

# Support First Responder Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Workplace Initiatives

The workplace culture and safety risks inherent to work as a first responder pose unique barriers to care and support. First responders must have equal access to mental health-related workplace benefits as they do for other aspects of their health, including internal wellness programs, and feel empowered to seek help.

## The Facts



**Stressors** such as traumatic events and shift work can significantly increase risk for suicide.<sup>iii</sup>



**First responders most in need of wellness services** have greater perceptions of the existing stigma around help-seeking than those who are well.<sup>iii</sup>

## AFSP Recommendations

- **Identify PTSD/PTSI as a compensable injury or occupational disease**
- **Establish peer counseling programs and support services**
- **Require regular in-service training to include job-related stress management and suicide prevention**

## Background

- In 2025, 114 law enforcement officers (LEOs) died by suicide, while 81 were killed in the line of duty (53 feloniously, 28 accidentally); 24 firefighters, 11 corrections officers, and 10 EMTs/dispatchers also died by suicide that year<sup>iv,v</sup>
- LEOs face a 54% higher risk of dying by suicide than the general population<sup>vi</sup>
- As many as 25% of 911 dispatchers show symptoms of depression and PTSD<sup>vii</sup>
- In a 2024 survey, 83% of LEOs reported that, within the previous year, their mental health had impacted their work, and 16% struggled with suicidality; 11% harbored suicidal thoughts specifically due to work stress<sup>viii</sup>
- Over 90% of LEOs say stigma negatively influences help-seeking behavior; even among those who have used and found services effective, stigma levels remain extremely high<sup>ix</sup>
- A higher number of agency-offered services is associated with lower overall rates of psychological distress among LEOs; yet, 62% of agencies do not offer such services<sup>x,xi</sup>
- To ensure the availability of benefits and programs, all frontline occupations – LEOs, firefighters, EMTs, corrections officers, 911 dispatchers, 988 service providers, and other emergency workers – should be classified as first responders

**We must ensure first responders have access to the benefits and mental health supports they deserve.**

Continued >



- <sup>i</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2018). *Disaster technical assistance center supplemental research bulletin – First responders: Behavioral health concerns, emergency response, and trauma*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>
- <sup>ii</sup> Tiesman, H.M., Elkins, K.L., Brown, M., Marsh, S., & Carson, L.M. (April 6, 2021). *Suicides among first responders: A call to action*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Science Blog. <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2021/04/06/suicides-first-responders/>
- <sup>iii</sup> Drew, J. M., & Martin, S. (2023). Mental health and wellness initiatives supporting United States law enforcement personnel: The current state-of-play. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(Suppl\_1), S12–S22. <https://www.journalcswb.ca/index.php/cswb/article/view/298>
- <sup>iv</sup> First H.E.L.P. (June 9, 2026). *First responder deaths by suicide* [Data set]. <https://datastudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/930d17a9-0020-4725-9942-44f2a3f40413/page/Kh2dC>
- <sup>v</sup> Criminal Justice Information Services Division. (May 2026). *Officers killed and assaulted in the line of duty, 2025*. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/resources/reports/Officers%20Killed%20and%20Assaulted%20in%20the%20Line%20of%20Duty%2C%202025.pdf>
- <sup>vi</sup> Violanti J. M., Steege, A. (2021). Law enforcement worker suicide: An updated national assessment. *Policing*, 44(1):18-31. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33883970/>
- <sup>vii</sup> Tiesman, H.M., Elkins, K.L., Brown, M., Marsh, S., & Carson, L.M. (April 6, 2021). *Suicides among first responders: A call to action*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Science Blog. <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2021/04/06/suicides-first-responders/>
- <sup>viii</sup> Police1. (June 27, 2024). *What cops want in 2024: The state of office wellness*. <https://www.police1.com/what-cops-want/digital-edition-what-cops-want-in-2024>
- <sup>ix</sup> Drew, J. M., & Martin, S. (2023). Mental health and wellness initiatives supporting United States law enforcement personnel: The current state-of-play. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(Suppl\_1), S12–S22. <https://www.journalcswb.ca/index.php/cswb/article/view/298>
- <sup>x</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xi</sup> Taylor, B. G., Liu, W., & Mumford, E. A. (2022). A national study of the availability of law enforcement agency wellness programming for officers: A latent class analysis. *International Journal of Police Science and Management*, 24( 2 ), 175 –189. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14613557211064050>