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News / Crime

What's changed since Sammy Yatim died

A look at some of the improvements made to policing in the wake of the 18-year-old's death in 2013.

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Citizen-shot video of the shooting of Sammy Yatim aboard a streetcar in July 2013, capping a series of police shootings of people in mental crisis, led to the Iacobucci report, which made a series of recommendations for changes to policing in Toronto.

By: **Wendy Gillis** News reporter, Published on Fri Jan 29 2016

Following the death of Sammy Yatim, Toronto police commissioned an independent review of use of force, looking specifically at encounters between officers and people in crisis.

Written by retired Supreme Court justice Frank Iacobucci, the report — based on a year of research — makes 84 recommendations to Toronto police, with the aim of eliminating fatal encounters with police.

The force says it has implemented, in full or in part, 79 of those recommendations, though some critics, including former police board chair Alok Mukherjee, have raised concerns the police service is overstating how much has been accomplished. Julian Falconer, the lawyer who is representing members of Yatim's family in a civil suit, called this week for an independent audit of the implementation.

Here's an update on changes that have been made following Yatim's death on three key issues.

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The Taser International X2 model is the new weapon Toronto police would like to purchase, for a total of \$1.3 million.

'Less lethal' weapons — and military style guns

Iacobucci recommended Toronto police consider expanding the use of Conducted Energy Weapons, or **Tasers** — currently, only front-line supervisors, about 275 officers, have the weapon — and that may happen in the long term.

But in the shorter term, Toronto police service's less lethal weapon of choice is the so-called "sock round," a shotgun that has been converted to shoot a small bean bag instead of a bullet. The bean bag 'bullets' do not penetrate the skin. The guns will be distributed to all divisions throughout the city.

Toronto police confirmed earlier this month that they have also [purchased military style rifles](#) to be paired with the sock guns. The idea behind the coupling of the weapons — wherever one is available, the other will be as well — is to give officers different levels of force, though the purchase of the C8 carbine rifles lead to some criticism the police service is becoming overly militarized.



File photo from 2014. Mental health nurse Sharon Lawlor and Const. Peter Sidlauskas have been working together for a year on the Toronto Police Mobile Crisis Intervention Team in 54 and 55 Division

Mobile Crisis Intervention Teams

Shortly after Const. James Forcillo was found guilty of attempted murder in Yatim's death this week, the family's lawyer, Julian Falconer, specifically commented on the need for more action when it comes to Mobile Crisis Intervention Teams.

MCITs, as they're known, involve the pairing of a mental-health nurse with a police officer so together they can respond to calls involving people with mental health

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challenges. Following Iacobucci's report, the force made it mandatory that MCIT units be notified of every call involving a person in crisis.

Recommended by

Toronto police have also altered the hours of operation of its MCITs to increase the likelihood that the duo can respond during peak times: midday and late afternoon. But as Falconer pointed out this week, the teams are "still are not available 24/7 across this city." Toronto police deputy chief Mike Federico, who is overseeing the implementation of the Iacobucci report, has said the hours of operation are continually being assessed.

Training

When they graduate next month, the latest crop of recruits will have had the benefit of an extra three weeks of education, thanks to a recommendation in the Iacobucci report.

Toronto police have also increased the amount of annual in-service training, upping the days from two to three. That new training was on display this week at the Toronto Police College to about 75 mental health activists, stakeholders and members of the Toronto Police Services Board, including Mayor John Tory.

In an interview afterwards, Tory said the new training teaches officers to "go back to the good old fashioned 'use your brain.'" They're also taught to use "hooks" and not "triggers" in language, Tory said; instead of telling someone in crisis that it's clear they're off their medication, officers are encouraged to say: "I can't help but notice that you're very sad today."

"Clearly they have received the message of the Iacobucci report," Tory said.

With files from Betsy Powell

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