberta was chosen as the permanent home for the PDSTC. Currently, the PDSTC is responsible for providing the requisite training and quality control for all RCMP PDS teams, as well as offering training and validations to other public safety agencies on a cost-recovery basis.
- The PDSTC not only provides training to PDS, it is also the location of the RCMP's breeding and imprinting programs as well as the PDS policy centre.

# Program overview

## Breeding

The PDSTC began breeding police dogs in 1999. Prior to this, the RCMP relied on purchasing dogs from brokers. Recent increases in the demand and price of German Shepherds has led the RCMP to rely more on its own breeding program.

- Broods and studs are selected for their performance.
- Broods are fostered with local families. They are artificially inseminated and brought to the PDSTC to birth the puppies.
- Puppies stay with the brood for seven weeks at which time they are tested and if successful, they move onto imprinting.



## Imprinting

Imprinting begins when a puppy has passed the seven-week puppy test and is paired with an RCMP regular member (RM) who has completed the Potential Police Service Dog Imprinting Course.

- The member raises and trains the puppy from eight weeks to between 12 and 24 months old. During this time they attend training in their division with their PDS supervisor and other handlers, quarries, and imprinters.
- Both puppy and imprinter work under the supervision of the local dog handler for up to a year.
- A member of the PDSTC pre-train unit tests the puppies at four, eight and twelve months to provide supervision and guidance on how to train the puppies to become police service dogs.



## Training

Training is designed to make the handler and dog into a capable and efficient working team.

- A police service dog begins training at between 12 and 24 months of age.
- Teams complete an 85-day basic DHT followed by a specialty profile course (e.g., explosives detection) at the PDSTC.
- After completing their training at the PDSTC, handlers are required to devote eight hours a week to PDS team training and specialty service dog training which they complete in the field.
- PDS teams must pass an annual field validation conducted by a PDSTC senior trainer.





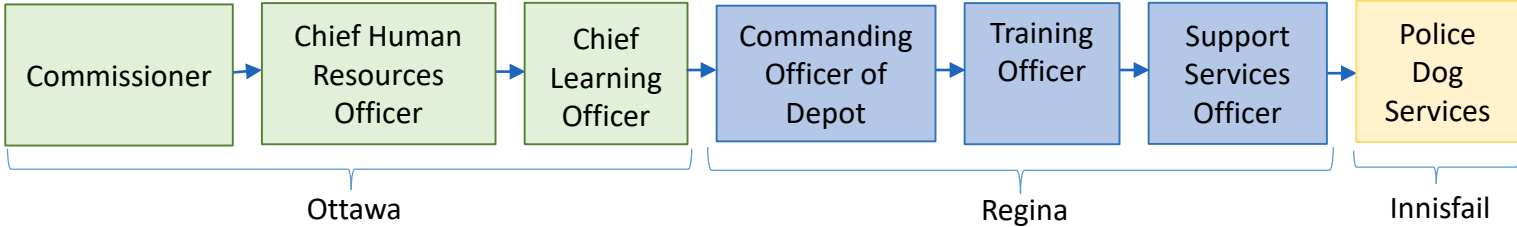
# Key Findings

# Governance



**FINDING #1**

**From a governance perspective, the positioning of PDS under Depot Division poses a challenge to the effectiveness of the program. PDS operations are not well supported and some of the roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined or understood.**



**PDS policy and operational activities are treated as an output of the training centre rather than a program that the training centre supports.**

- Currently PDS is functionally governed by Depot Division. This structure poses governance challenges, as PDS is an operational service with members across the country, while Depot focuses primarily on cadet training activities at the training academy in Regina.
- While there is a link between the mandate of PDSTC and Depot from a training perspective, PDSTC is considered in-service training (i.e., training that occurs as an employee) where Depot focuses on cadet training.
- According to interviewees, Depot does not prioritize the duties, concerns and needs of PDS teams to the extent required. Additionally, PDS policy is not prioritized, which negatively affects operations in the field.
- Furthermore, many program managers and handlers stated that the governance structure for PDS is not effective or efficient. Some interviewees indicated there is confusion surrounding whether divisional PDS employees should consult with the Officer in Charge (OIC) of PDS or divisional representatives when they have questions or suggestions regarding the program.
- Interviewees reported that PDS could be structured more like other operational services such as the Emergency Response Team (ERT) program, which falls under C&IP and has a policy center at National Headquarters in Ottawa. It was noted that PDS is one of the RCMP’s highest-risk programs due to the risk of injury to the public (e.g. dog bites) and, as such, should report to a policy centre that is experienced in operations and responsive and accountable to evolving needs in the field.
- Within the comparator police services reviewed (i.e. OPP, CPS), canine units are governed within operational areas which also have responsibility for ERT.
- Prior to 2013/14, there was a PDS policy position within C&IP at National Headquarters and the responsibilities were transferred to the OIC PDS.

FINDING #1 (continued)



Roles and responsibilities at the PDSTC and in the field

- Some program managers and handlers in the field reported that roles and responsibilities within PDS were not well defined. A few reported that handlers are expected to perform tasks outside their duties.
  - e.g., handlers are expected to provide advice to higher ranking members related to high-risk incidents given their exposure to these types of situations, even though they may not have the required experience.
- All PDSTC employees interviewed stated that the roles and responsibilities at the PDSTC were not clearly defined and that, as a result of being short staffed, they are being asked to undertake tasks that are not in their job description. This has caused undue stress on staff members.

- Updates are required to *Operational Manual Chapter 33.1 Police Service Dogs (2019)* including Sections 3.1 (Roles and Responsibilities of a Member), 3.2.5 (Uniform and Kit), and 8 (Dog Bites). Lack of clarity around these sections adds to the confusion of roles and responsibilities and policy direction.
- Updating these sections of the RCMP *Operational Manual* would help ensure that PDS best practices are used to maintain the health and safety of PDS teams and the public.



Why it matters

The current PDS governance structure and policies do not promote effective support to PDS teams in the field, thereby putting public and officer safety at risk.

# Breeding, Imprinting and Pre-training



## FINDING #2

There are challenges within imprinting and pre-training, which have led to inefficiencies in the program.

*The breeding program is essential to fulfil the demand for high quality police dogs.*

- Historically, the RCMP relied on purchasing police service dogs from brokers; however, with an increased demand for, and cost of German Shepherds in the early 2000s, the RCMP began to rely fully on its own breeding program.
- Currently, the breeding program within the PDSTC is producing the number of puppies required to keep up with current training capacity, and therefore meet the needs of the program.
- A recent policy change has made the Non-Commissioned Officer in charge (NCO i/c) of acquisition position rotational. The NCO i/c of acquisition is responsible for the breeding, imprinting and pre-train units. Some PDSTC employees reported that this rotation is problematic, since the individual does not have enough time to experience the outcome of their breeding decisions or to become proficient at the job.

*"The RCMP imprinting program is critical to the success of a dog becoming a police dog."*

[Interviewee]

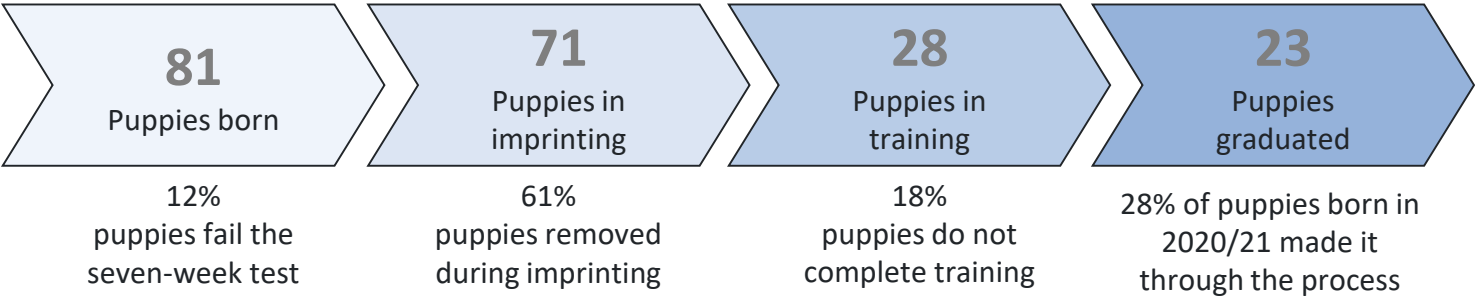
*The imprinting process is very long.*

- Puppies remain at the PDSTC until they are tested at seven weeks old. Those puppies that pass the test move on to the imprinting program.
- During imprinting, puppies are paired with an RM who is aspiring to be a PDS handler and has volunteered their time to imprint puppies. This member will raise and train a puppy until they are between 12 and 24 months old, at which time a decision is made as to whether they will become police service dogs and begin formal training or will be sold.
- According to policy, after two years of imprinting, members can apply to become a dog handler; however, most imprinters spend six to eight years in the imprinting program because there are more teams ready for the DHT course than there is capacity to train them. Teams spend so much time in the process that some RMs decide not to pursue a career with PDS, and in some cases quality dogs that would have otherwise become RCMP police service dogs, may be sold due to aging out of the program.



FINDING #2 (continued)

Progression of PDS puppies born in 2020/2021



The lack of staff in the *pre-train program* has a negative impact on the readiness of dogs in the imprinting program to be fit for training, which may lead to a decrease in the performance and number of police service dogs within the RCMP.

- The pre-train unit supervises and provides guidance to imprinters regarding how to raise puppies that will become successful police service dogs. The evaluation noted that the lack of staff in the pre-training program is having a negative effect on the number of puppies successfully completing the imprinting program.
- The largest proportion of puppies are culled from the program during imprinting (e.g., 61% in 2020/2021) (see Figure 2). Puppies could be removed from the program during imprinting due to performance issues. Some of these performance issues could have potentially been mitigated through testing by pre-trainers. Interviewees highlighted the importance of having pre-trainers who can evaluate puppies during imprinting to ensure their behaviour is consistent with a police service dog.
- The NCO i/c of acquisition is the only employee in the pre-train unit available to test over 70 puppies in the imprinting program across the country. The puppies require testing at 4, 8 and 12 months old. This workload is unsustainable given the other core responsibilities of the NCO i/c.



Why it matters

There is a risk that PDS will lose potential future handlers and police service dogs due to the long time spent in imprinting and a lack of pre-trainers to support and test puppies.

# Training delivery



## FINDING #3

**PDSTC provides training that generally meets the needs of PDS. However, the PDSTC is not meeting the demand for training in terms of frequency and types of courses offered.**

**The basic DHT course generally meets the need of PDS. Updates to the course should be considered to include best practices identified in the field.**

- One of the PDSTC's core responsibilities is the provision of the DHT course that is intended to provide PDS teams with the skills to function in the field and the ability to enhance their skills through field training.
- According to the RCMP's *Dog Handlers Guide (2011)*, upon completion of the DHT course, PDS teams have the ability to function operationally and have the skills to continue to train in order to enhance their skills. Handlers must continue to develop their dog's capabilities beyond the DHT course to prepare them for the Field Validation standard, a test which is conducted after every full year of operational duties.
- Program managers and handlers reported that the DHT is a basic course and generally meets the needs of PDS. However, some interviewees suggested that it should be updated to include current best practices as identified in the field (e.g., include a search and rescue component), and a few stated that the DHT does not prepare handlers for operational duty as they need further training in tactical areas (e.g., high-risk tracking and extractions, building/compound searches).
  - It should be noted that training needs may differ depending on the divisions in which the PDS members work and the types of calls they receive.

FINDING #3 (continued)

The PDSTC is not meeting the demand for PDS training with respect to the frequency and availability of courses (e.g., DHT, homemade explosives course, ERT-PDS interoperability course, and officer safety training).

- Program managers and handlers reported that the DHT course was not provided in a timely manner and that PDSTC cannot train the number of handlers required in the field. For example, according to the *Cadet Training Program Multi-Year Plan 2022-2023*, in 2022/23, 16 new PDS handlers were required to meet the demand in the field (e.g., fill existing vacant handler positions, replace handlers who are retiring). PDSTC only trained 12 new handlers, therefore, increasing the number of vacant positions in the field and increasing the time members spend in imprinting.
- Interviewees also reported that the PDSTC is not meeting the demand for re-trains/re-teams (i.e., pairing an experienced handler with a new police service dog/pairing an experienced handler with an experienced police service dog). For example, interviewees reported that in 2024, 18 handlers/police service dogs would require the Dog Handler Re-training Course. However, with the current training resources at the PDSTC, they would only be able to provide this course to 12 teams.
- More training courses are required to satisfy the demand for PDS teams across the country. According to the RCMP’s *ERT and PDS Interoperability Survey Report*, 33% of ERT team leads (ERT-TLs) reported that PDS teams were not meeting the needs of ERT. Respondents reported that the main reason PDS teams do not meet the needs of ERT was that they are not trained in the skills/tactics required to support the function (e.g., Laser/Tech Guided room clearing). ERT-TLs and PDS handlers reported needing more training together to improve their skills.
- It should be noted that all courses offered at the PDSTC are in English.

Annual validations are being conducted frequently enough to meet the needs of PDS.

- The PDSTC senior trainer is responsible for travelling nationwide to validate over 150 PDS teams. With the other core responsibilities of the senior trainer, this workload is not sustainable. While validations are a policy requirement, they are resource intensive and take away from resources available for basic training, re-trains, re-teams, and specialty training.
- *RCMP Operational Manual Chapter 33.1 Police Service Dogs (2019)* states that dog handler teams are required to dedicate eight hours per week for PDS team training and eight hours per week for specialty service dog team training. All program managers and handlers reported participating in weekly training as per this directive. Some program managers and handlers reported that they take additional training courses (e.g., officer safety, e-collars).
- Interviewees reported that communication between PDSTC and the divisions could be improved with respect to sharing of PDS best practices and general information.



Why it matters

The current deficit in the PDS training negatively impacts the RCMP’s ability to build upon modern policing methods and to maintain a sufficient number of well-trained dog teams to support members in the field.

# Equity, Diversity and Inclusion



## FINDING #4

There are several deterrents for RCMP members joining PDS, which may be amplified for women.

Proportionally there are fewer women PDS handlers than there are women RMs within the RCMP.

- The first woman dog handler joined PDS in the late 1990s. While today women make up 22% of the complement of RMs overall, only 3% of dog handlers are women.
- Through interviews and an internal PDS client survey, a number of deterrents to joining PDS were identified, including the length of the process, the impact on family and personal interests, and the large amount of overtime. Some of these deterrents may be amplified for women:
  - **The length of time it takes to become a handler** was identified by interviewees as a reason women may not join PDS. For example, as per policy, if a handler takes extended leave (e.g., maternity leave), they risk having their dog reassigned and losing the time they have invested in the process. The significant time commitment of becoming a PDS member may also dissuade women who want to have, or already have, families.
  - **The nature of the work** was reported by some PDS employees as a barrier for women. A few stated how dangerous the work is and a few others reported that it is a complete lifestyle change.
- **The physical requirements** of working as a dog handler were mentioned by some PDS employees as a barrier for women.
- **Harassment and discrimination and the existence of an “old boys club”** were identified by a few PDS employees as a barrier for women.
- While these barriers are not necessarily specific to PDS and exist in the larger context of law enforcement, they may be amplified in a specialized program such as PDS.
- Due to the lack of data, the evaluation was unable to report on the number of visible minority and Indigenous members within PDS. It also was not possible to identify potential deterrents/barriers to their participation in PDS.



### Why it matters

Recruitment of future dog handlers, particularly women, may be limited by various barriers, which reduces diversity within the program.



# Health and Wellness



**FINDING #5**

**The current operating environment, infrastructure, and delivery of the PDS program pose risks to the physical and mental health and well-being of PDS employees and dogs.**

**The morale at the PDSTC is low.**

- A health and safety audit conducted in January 2023 found that the PDSTC was deficient in 11 of 13 psychological factors for a healthy workplace. The results of this study were supported by interviewees who reported that the PDSTC work environment is unhealthy, with employees feeling overworked and with little control. Many PDSTC employees also reported that communication within the PDSTC, both between units and between management and employees, is poor. In particular, management of the program was noted as a contributing factor to the low morale of the PDTSC.

**Poor infrastructure at the PDSTC has a negative impact on the physical health and safety of staff members and dogs.**

- In 2022, a new whelping pod was built at the PDSTC. This structure was not designed using best practices and therefore poses hazards and creates undue stress for the dogs and staff (e.g., no in-floor heating means it is too cold to whelp puppies from mid-fall to mid-spring).
- Many dog handlers refuse to house their police service dogs at the PDSTC given the issues with the kennels. Many PDS employees reported that kennel buildings 1 and 2 cause great stress and pose a number of potential hazards to the dogs housed there.

Stressors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• lack of natural light</li><li>• inability for dogs to go outside</li><li>• loud noise, especially during feeding and cleaning times</li></ul>

Hazards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• choking from chewing on flooring that is peeling</li><li>• lead poisoning from eating paint that is peeling</li><li>• respiratory disease due to poor ventilation</li></ul>

FINDING #5 (continued)



PDS teams face operational health risks in the field.

- PDS members are not issued the same equipment across the country. PDS members attend the highest risk calls, frequently with ERT, and often do not have the equipment they need to keep them safe. According to the RCMP’s *ERT and PDS Interoperability Survey Report*, some PDS handlers reported that they are not prepared to attend an ERT call as they are missing equipment (e.g., night vision goggles, ballistic helmet, CBRN mask).
- The lack of appropriate equipment issued to PDS handlers poses a risk to officer safety.

*“Handlers across the country have different equipment and wear different uniforms.”*  
[Interviewee]

- PDS handlers reported that they work a lot of overtime and are often on-call. Interviewees reported that the job takes a toll on their physical and mental health, with a few suggesting that they should have access to psychologists that understand the stresses associated with being a PDS handler.

*“When you are doing [working] that many days in a row and not sleeping...it’s hard on the body.”*  
[Interviewee]

- The health and welfare of PDS dogs was raised as a concern during interviews in particular, referencing cases where dogs have been left in hot vehicles and work long hours in extreme temperatures. Additionally, some dogs work beyond their retirement age as a mitigation strategy to the lack of available trained dogs, which increases the risk to PDS teams.



**Why it matters**  
The work environment and infrastructure within PDSTC pose significant health and wellness risks to employees and dogs.

# Human Resources

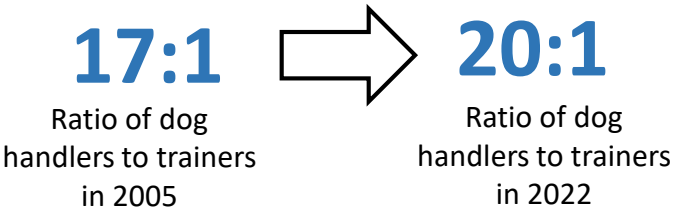


**FINDING #6**

There are insufficient human resources within the PDSTC to support the efficient and effective delivery of PDS. Without adequate personnel, the program will fall further behind in providing services for front-line members.

The PDSTC cannot provide sufficient training to support PDS due to the low number of available human resources.

- In the period under review, only 17 of 26 positions were staffed at the PDSTC. This is particularly an issue in the pre-train and training units, where there are no pre-trainers and only four of the eight trainer positions are filled.
- According to the *Cadet Training Program Multi-Year Plan 2022/23*, additional resources will be required to meet increasing demand for PDS teams in the field.
- Even with the full complement of staff, some PDSTC employees reported that more positions are needed to meet the demands of front-line policing.
- For 16 years, the total complement of trainers at the PDSTC has remained relatively unchanged, while the number of PDS teams in the field has increased. In 2005, there were seven trainers at the PDSTC and 125 dog teams in the field. In 2022, there were eight trainers at the PDSTC and 157 handlers in the field.



Most PDSTC employees reported being over-worked and at risk of burnout.

- The high number of vacant positions at the PDSTC has led to an increased workload on the remaining staff members. Trainers have little opportunity for professional development to learn new and modern methods and tools to teach PDS teams. The inability to maintain updated PDS training poses a risk to the success of this function within the RCMP (e.g., homemade explosives course).
- Temporary solutions have been implemented to mitigate the staffing crisis, including no longer training PDS partners, using guest trainers at the PDSTC, and creating a corporal trainer position.

Many interviewees reported the need for more dog handlers.

- Some interviewees reported that there are not enough dog handlers to cover holidays, unfettered time off, training, or those off duty sick. Dog handlers reported that they often take their equipment and dog with them during personal time (e.g., on vacation) so they are available when needed.
- Some dog handlers state that travel time to the scenes where PDS teams are needed is exacerbated by the lack of dog teams. In divisions/detachments with only one dog team, dog teams from further away have to cover that area when the closer team is away. This can result in clients not calling PDS for assistance.

FINDING #6 (continued)

There are various reasons why PDS dog handlers do not want to work at the PDSTC.

- According to interviewees, it is difficult to staff pre-train and trainer positions at the PDSTC due to:
  - **Poor morale:** Handlers have observed interpersonal issues at PDSTC;
  - **No on-call or overtime pay:** At PDSTC there is no on-call or overtime pay, which handlers in the field use to supplement their income;
  - **Loss of autonomy:** Dog handlers in the field typically work alone;
  - **Relocating:** To work as a trainer or pre-trainer, handlers must relocate to Innisfail, AB; and,
  - **Difficulty transitioning back into the field:** A handler is promoted to the Sergeant level to become a trainer. Since there are very few positions in the field at that level, the handler cannot easily transition back into the field as a dog handler.

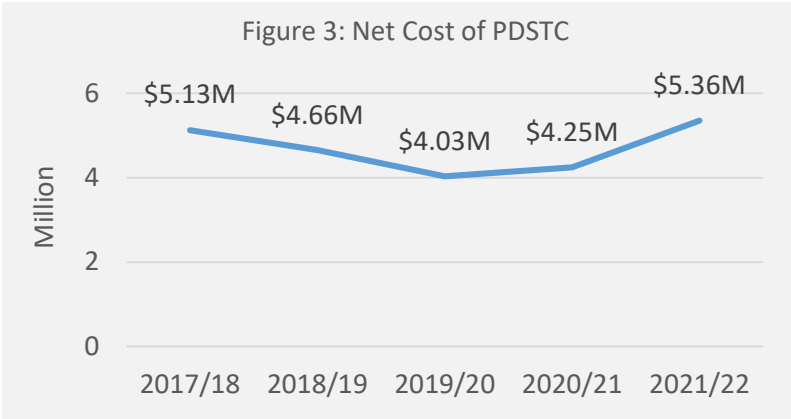
Challenges related to transfers and career development were identified.

- A few Interviewees mentioned that some dog handlers have been promoted through exemption, given preferential treatment, and posted to their preferred division.

- A few PDS members reported difficulty transferring between divisions or out of positions.
- While these challenges are not unique to PDS, difficulty transferring and lack of promotional opportunities may be exacerbated within specialized units like PDS.

PDS Financial Resources

- Based on the financial data outlined in the multi-year financial plans, between 2017/18 and 2021/22 the net costs of the PDSTC have fluctuated between \$4.03 million and \$5.36 million (see Figure 3).



- Some interviewees reported that even a full complement of staff at the PDSTC would not fulfill the need for handlers and police service dogs in the field. New positions at the PDSTC are required to ensure employees are not regularly performing tasks outside their duties and to meet the needs of PDS teams in the field.
- As identified in Finding #5, some of the infrastructure at the PDSTC (e.g., whelping pod, kennel buildings 1 and 2) is unsafe. Funding is required to upgrade this infrastructure to ensure the health and safety of employees and dogs.
- As identified in Finding #5, while PDS handlers are equipped with basic equipment, they often need to purchase additional kit. Some PDS teams struggle to acquire the equipment they need to keep them safe, as funding for this additional equipment is not always available.



Why it matters

A lack of sufficient resources affects the ability of PDS to meet the demand for police service dogs, meet the need for modernized training within the organization, and keep employees and dogs safe.



# Performance Data



**FINDING #7**

Although PDS collect performance data in a variety of areas, data related to PDS field operations is not collected consistently.

While data is collected in the divisions, its collection and use are inconsistent.

- PDS handlers keep a call log that includes information related to the number and type of calls they receive and respond to. This data is also captured in PROS; however, there are discrepancies with the data that is captured in the call logs versus what is reported in PROS. This may be due to:
  - PDS may not be attached to ERT files as they are locked on PROS, and PDS is therefore unable to flag/attach themselves to a file; and/or
  - PDS can work on a file for days or weeks but it is counted as one instance in PROS.
- PDS members’ call logs are not completed consistently across divisions. They are captured on various software systems including SharePoint and Excel. K Division is piloting the use of the KATS K9 Activity Tracking System, which is specifically designed for police canine operations and training.
- Some divisions create regular reports using call log data for the purpose of enhancing decision making (e.g., business case for acquiring another PDS position), while others do not report on this data at all.

Data is collected at the PDSTC in a useful manner.

- Data related to breeding, imprinting, pre-training and training is used to inform decisions related to the work at the PDSTC.

<div>Breeding Data</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of broods in the program</li><li>• Number of broods that retired in a given year</li><li>• Puppies date of birth</li><li>• Litter size</li></ul>	<div>Imprinting</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of puppies that make it to imprinting from breeding</li><li>• Name and division of imprinters assigned to police service dogs</li></ul>
<div>Pre-training Data</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Results of puppy tests conducted at 4, 8, and 12 months</li></ul>	<div>Training Data</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Course instructors</li><li>• Course completion dates</li><li>• Candidates who attended the course and the location of the course</li></ul>



**Why it matters**

The lack of consistent national data prevents meaningful analysis of trends, and makes it challenging to make informed policy decisions.

# Conclusions

- PDS is a unique service that is valued by front-line RCMP members.
- The positioning of PDS under Depot Division poses challenges with respect to supporting PDS handlers in the field. PDS support front-line RCMP members and as such, may benefit from reporting to a policy centre that is more responsive to the needs of PDS teams in the field.
- The breeding program is essential to PDS and provides a sufficient number of dogs to support the program. However, there are a number of challenges with imprinting and training, including the lengthy imprinting process, lack of resources to support imprinters and provide PDS training, limited frequency and types of courses available, and poor infrastructure at the PDSTC.
- The challenges identified within PDS pose a significant risk to the health and safety of employees and dogs, and limits the ability of PDS to fulfil its mandate.



*"At the core of it all, we're a support service; we're here to do anything and everything we can to support front-line RCMP officers."*

[Interviewee]

# Recommendations



1. Review the current reporting structure of PDS with a view to better align PDSTC with the RCMP's in-service training mandate and supporting operations in the field.
2. Update PDS policy with a view to better reflecting the operational reality of handlers in the field (including kit and procedures), and enhancing officer and animal safety.
3. Ensure sustainability of the PDSTC by determining and addressing resource gaps based on the demand for dog teams across the country. In particular, ensure PDSTC has sufficient positions within breeding, imprinting, pre-training and training to fulfill its mandate.
4. Review and modernize training offered at the PDSTC to reflect the needs of handlers in the field and recognized best practices.
5. Address the health and safety concerns of PDS employees and dogs at the PDSTC (e.g., infrastructure, workplace morale) and in the field.
6. Enhance the approach to performance measurement through the consistent collection and reporting of PDS data. EDI considerations should be included in performance measurement activities to inform future programming decisions.

# Appendices

	Slide #
A. Management Response and Action Plan	28-30
B. Scale of interview responses	31

# Management Response and Action Plan (1/3)

The Chief Human Resources Officer, along with line officers currently responsible for the Police Dog Service (PDS), have reviewed the evaluation and accept the findings and recommendations proposed by National Program Evaluation Services.

Recommendation	Planned Action(s)	Diary Date
<b>1. Review the current reporting structure of PDS with a view to better aligning PDSTC with the RCMP’s in-service training mandate and supporting operations in the field.</b>	The Chief Learning Officer and Depot Division (PDSTC), in consultation with various operational programs and policy centres, will review current oversight responsibilities, as well as effectiveness, to determine a recommended structure and proper business alignment to seek better alignment with policing operations. Consultations are underway, and future operational alignment recommendations will be presented to the Senior Executive Committee, with a full transition to future state completed by December 2025.	December 2025
	At the same time, Depot Division (PDSTC) will create a National Working Group (NWG) comprised of relevant national programs/policy centres and divisional representatives to inform the various actions related to this plan, and particularly to address policy amendments or development (recommendation #2), PDS resources gaps (recommendation #3), and training gaps (recommendation #4). The conclusion of the work of the NWG will be to provide a final report by March 2025, drafted in collaboration with PDSTC and Depot, containing specific prioritized actions and solutions for implementation related to policy, training and resource gaps for the future program state.	March 2025
<b>2. Update PDS policy with a view to better reflecting the operational reality of handlers in the field (including kit and procedures), and enhancing officer and animal safety.</b>	Depot Division (PDSTC), in consultation with the NWG, will:  1) identify, in order of priority to the program, the policies to be reviewed or created; and, 2) update and/or create program-critical policies.	December 2025



# Management Response and Action Plan (2/3)

Recommendation	Planned Action(s)	Diary Date
<b>3. Ensure sustainability of the PDSTC by determining and addressing resource gaps based on the demand for dog teams across the country. In particular, ensure PDSTC has sufficient positions within breeding, imprinting, pre-training and training to fulfill its mandate.</b>	In the short term, Depot Division (PDSTC) and Career Development and Resourcing are working to backfill all vacant positions as quickly as possible, and have developed an HR Plan that identifies the critical resource gaps, as highlighted by the Evaluation. Specifically, capacity is being created in the areas of police dog training (5 new dog handler trainer positions), policy development (1 new position), program administration (1 new position) and instructional design (1 new position). HR related activities have already begun and positions are expected to be staffed by June 2025.	June 2025
	Once the program is aligned to the future state and subject to additional program funding, a comprehensive HR plan will be developed to build the capacity PDSTC requires to adequately align to and respond to the national program’s current, future and evolving needs.	December 2025
<b>4. Review and modernize training offered at the PDSTC to reflect the needs of handlers in the field and recognized best practices.</b>	Depot Division (PDSTC), in collaboration with the NWG, will:	December 2025
	<div>1) review and update the dog handler task bank (job analysis); and,</div> <div>2) consult with partner agencies to assess equivalency of modern dog handler training profiles.</div> <div>The NWG will provide results of the analysis and present recommendations in a report to inform the training gap analysis and updated training profiles.</div>	June 2026

# Management Response and Action Plan (3/3)

Recommendation	Planned Action(s)	Diary Date
5. Address the health and safety concerns of PDS employees and dogs at the PDSTC (e.g., infrastructure, workplace morale) and in the field.	Depot Division (PDSTC) will create a management/employee committee to develop an action plan that will see the implementation of health and safety concerns of employees and dogs at PDSTC. The plan will be based on internal consultations between Depot Division, OIC PDSTC and EMRO to outline clear goals and objectives, and will include monitoring and reporting mechanisms as well as comprehensive communication strategies.	June 2025
	<p>The committee initiatives will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• revision of the Fire Safety Plan to align with fire codes and Depot standards (by December 2024);</li><li>• development of a Safety Manual for PDSTC. Initial plans are underway to discuss a plan forward for high risk/critical tasks to create Safe Job Procedures of these tasks (by March 2025);</li><li>• review and assessment of the 13 factors addressing Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace with recommendations for opportunities for improving deficient factors (by March 2025); and,</li><li>• ensure Standard Operating Procedures exist for all of the areas that serve to operate the PDSTC (by December 2025).</li></ul> <p>Implementation of recommendations have begun and will continue between June 2024 and will be completed by December 2025.</p>	December 2025
6. Enhance the approach to performance measurement through the consistent collection and reporting of PDS data. EDI considerations should be included in performance measurement activities.	Future state program will develop a logic model and a comprehensive plan to collect, analyze and report on program performance data nationally. The program will pay particular attention to the assessment criteria, which will be developed to ensure the selection and development of police dog teams and police dog team trainers, with a focus on identifying the most suitable candidates.	March 2026

# Scale of interview responses

DESCRIPTOR	MEANING
All	Findings reflect the views and opinions of 100% of interviewees
Most	Findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 75% but less than 100% of interviewees
Many	Findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 51% but less than 75% of interviewees
Half	Findings reflect the views and opinions of 50% of interviewees
Some	Findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 25% but less than 50% of interviewees
A few	Findings reflect the views and opinions of at least two respondents but less than 25% of interviewees