

# FIRST RESPONDER MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Many fire and EMS personnel struggle with mental health battles, frequently on their own. By providing these public safety officers with opportunities such as peer counseling programs specifically designed for them, or by collecting data on post-traumatic stress among public safety officers, we can assist in developing best practices and improving measures to recognize, prevent, and treat mental health issues.

## Background

Public safety officers, including firefighters and paramedics, are frequently exposed to scenes including traumatic injury and loss of life while on the job. This work takes its toll, and can lead to trauma, post-traumatic stress, and suicide.

Firefighters develop post-traumatic stress at rates comparable to military service members--and much higher than the general population. They also die by suicide at higher rates than the general public. The number of firefighter suicides is estimated to be at least 100 per year by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

Public safety officers often experience specific mental harms that the general public does not. Therefore, policies such as peer-support behavioral health and wellness programs within fire departments and emergency medical services agencies should be conducted by culturally competent providers who specialize in assisting fire and EMS professionals.

## Talking Points

### ► Addressing the First Responder Mental Health Crisis

The rates of suicide and posttraumatic stress among firefighters are higher than the general public. Ensuring firefighters have access to quality peer support and mental health providers can help to lower suicide risks.

### ► Improving Care for First Responders

By improving access to care and cultural competence of providers, firefighters will be better positioned to receive the support they need.

### ► Protecting Those Who Protect Us

Firefighters put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe. We must ensure that those who risk their health for others receive the support they deserve.

