

OFFICER WELLNESS: CRITICAL TO PERFORMANCE AND OFFICER SURVIVAL

Law enforcement officers face unique challenges and risks in their line of duty, and prioritizing their well-being is crucial and further exploring these critical considerations is vital:

1. **Occupational Fatality Rate.** The occupational fatality rate for law enforcement is three to five times greater than the national average for the working population.¹
2. **Physical Health and Injuries.** Physical fitness can be key to ensuring that an officer operates at their most effective potential, and being in good physical health can reduce the risk of injury.²
3. **Suicide.** Knowing the specific number of officers lost to suicide can be challenging, but it is estimated that 169 law enforcement officers completed suicide in 2022.³

Agency leaders must continue to invest in programs and strategies to improve officer safety, promote overall employee physical and mental wellness, reduce physical injuries and illness, and save lives.

Considerations for the Chief of Police:

1. Evaluate the agency's current policy and overall initiatives addressing Officer Wellness. A sample policy can be found [here](#). Ensure the agency regularly promotes how to access their Employee Assistance Program, Resiliency Protection Officer, and other resources, including [NJ Cop-2-Cop](#), [CopLine](#), and [988](#).
2. Utilize the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the International Association of Chiefs of Police, [Officer Health and Wellness Agency Assessment Tool and Action Planning Roadmap](#) to evaluate, modify, and plan the agency's wellness program.
3. Involve the agency Safety and Wellness Committee in the evaluation and planning process and ensure that wellness is regularly discussed at committee meetings. Direct Safety and Wellness Committee members to review [Six Ways to Improve Officers' Wellness](#) while developing strategies to promote these behaviors.
4. Model appropriate behavior that supports officer wellness and destigmatizes mental health treatment by earning employees' trust, working with collective bargaining groups, investing in, or requesting funding for high-quality mental health and wellness programs.
5. Invest in peer-to-peer programs and explore the value of mental health screenings, as findings suggest that routine mental health screenings help identify officers in need of mental health care services.⁴
6. Ensure the agency's wellness program encompasses considerations for all employees, including retirees.
7. Address fatigue. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that fatigue contributed to 16 percent of all motor vehicle crashes involving law enforcement officers between 2000 and 2009.⁵ Develop a training program for all employees to recognize fatigue in themselves and in others. One study found that 80 percent of overtime was worked by 20 percent of employees.⁶ Evaluate the agency's current policies concerning the permitted length of working hours and mandatory rest between shifts.

8. Civil disturbances and protests can occur at any moment, and such a low-frequency but high-risk event creates significant officer wellness risks. Review the Officer Safety and Wellness Resource Guidebook, [Staying Healthy in the Fray. The Impact of Crowd Management on Officers in the Context of Civil Unrest](#).
9. Prioritize suicide prevention and utilize key resources, such as:
 - [Recommendations Regarding the Prevention of Death by Suicide by Law Enforcement](#) from the Department of Justice (2023).
 - The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), National Officer Safety Initiatives, [Preventing Suicide Among Law Enforcement Officers. An Issue Brief](#).
 - The IACP [National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide](#).
 - Report any suicide of an officer to the recently established [Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection Portal](#) and to [Blue H.E.L.P.](#) so others can learn how to prevent such tragedies.
10. Include in the agency budget planning both short- and long-term goals concerning necessary funding for wellness initiatives.

If you have any questions, please contact your Law Enforcement Risk Control Consultant.

Sources:

- ¹National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. (2024, May 1). *Fitness and Health*. Retrieved from <https://nleomf.org/officer-safety-and-wellness/fitness-and-health/>
- ²Community Orientated Policing Service. (2024, May 2). *Officer Safety and Wellness*. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Justice: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/officersafetyandwellness>
- ³Blue H.E.L.P. (2024, 28 April). Retrieved from Blue H.E.L.P.: <https://bluehelp.org/>
- ⁴Jetelina, K. K., Mosberry, R. J., Gonzales, J. R., Bauchamp, A. M., & Hall, T. P. (2020). *Prevalence of Mental Illness and Mental Health Care Use Among Police Officers*.
- ⁵Mumford, E. A. (2021, October). The Officer Safety and Wellness Initiative. *Police Chief Magazine*, pp. 16-18.
- ⁶Dowling, K. W. (2017, August). Risk Management Through Fatigue Management. *Police Chief Magazine*, p. 40.