

## **Behavioral Health and Wellness in the Fire Service**

*There is growing concern about behavioral health issues and the significant impact on wellness. The stresses faced by fire fighters, paramedics and EMTs throughout the course of their careers – incidents involving children, violence, inherent dangers of firefighting and other potentially traumatic events – can have a cumulative impact on mental health and well-being.*

### “Definition of Peer Support”

The goal of peer support is to provide public safety professionals the opportunity to receive emotional and tangible peer support through times of personal or professional crisis and to help anticipate and address potential difficulties. He or she is not a counselor or therapist but rather someone who is familiar to the individual who will help bridge the gap between the individual and professional intervention if needed.

### What is Peer Support?

Peer Support Team members have been trained in therapeutic communication, crisis intervention, and community resource networking.

Peer Supporters can provide assistance to both active and retired firefighters who are experiencing mental health and/ or addiction issues.

Peer Supports act as a bridge to outside definitive mental health/ addiction treatment.

### Why Peer Support?

Firefighters are going to be exposed to:

- Life threatening situations
- Sleep Deprivation
- Scenes of death and destruction
- Home life issues (life still goes on at home while we are at the firehouse)

These experiences have been shown to increase firefighters' risk of:

- PTSD (up to 20% of firefighters will develop PTSD over the course of their career)

- Alcoholism, Substance Abuse, Behavioral Changes, Abnormal Risk Taking
- Suicide (119 firefighters 20 EMS completed suicide vs 62 firefighter LODD in 2019)

Research shows that fire personnel who balance physical, behavioral and emotional fitness have the best outcomes, whether one is looking at adjustment to becoming a firefighter, ratings of career satisfaction, family well-being, or adjustment to retirement

Peer Support SUPPORTS other programs, but IS NOT a replacement for:

- Chaplain
- EAP
- Clinicians
- Community Programs
  - o It is a Bridge to Other Resources

Peer Support Long Term Goals

To provide assistance to firefighters experiencing mental health problems. These problems may range from marital/ family problems, depression, anxiety, substance/ alcohol abuse, and PTSD.

To respond to firefighters and/or fire companies who have been exposed to a potentially traumatic event (aka "critical incident")

To provide education to our members on various mental health issues that fire service members are prone to.

To provide information and education on the importance of self-care, mental wellness, and fostering resiliency within the fire service.

To provide referrals to quality and easily accessible mental health resources to firefighters and their families.

To reduce the stigma associated with mental health treatment within the fire service community.

To eliminate suicide amongst firefighters, both active and retired.

**National Suicide Hotline**

**800-273-8255**

**Veterans push 1**