

PRACTICES IN MODERN POLICING

OFFICER SAFETY AND WELLNESS

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This project was supported by cooperative agreement number 2016-CKWXK-018, awarded by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s) or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

The Internet references cited in this publication were valid as of the date of publication. Given that URLs and websites are in constant flux, the author(s) cannot vouch for their current validity.

Recommended citation:

International Association of Chiefs of Police. 2018. *Officer Safety and Wellness*. Practices in Modern Policing. Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Published 2018.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and CNA, launched the Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative. This program provides evaluations and technical support to 15 law enforcement agencies. Because these agencies are diverse in size, location, and other characteristics, their insights and lessons learned can be useful to other agencies across the nation. Their program efforts are published as part of the Practices in Modern Policing series. These reports offer guidance to the field for advancing practices and policies in specific aspects of community policing.

This publication focuses on improving officer safety and wellness, featuring case studies of programs in San Antonio, Texas; Camden County, New Jersey; and Columbia, South Carolina.

Although it makes a career in law enforcement especially engaging, the unpredictable nature of police work also makes it especially dangerous. The occupational fatality rate for law enforcement is three to five times that of the national average for the working population.¹ This is owed to the myriad risks law enforcement officers face in their daily work, including injury from firearms and motor vehicle crashes, as well as coronary vascular disease and suicide, both of which plague police officers at elevated rates.²

“Those who serve in law enforcement . . . work long hours and dangerous hours, oftentimes in difficult conditions,” President Donald Trump said. “We must support them, not undermine them.”³ Supporting law enforcement requires a national commitment to ensuring police officers’ health, wellness, and safety, stakeholders asserted in the testimonies they submitted to the task force, and again during the listening sessions that it hosted. For that reason, Officer Safety and Wellness emerged in the final report of the Task Force on 21st Century Policing⁴ as one of the key pillars necessary for driving healthy community-police relations.⁵ This guide demonstrates how law enforcement agencies can improve officer wellness and safety by targeting the diverse array of occupational risks they face. It includes information on the need for enhanced officer wellness and safety, along with examples of model programs that promote and facilitate it.

1. “Community Policing Topics: Officer Safety and Wellness,” Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, accessed April 30, 2017, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/default.asp?Item=2844>.

2. Elizabeth Lang Sanburg, Corina Solé Brito, Andrea Morrozzoff Luna, and Shannon M. McFadden, *A Guide to Occupational Health and Safety for Law Enforcement Executives* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2010), https://www.bja.gov/publications/perf_le_ochealth.pdf.

3. “Transcript of President Donald Trump’s Speech to the Major Cities Chiefs Police Association,” The Hill, February 2, 2017, <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/the-administration/318525-transcript-of-president-donald-trumps-speech-to-the>.

4. The task force comprised experts in the fields of policing, criminal justice, civil rights, academia, and other arenas, who worked together to identify best practices to reduce crime and build trust between the public and law enforcement. The task force’s final report identified 59 recommendations and 92 action items. For details, see appendix A.

5. *Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015), 5, <https://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P311>.

Healthy officers create healthy communities

In case of an emergency, commercial airlines advise passengers to don their own oxygen mask before assisting neighbors with theirs. Failure to do so means losing consciousness before one can come to others' rescue. Simply put: Helping yourself ensures you're fit to help others.

The same is true of law enforcement. In order to secure and protect the communities they serve, police officers must receive the tools and resources they need to secure and protect their own health and safety. In order to be effective, those tools and resources must address all facets of officer safety and wellness—including occupational, physical, and mental health.

Occupational health

Many of the threats and stressors officers face are occupational in nature. Law enforcement agencies can therefore improve officer wellness by creating and enforcing tactical policies and procedures that promote positive health and safety outcomes in the field. In a 2014 study, the IACP quantified the potential benefits of body armor, safety training, seatbelt use, and physical fitness regimens, all of which were found to reduce the likelihood of injury. In addition, body armor, seatbelts, and certain fitness benchmarks such as regular exercise were found to decrease the time required for rehabilitation when injuries were sustained.

Collectively, the preventable injuries sustained by officers in the course of one year cost the 18 law enforcement agencies that participated in the study more than \$3 million.

"It is vitally important that all agencies instill a strong culture of safety," concluded the report, which said agencies can mitigate the risks of injuries "by targeting resources and instituting policies and procedures."⁶

Physical health

Police officers often possess poor physical health compared to the general population. Research has shown, for instance, that police officers are more likely to be obese and more likely to have metabolic syndromes, including high blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat, and abnormal cholesterol.⁷ They are also at increased risk for heart attacks and sleep disorders.⁸

Occupational health experts attribute these and other negative health outcomes to a variety of occupational risks associated with the nature of police work, such as stress, fatigue, and poor nutrition.⁹ "Many officers operate in vehicles for the bulk of their shifts," according to the IACP's Center for Officer Safety and Wellness. "When a vehicle becomes an officer's de facto office, options for meals or snacks and adequate time to consume them are often very limited and are not necessarily the most nutritious options."¹⁰

6. *Reducing Officer Injuries: Final Report* (Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2014), http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/IACP_ROI_Final_Report.pdf.

7. Mark St. Hilaire, "BCOPS Study Indicates Police Work May Have Adverse Health Effects," *Law Enforcement Today*, July 18, 2012, <http://www.lawenforcementtoday.com/bcops-study-indicates-police-work-may-have-adverse-health-effects>.

8. Joseph B. Kuhns, Edward R. Maguire, and Nancy R. Leach, *Health, Safety, and Wellness Program Case Studies in Law Enforcement* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015), https://www.valorforblue.org/Documents/Publications/Public/Health_Safety_and_Wellness_Program_Case_Studies_in_Law_Enforcement.pdf.

9. Kuhns et al., *Health, Safety, and Wellness Program Case Studies* (see note 7).

10. "Eating Well On-the-Go: How Agencies Can Provide Education and Support to Improve Officer Nutrition and Well-Being," *Health Watch Starts Here*, (Alexandria, VA: IACP Center

Officers who improve their physical health through diet, exercise, and adequate sleep can reduce their risk of hypertension, heart disease, cancer, degenerative joint diseases, and diabetes.¹¹ Those who maintain a healthy weight or an active lifestyle likewise can reduce their risk and severity of injury.¹²

Mental health

Law enforcement officers regularly bear witness to the leading causes of death in the United States, including car accidents, substance abuse, and gun violence.¹³ However, the nation's biggest killer isn't any of these: rather, it is stress. The American Psychological Association calls chronic stress a factor in each of the six leading causes of death in the United States: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.¹⁴

Police officer consistently ranks in the top 10 most stressful occupations, along with enlisted military personnel, firefighter, and airline pilot.¹⁵ Of all the hazards officers face on the job, therefore, stress may be the most prevalent—and the most perilous. In particular, according to a 2011 report from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), police officers are at increased risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which “can be triggered by experiencing traumatic events, such as crime scenes or exceptionally heinous acts.”¹⁶

Severe depression, which can be linked to PTSD, is also common among police and often leads to suicide, which kills twice as many officers as traffic accidents and felonious assaults.¹⁷ “This sobering data indicates that some law enforcement officers suffer from mental health issues and suicidal ideation and behavior, and too many officers are dying from it,” states the report on the 2014 IACP – COPS Office National Symposium on Law Enforcement Officer Suicide and Mental Health. “Moreover, it suggests that mental health and well-being is integral to the continuum of officer safety and wellness.”¹⁸

for Officer Safety and Wellness, 2014), http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/documents/pdfs/roi/iacp-factsheet-hw-final_web.pdf.

11. Mora L. Fiedler, “Officer Safety and Wellness: An Overview of the Issues,” (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2011), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/OSWG/e091120401-OSWGReport.pdf>.

12. *Reducing Officer Injuries: Final Report* (see note 6).

13. Melanie Heron, “Deaths: Leading Causes for 2014,” *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 65, No. 5, June 30, 2016, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr65/nvsr65_05.pdf.

14. Deborah S. Hartz-Seeley, “Chronic Stress is Linked to the Six Leading Causes of Death,” *The Miami Herald*, March 21, 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/living/article1961770.html>.

15. “The Most Stressful Jobs of 2017,” CareerCast, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://www.careerCast.com/jobs-rated/most-stressful-jobs-2017>.

16. Fiedler, “Officer Safety and Wellness: An Overview” (see note 11).

17. *IACP National Symposium on Law Enforcement Officer Suicide and Mental Health: Breaking the Silence on Law Enforcement Suicides* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing, 2014), http://www.iacp.org/Portals/0/documents/pdfs/Suicide_Project/Officer_Suicide_Report.pdf.

18. *IACP National Symposium* (see note 17).

Fatigue

One issue that intersects all of these areas is officer fatigue. The average adult requires eight hours of sleep every night.¹⁹ According to a study published in 2000, the average police officer slept 6.6 hours, while four percent of the officers in the study received less than five hours of sleep per 24-hour period.²⁰ Lack of sleep causes slower reaction times, reduced ability to pay attention, difficulty processing and absorbing information, and loss of short-term memory accuracy. A study by the University of New South Wales in Australia found that after 17 hours of continuous wakefulness, an individual experiences a decrease in performance equal to a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05 percent. After 24 hours, the performance decrease is equal to a 0.10 percent BAC.²¹

Fatigue-related issues can bring on serious performance and safety concerns for officers. Driving while fatigued can lead to serious injuries. In 2016, 39 percent of law enforcement line of duty deaths were attributed to traffic-related incidents.²²

Lack of sleep can also affect officers' moods, causing irritability and impaired judgment. These mood changes may cause officers to respond incorrectly to community members and colleagues, leading to complaints about officer behavior and even inappropriate use of force.

While insomnia and restless sleep may be symptoms of many physical and mental health conditions, one very common cause of disordered sleep is poor sleep hygiene. Good sleep habits include making the bedroom as dark as possible, ensuring a cool temperature in the bedroom, blocking noises, maintaining a sleep schedule, regular exercise, and avoiding caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol right before. In addition to encouraging these habits, departments can also examine their shift structures.

Officer wellness and safety recommendations from the task force report

The final task force report acknowledged that “an officer whose capabilities, judgment, and behavior are adversely affected by poor physical or psychological health not only may be of little use to the community he or she serves but also may be a danger to the community and to other officers.” It therefore recommended that communities adopt policies and programs that promote the wellness and safety of law enforcement officers by mitigating the physical, mental, and emotional risks they face.²³ Specifically, the task force suggested the following action items:

19. National Institutes of Health, *Your Guide to Healthy Sleep*. (Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health, 2011), https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/sleep/healthy_sleep.pdf.

20. The International Association of Chiefs of Police, *Training Key #633: Police Fatigue*, <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/training-key/633-police-fatigue>.

21. A.M. Williamson, “Moderate Sleep Deprivation Produces Impairments in Cognitive and Motor Performance Equivalent to Legally Prescribed Levels of Alcohol Intoxication,” *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 57 (2000): 649-655.

22. National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, *2016 Law Enforcement Officer Fatalities Nationwide in 2016*, December 2016, <http://www.nleomf.org/assets/pdfs/reports/Preliminary-2016-EOY-Officer-Fatalities-Report.pdf>.

23. President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Final Report* (see note 5).

The U.S. Department of Justice should do the following:

- Support continuing research into the efficacy of an annual health check for officers encompassing mental health, fitness, resilience, and nutrition.
- Ensure that pension plans recognize fitness for duty examinations as definitive evidence of valid duty or non-duty related disability.
- Provide Public Safety Officer Benefits (PSOB) to survivors of officers killed while working, regardless of the officer's health and safety status.
- Fund additional research into the efficacy of limiting the hours an officer can work in a 24- to 48-hour period.²⁴

Congress should do the following:

- Authorize funding for the distribution of law enforcement individual tactical first aid kits.
- Reauthorize and expand the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) program.²⁵

Law enforcement agencies should do the following:

- Promote safety and wellness at every level of the organization.²⁶
- Expand the reach of the National Blue Alert network through information sharing and officer training.

24. President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Final Report* (see note 5).

25. President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Final Report* (see note 5).

26. President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Final Report* (see note 5).

PROMISING PROGRAMS FOR OFFICER SAFETY AND WELLNESS

Law enforcement agencies around the country have developed and implemented many successful programs through which to facilitate, promote, and improve the wellness and safety of police officers. In the wake of the final task force report, the 15 model sites for the Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative²⁷ have recommitted to and reinvested in established programs while also conceiving innovative new ones that raise the bar on officer well-being. As a result, what's emerging across the nation is a new, more holistic approach to protecting officers' well-being.

San Antonio (Texas) Police Department

According to San Antonio Police Department (SAPD) Psychologist Dr. Brandi Burque, "The number one killer of police officers is cardiovascular disease." Burque, says police officers are 25 times more likely to die from cardiovascular disease than from the actions of a suspect. This is especially true in a city like San Antonio, she says, where healthy food is the exception, not the rule. "We have great food down here, but what's open at 2 o'clock in the morning for an officer who is working an overnight shift isn't exactly healthy," continues Burque, who says what happens on officers' plates often is a function of what happens in their heads. For that reason, SAPD has taken a unique approach to officer health and wellness. With two programs, in particular—its Performance and Recovery Optimization (PRO[®]) and Peer Support Team programs—it's leveraging mental exercise to catalyze positive physical change.

Performance Recovery Optimization (PRO[®])

The SAPD's PRO[®] program was born at San Antonio's Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC), where Burque did her postdoctoral fellowship under Dr. Deloria Wilson in BAMC's Warrior Resiliency Program. At the time, the Army was promoting and deploying its Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program, a program through which the military sought to reduce and prevent psychological trauma by teaching soldiers and veterans stress management techniques that would make them more resilient to the rigors of combat. Although it leveraged proven therapeutic techniques, Wilson and Burque noticed a major chink in the program's armor: Psychologists, not soldiers, designed it.

"It was a good program. The problem with it was: It didn't take into account the culture of the military," recalls Burque, who says military culture is such that soldiers may learn therapeutic techniques but won't actually use them, dismissing them as signs of weakness rather than sources of strength. "I can tell people all day long that they should 'dispute their negative thoughts,' but if you're a soldier in combat, you're not going to do that. It's not practical."

27. The Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative, which IACP and the COPS Office created in 2016, provides evaluations and technical support to 15 law enforcement agencies, and published reports highlighting the agencies' program efforts constitute the Practices in Modern Policing series. For more details, see appendix B.

In response to the flaws they perceived in CSF, Burque and Wilson in 2010 conceived a new program that would teach soldiers the therapeutic techniques they needed in a manner they believed would actually encourage their adoption.

“We decided to look at something that was more performance-based,” Burque says of the new program, which borrows principles from sports psychology.

Like soldiers, officers often eschew psychology as sentimental or saccharine, according to Burque, who says the purpose of PRO[®] is teaching officers to understand and recognize their body’s physiological response to stress and motivating them to manage it. The key to doing that successfully, she says, is positioning stress as a challenge for officers to overcome rather than a feeling for them to reconcile.

“Stress isn’t sick, lame, and lazy. Stress is two chemicals in the brain—adrenaline and cortisol—that have effects on performance and health,” explains Burque, who has designed PRO[®] to treat officers like “tactical athletes” for whom stress management is a performance aid. “It’s not just teaching them to manage their stress; it’s helping them do their jobs better.”

PRO[®] includes an eight-hour training session for cadets and a five-hour in-service training for officers, as well as an elective three-day professional development course debuting in late 2017. In all three formats, Burque demonstrates the body’s stress response and teaches officers to tame it by mastering techniques in five areas: controlled breathing, muscle control, attention management, performance self-talk, and developing a winning mindset. One popular PRO[®] exercise, for example, involves the classic board game Operation: Cadets must do 10 burpees to elevate their heart rate, then extract three designated game pieces from the “patient” using the game’s signature tweezers.

“It demonstrates what happens to the brain under stress,” explains Burque, who says the exercise illustrates the negative impact of stress on memory and fine motor skills in a way that makes officers keen to learn how they can regain control of their brains and bodies. Not because they want to feel better, but because they want to perform better, according to Burque, who says PRO[®] also includes modules dedicated to nutrition, fitness, and sleep hygiene—all viewed through the lens of performance improvement, leveraging officers’ competitive spirit to activate behavioral change.

To date, 257 cadets, 1,871 officers and detective-investigators, and 286 supervisors have received PRO[®] training. So far, the results of that training remain anecdotal. Plans are in motion, however, to quantify PRO[®]’s impact through a partnership with the University of Texas at San Antonio. When empirical evidence is gathered, Burque predicts, it will tell a compelling story: Officers who know how to manage their stress are more resilient to trauma, and increased mental resilience bears fruit in the form of better physical health.

“If I can teach you to perform better at work, you can use those same skills to perform better at home,” Burque concludes. “Hopefully, by controlling all that adrenaline and cortisol you can avoid the negative side effects of stress, including obesity and heart disease.”

Peer Support Team

Sometimes, what starts as a single bad day can spiral into a bad week, a bad month, or even a bad year. When that happens, officers often find themselves on a slippery slope. In the most serious cases, potential consequences include chronic depression, PTSD, and suicide. Even in the most benign cases, however, officers can find themselves making small choices—about nutrition, exercise, and sleep, for instance—that have big health ramifications down the line.

The SAPD's Peer Support Team provides an early intervention to keep stress from escalating into distress.

Established in 2011, it began as a small group of volunteer officers who wanted to help their peers, some of who were slipping through the cracks in the wake of officer-involved shootings.

"We didn't want that to happen, so we started the Peer Support Team as a way to follow up with people after critical incidents," recalls SAPD Psychologist Dr. Melissa Graham, who says the program has since expanded to help officers cope with all manner of personal and professional trauma, including financial stress, illness, divorce, and death, to name but a few of the issues for which officers seek support. "A lot of officers have life stress, just like everybody else, and sometimes all they need to get through it is a colleague or coworker reaching out and saying, 'Hey, are you OK?'"

Today, the Peer Support Team comprises approximately 60 uniformed officers from all ranks—from captain down—who reach out as needed to help at-risk peers, either at their own request or at that of their supervisor. Sometimes, the officers meet for coffee. Sometimes, they talk by phone. Always, however, their interaction is confidential: When an officer requests or receives peer support, she and the assigned officer are the only ones who know it, according to Graham, who emphasizes ethics and confidentiality to new members of the Peer Support Team during a mandatory two-day training that teaches them how to recognize and respond to common mental health issues.

"We don't expect our Peer Support officers to be clinicians—they're not—but it's important that they be able to look at someone they work with and recognize when they're going through something," explains Graham, who also offers quarterly training on specialized topics like grief, children's issues, acute stress disorder, and substance abuse.

In order to join the Peer Support Team, officers must have a clean internal affairs record, as well as a recommendation from their supervisor. Most importantly, however, officers must be good listeners and have a genuine desire to help their colleagues.

"There's no glory in this—officers get no monetary compensation and no special uniform—so you know they're doing it out of the goodness of their heart," explains Graham, who says the program's success is evident in officers' and supervisors' demand for it. "We know it's successful because it's so widely used. We had an officer who was murdered last year, for example. When that happened, almost immediately somebody stepped up to ask if the Peer Support Team could reach out to everyone who was on the scene to make sure they were OK. We're just part of the culture now."

If officers' needs escalate, the Peer Support Team is trained to refer them to Graham for formal counseling. For the vast majority of officers, however, all that's needed is an ear to confide in and a shoulder to lean on.

“When people are going through a lot of stress, they often feel alone,” Graham concludes. “Even if they can’t fix the problem, just knowing that somebody else is there to listen to you if you need it can be very therapeutic and very beneficial.”

Camden County (New Jersey) Police Department

Located just across the river from Philadelphia, Camden, New Jersey, has its share of big city challenges in a relatively small geographic area. These challenges take a toll on officers’ physical and mental health, according to Chief of Staff James Bruno, Sr.

“We all know that police work in and of itself is stressful. In a city like Camden that’s very challenging, it’s even more stressful,” explains Bruno, who notes that officers often face stress at home as well, resulting in personal and professional trauma that can negatively impact officers who don’t know how to cope.

Enter the Camden County Police Department (CCPD), which has made officer wellness and safety a major priority since its inception in 2013, when it replaced the city-run Camden Police Department as Camden’s primary police force. “It’s very important for us to provide resources that ensure we have officers who are as healthy and as focused as possible,” Bruno continues. “Because at the end of the day, our officers need to be healthy to do a good job.”

To meet its goal of healthy and high-performing police officers, the CCPD leverages a number of successful initiatives that work in concert to fortify officers’ well-being, including its Blue Guardian Training Program, its dedicated wellness coach, the state of New Jersey’s Cop 2 Cop program, and its Police Chaplain Program.

Blue Guardian

From its inception, the new CCPD has focused, through policy and training, on instilling the “Guardian” mentality: a culture and mindset that every life has value and everyone goes home safely. CCPD staff reframed their entire training program, called Blue Guardian, to align with this vision, looking at best practices from around the country and accessing training through the Violence Reduction Network and other sources. The CCPD’s training focuses heavily on de-escalation and communication to help reduce tension in potentially volatile and dangerous situations. The department was integral in developing the Police Executive Research Forum’s Integrating Communications and Assessment Training, which it now delivers to all officers. Officers also receive recurrent trainings on basic self-defense, control tactics, and tactical first aid. Using best practices in adult learning, all trainings incorporate extensive hands-on scenario role-play training, focused on making the scenario and actors as realistic as possible, to reflect what officers might encounter on patrol. A newly implemented mentor program brings in experienced, respected officers to help reinforce the Guardian culture and the training lessons. Captain Jack Handy reported that since the Blue Guardian program began, use of force has declined 30 percent and officer injuries have declined 35 percent.

Wellness Coach

In 2016, the CCPD began offering the services of a certified wellness coach and personal trainer through its insurance company. The trainer visits the police department monthly to advise officers on topics such as exercise, fitness, and conditioning; tobacco cessation; weight loss; stress management; nutrition; high blood pressure and heart disease; diabetes; and more. Making health expertise available onsite, the CCPD theorized, would lower the barrier to entry and encourage more officers to set and achieve personal health-and-wellness goals.

“It’s a great resource because it’s confidential and it’s right there at their fingertips,” Bruno says.

Cop 2 Cop

Because so many of the stresses of police work are unique to the profession, officers often prefer the ear of a colleague, who understands the background issues, to that of a psychiatric professional. Enter Cop 2 Cop, a peer support program offered to law enforcement officers across the Garden State by the New Jersey Department of Human Services and Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care.

Like Camden County’s Employee Assistance Program, Cop 2 Cop is a confidential, 24/7 hotline that officers can call to seek help with stress, anxiety, depression, PTSD, substance abuse, marital issues, legal problems, grief, and suicidal ideations, among other things. Unlike EAP, however, the hotline is staffed by retired police officers—including trained peer supporters and licensed clinical social workers known as Cop Clinicians—who understand firsthand the rigors and demands of police work.

“Officers who experience trauma may not feel comfortable talking to somebody who doesn’t really know the job,” Bruno says. “But when they can hear from another officer who has experienced something similar—someone who can explain what they went through and how they recovered from it—it’s very well received.”

Police Chaplain Program

Healthy officers aren’t just mentally and physically strong. They’re also spiritually and emotionally fit, according to Sergeant Elizer Agron. A retired police officer who spent 25 years in uniform before becoming senior pastor at a local church, he now leads the CCPD’s Police Chaplain Program, which provides Camden police officers with a spiritual compass that points them in a healthy direction during trying times.

“When there’s an incident or an issue with an officer, Mr. Bruno or the chief of police will send me an email, a text, or simply give me a call. And then, I’m involved with that officer,” says Agron, who assists after officer-involved shootings and other critical incidents. “Outside of all the other great benefits they have, like Cop 2 Cop and the wellness coach program, I come in and I follow up with them. I’m there if they need me, and I monitor them until we agree that they’re strong enough in spirit and in mind to come back to work and be the best cops they can be.”

Even after they're back at work, Agron regularly follows up with officers to check in and find out how they're doing. "They seem to truly embrace that because they know I'm one of them," Agron continues.

The Police Chaplain Program nurtures community members, as well, according to Agron, who regularly hosts police-sponsored events that are staffed by officers and local clergy, including basketball games, softballs games, cookouts, skating parties, ice cream socials, and neighborhood cleanups.

"We bring mental wellness and strength to our officers, but we're also out in the community letting people know that we're there and that we care," says Agron, who also officiates weddings, funerals, christenings, and prayer services for officers and community members who lack faith leaders. "We're no longer a police department that has the mentality that we're there to write tickets and lock people up. We have the mentality that we're men and women in blue; we're public servants who take care of ourselves and work hand-in-hand with our community to enhance it."

Being involved with the community, it turns out, is just as good for officers as it is for citizens.

"Doing these events is a nice stress reliever," Agron explains. "Speaking from experience, many of us became police officers because we wanted to make an impression on the community and on kids. . . . When you're able to give a kid an ice cream cone—or when you're able to let a kid wear your hat and take a picture with you, and it makes them happy—it's very positive. There's nothing more fulfilling for an officer than something like that."

Columbia (South Carolina) Police Department

As it is across the nation, heart disease is the number one killer in South Carolina, where it causes approximately 10,000 deaths every year, according to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. Among all South Carolinians, 19.7 percent are smokers, 66.2 percent are overweight or obese, 26.7 percent live a sedentary lifestyle, 37.8 percent suffer from hypertension, 11.8 percent have diabetes, and 38.9 percent have high cholesterol—all of which are preventable risk factors for cardiovascular disease.²⁸

Against this backdrop, the Columbia Police Department (CPD) is designing and implementing programs to improve officer health and wellness, like its Fit for Duty wellness planning program.

Fit for Duty

When he graduated from the New York City Police Academy in 1975, Bertram Bailey intended to become a police officer. Instead, he became a personal trainer. Nearly 30 years later, in 2014, he recognized in Columbia an urgent need to combine his passion for fitness with his love for law enforcement.

28. "State of the Heart: Heart Disease in South Carolina," South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, last updated November 2016, <http://www.scdhec.gov/Library/ML-002149.pdf>.

"A police officer here had a heart attack on duty and had a quadruple bypass. At that point, I felt all my training and experience could be used in the city of Columbia, so I wrote a program called Fit for Duty and presented it to the city manager and the police chief," recalls Bailey, who began as a contracted fitness trainer for the city in 2005, became a city employee in the Parks and Recreation Department in 2012, and joined CPD as its full-time fitness coordinator in 2015.

A comprehensive wellness and fitness program, Fit for Duty provides fitness training, wellness training, and nutrition counseling to officers with the goal of reducing their risk for cardiovascular disease; it targets risk factors such as stress, blood pressure, and obesity. Officers who join the program receive an initial physical assessment, after which Bailey develops for them a custom wellness plan, including a diet plan and exercise routine. Officers may receive one-on-one personal training, participate in group fitness classes, or work out on their own at any of several gyms made available to them, including gyms across the city that officers can use free of charge.

"We've seen astounding results," reports Bailey, who says approximately 150 officers have participated in the program to date. So far, 54 of them have achieved their fitness goals—including a lieutenant who entered the program weighing 388 pounds and within a year had lost nearly 105 pounds.

Among the most influential Fit for Duty participants have been the police chief and the deputy police chief, both of who have set a positive example by seeking and receiving training. "Leadership has been one of the key factors that's made this program work," Bailey says. "Our leaders have recognized that we have a problem, and they're doing something about it."

The result won't just be officers who live longer, according to Bailey. It also will be officers who police better. "An officer's physical health helps him do his job," he concludes. "It reduces stress and helps him perform at the level an officer should."

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING OFFICER SAFETY AND WELLNESS STRATEGIES

“Law enforcement is constantly being challenged to rise to higher levels of performance, crime prevention, and community engagement. None of these objectives can be successfully met or exceeded without a commitment to increasing officer safety and wellness. Our law enforcement officers cannot effectively perform or connect with citizens if there are not safe internal and external environments for them.”²⁹

*Donald De Lucca, Chief of Police,
Doral (FL) Police Department and IACP President 2016-2017*

Law enforcement agencies should consider the following points, based on the final task force report and on information gathered by the IACP’s Center for Officer Safety and Wellness, when developing officer wellness and safety strategies.

Consideration 1. Take a holistic approach to health, wellness, and safety.

To serve communities effectively, officers must be healthy in mind, body, and spirit. Successful wellness and safety programs are therefore multifaceted, taking a 360-degree approach that encompasses the following:

- **Physical health:** Agencies should offer programming that promotes and facilitates physical fitness and nutrition, such as personal training, wellness planning, and nutrition counseling. Doing so will ensure officers are able to meet the physical demands of their job while reducing officer deaths from heart disease and other preventable illnesses.
- **Mental health:** Agencies should offer psychological programming, including counseling and peer support, to help officers manage stress and cope with grief, depression, anger, and other negative emotions that impact their performance. Such programming is essential as agencies pursue solutions to PTSD and suicide in their departments and across the law enforcement community.

29. Donald W. De Lucca, “Implementing All Aspects of Officer Safety and Wellness,” President’s Message, *The Police Chief* 84, no. 6 (2017), <http://www.policiechiefmagazine.org/presidents-message-implementing-aspects-officer-safety-wellness/>.

- Other considerations: Agencies may choose to offer programming that strengthens officers' relationships with each other, their families, and their communities, regardless of their faith or religious background. Chaplain programs, community events, and other initiatives can build resilience in officers by giving them purpose, direction, and connection.

Consideration 2. Build top-down support to promote and model healthy behaviors.

It's not enough for officer wellness and safety to be programmatic; in order to be successful, it must be pervasive. Law enforcement agencies must therefore create a wellness culture that permeates every level of their organization—starting at the top.

A wellness culture is one in which senior leaders initiate, support, promote, and actively participate in efforts to fund and facilitate officer health, safety, and wellness. When senior leaders outwardly embrace wellness and safety, it sends a message that officer health is a fundamental and strategic priority for their agency. Furthermore, when senior leaders make their own healthy choices, they become role models for officers, who are likely to follow positive examples when leaders set them.

Consideration 3. Involve officers in program development and execution.

Although top-down leadership is crucial, so is bottom-up buy-in. To get it, agencies should strive to involve officers whenever possible in the conception and development of health, safety, and wellness programs. As the end users and designated beneficiaries of such programs, officers are critical stakeholders whose input is vital at every step of the process. Without that input, agencies risk creating programs that misfire by misidentifying, misrepresenting, or otherwise misunderstanding officers' needs and priorities.

Officers play an equally important role in the delivery and execution of programs. Staffing both mental and physical health programs with current or retired officers, who understand intimately the rigors of law enforcement, lends these initiatives the credibility they need to attract support. Further, leveraging such officers as spokespeople to promote programs can be an effective way to stimulate positive word of mouth in order to drive interest and, ultimately, participation.

Consideration 4. Take a proactive instead of reactive approach to wellness and safety.

When it comes to health, safety, and wellness, it is easier and more cost-effective to avoid crises than it is to solve them. Instead of coping later with PTSD and suicide, for example, it is preferable for agencies to develop officers who are resilient to mental stress in the first place. Likewise, it is preferable to make officers fit today and reduce their health risks rather than to treat heart disease or diabetes later. Policies that mandate the use of body armor, seatbelts, and other safety equipment similarly can save money and lives by preventing deaths and injuries before they occur. Agencies should therefore focus resources on education, intervention, and prevention.

Consideration 5. Increase access to health services.

In health and wellness, convenience is a cornerstone of success. Improving and increasing access should therefore be a principal objective for agencies pursuing a healthier workforce. In the case of mental health programs, for example, officers are more likely to use services if they can access them at a time and place convenient for them. Offering counseling in person, online, and by phone is one way this can be achieved. Likewise, physical fitness can be more easily encouraged when officers have access to a variety of fitness facilities and formats in different locations. Some officers, for example, are more likely to exercise if they have a gym onsite at the police station where they work. Other officers might feel intimidated by working out with colleagues who are more fit than they are, and would be more comfortable at a commercial gym near their home.

Cost can be just as important as convenience: For mental as well as physical health services, the barrier to entry is lowered significantly when employers negotiate complimentary or discounted access for employees.

Ultimately, the more choices they have—both geographically and economically—the more successful officers will be.

Consideration 6. Adopt confidentiality as a guiding principle.

Health is extremely personal, and therefore extremely sensitive. As such, all health and wellness programs should be designed with confidentiality in mind. Open programs, such as group fitness classes and nutrition seminars, can be very popular and exceedingly helpful. Closed programs, however—such as anonymous counseling hotlines, confidential peer support programs, and private wellness coaching—also should be available for officers who wish to seek help, but want to protect and conceal their identity due to feelings of fear, shame, or embarrassment.

Consideration 7. Embrace a performance mindset.

For officers, health is not about just surviving, but thriving—at home, in the community, and on the job. For that reason, agencies developing officer wellness and safety programs should take a performance mindset that emphasizes the occupational benefits of health and wellness, instead of or in addition to the clinical benefits.

Regardless of their age or physical condition, all officers are united by their desire to serve their community and protect their fellow officers. Promoting wellness as a tool that can help them achieve their goals—emphasizing how exercise can help them pursue and apprehend suspects, for example, instead of how it can help them reduce their blood pressure—is one way agencies can build support and enthusiasm for health and wellness.

Consideration 8. Document, celebrate, and publicize successes.

Unlike many other goals in modern policing, in which success can be slow and hard to measure, officer safety and wellness is an area where agencies can achieve tangible results, quickly. Officers who participate in physical fitness programs, for example, may achieve dramatic weight loss and performance gains that can be not only quantified, but also witnessed. Safety initiatives likewise yield benefits that officers can see and feel—for example, when a bulletproof vest protects an officer in the field. Even mental health programs can catalyze improvements in mood and disposition that officers can readily detect in their colleagues. Leveraging success stories as case studies can help agencies capture officers' attention and build momentum in order to turn early wins into sustained success.

CONCLUSION

“If officers are of healthy mind and body, they will stay connected with why they chose this profession—to help and protect those who can’t protect themselves. It will ensure officers are making good decisions while serving our citizens.”³⁰

– Jane Castor, Chief of Police (ret.), Tampa, Florida

Law enforcement can be an extremely challenging and dangerous career. However, it also can be a very fulfilling one. Developing their minds and bodies to make them stronger and more resilient will help officers minimize occupational risks and maximize occupational rewards, ensuring that they have not only long and happy lives, but also long and happy careers.

Officer wellness and safety is not merely about officers, however; it is also about the citizens they serve. Policies and programs that encourage officers to adopt healthy lifestyles, positive mindsets, and safe work practices—and make it easier for them to do so—are essential to building thriving and prosperous communities in which citizens can safely learn, live, and work. Without such policies and programs, officers cannot be expected to perform to their full potential and often will perform significantly beneath it. As a result, officers who are supposed to be assets to their colleagues and communities could become liabilities to them, instead.

Using the broad set of concepts captured in the six pillars of the task force report, law enforcement, together with community partners and stakeholders, can develop strategies to simultaneously make officers stronger and citizens safer. As custodians of both, it is the responsibility of law enforcement executives to lead changes that will fortify officers’ well-being in pursuit of a brighter future for them, their families, and their neighbors.

30. The President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Officer Safety and Wellness: Submitted Oral & Written Testimony Received by February 24, 2015, Presented Alphabetically by Last Name*, (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015), https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/02-23-2015/Invited_testimony.pdf.

APPENDIX A. HISTORY OF THE TASK FORCE ON 21ST CENTURY POLICING

Trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve is essential in a democracy. Following several high-profile events that exposed rifts in this relationship, U.S. President Barack Obama established the Task Force on 21st Century Policing on December 18, 2014. The task force, comprising experts in the fields of policing, criminal justice, civil rights, academia, and other arenas, heard testimony from stakeholders around the United States and identified best practices to reduce crime and build trust between the public and law enforcement, with an emphasis on mutual respect and fair and equitable treatment.

The *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing*³¹ set forth six main topic areas, or pillars, found to be essential to healthy community-police relations: (1) building trust and legitimacy, (2) policy and oversight, (3) technology and social media, (4) community policing and crime reduction, (5) training and education, and (6) officer safety and wellness. Within these pillars, the task force laid out 59 recommendations with 92 action items. These practical steps provide a road map to help law enforcement and communities move forward to mend and strengthen relationships.

Pillar 1. Building Trust and Legitimacy

A law enforcement agency must not be seen by the community as an occupying force but rather as a legitimate, trusted, and fair authority. Embracing a guardian rather than a warrior mentality will help law enforcement gain the trust and respect of those they serve. This can be achieved through positive, nonenforcement activities (e.g., Coffee with a Cop, National Night Out, or officer athletic or activity leagues) that engage the community. The task force also recommended that agencies adopt procedural justice as their guiding principle and establish transparency and accountability to ensure that decision-making is understood by citizens. Last, creating a diverse workforce that mirrors the community will increase trust building.

Pillar 2. Policy and Oversight

An agency's policies should reflect community values. An agency can ensure this by developing comprehensive policies and responsive strategies "that reduce crime by improving relationships, increasing community engagement, and fostering cooperation."³² Clear and comprehensive policies that ensure formal checks and balances and data analysis are critical. For example, an agency should make sure that its SRO policy states that SROs should never enforce school discipline rules and are there only to enforce crime problems.

31. *Final Report of the President's Task Force* (see note 5).

32. "Executive Summary," *Final Report of the President's Task Force*, 2 (see note 5).

Pillar 3. Technology and Social Media

Through the use of technology and social media, law enforcement can engage the community (particularly youth) and educate and inform citizens in an up-to-date and evolving way. Implementing new technologies can provide law enforcement agencies with an opportunity to engage the community in a discussion about their expectations for transparency, accountability, and privacy. Agencies also should monitor social media for enforcement purposes and learn about the issues that are important to the community. Using social media can also help keep the community informed about major events and provide up-to-date reports on live incidents.

Pillar 4. Community Policing and Crime Reduction

By encouraging and implementing policies that support community-based partnerships, officers can reduce crime and increase trust. Working alongside residents to identify problems and collaborate on “implementing solutions that produce meaningful results” for all engages residents, provides them with a stake in the outcome, and promotes mutual respect.³³

Pillar 5. Training and Education

Cadets, line officers, and executives should respond to the challenges of modern policing. Academy and in-service trainings should focus on previously unaddressed subjects such as mental health, cultural differences, and youth brain development. High-quality, effective training, particularly that which comes from a highly regarded academic institution, will enable officers to better understand the diverse populations with which they work.

Pillar 6. Officer Wellness and Safety

The stress that accompanies being a law enforcement officer cannot be understated. For this reason, the mental and physical health of officers is crucial to effective and equitable policing, which is why promoting safety and wellness throughout an agency is important. Endorsing practices that support officer safety and wellness (e.g., evaluating and adjusting shift lengths or requiring officers to wear bulletproof vests) will enable officers to better do their jobs.

33. “Executive Summary,” *Final Report of the President’s Task Force*, 3 (see note 5).

APPENDIX B. THE ADVANCING 21ST CENTURY POLICING INITIATIVE AND ITS 15 MODEL SITES

The Task Force on 21st Century Policing's goal of transforming the thinking and organizational approach of U.S. law enforcement is intended to be applicable to every size and type of law enforcement agency. Given the local design of the U.S. law enforcement model, it is critical that local agencies adapt the implementation of the task force recommendations to fit their individual needs and capacities. Agencies ready to implement the task force recommendations will need to develop strategies to achieve such change.

In May 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and CNA (a nonprofit research and analysis organization), launched the Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative, which provides evaluations and technical support to the following 15 state and local law enforcement agencies that already have made strides in implementing the task force recommendations:

1. Albany (New York) Police Department
2. Arlington (Texas) Police Department
3. Atlanta (Georgia) Police Department
4. Camden County (New Jersey) Police Department
5. Columbia (South Carolina) Police Department
6. Doral (Florida) Police Department
7. Gun Lake Tribal Public Safety Department, Michigan
8. Hennepin County (Minnesota) Sheriff's Office
9. Indio (California) Police Department
10. Kewaunee County (Wisconsin) Sheriff's Department
11. Louisville (Kentucky) Metro Police Department
12. Lowell (Massachusetts) Police Department
13. San Antonio (Texas) Police Department
14. South Dakota Highway Patrol
15. Tucson (Arizona) Police Department

These agencies vary widely in size, type, and location. Their diversity ensures that the information stemming from the initiative is useful to the greatest number of agencies throughout the United States.

Armed with lessons and information learned from these sites, the IACP and the COPS Office have created a series of companion guides to the final task force report. This series, *Practices in Modern Policing*, focuses on common and emergent themes from the report and highlights programs from the 15 sites. In each case, it is important to note that post-implementation studies will be needed to measure the impact of these new policies and programs.

ABOUT THE IACP

The **International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)** is the world's largest and most influential professional association for police leaders. With more than 30,000 members in 150 countries, the IACP is a recognized leader in global policing. Since 1893, the association has been speaking out on behalf of law enforcement and advancing leadership and professionalism in policing worldwide.

The IACP is known for its commitment to shaping the future of the police profession. Through timely research, programming, and unparalleled training opportunities, the IACP is preparing current and emerging police leaders—and the agencies and communities they serve—to succeed in addressing the most pressing issues, threats, and challenges of the day.

The IACP is a not-for-profit 501c(3) organization headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia. The IACP is the publisher of *The Police Chief* magazine, the leading periodical for law enforcement executives, and host of the IACP annual conference, the largest police educational and technology exposition in the world. IACP membership is open to law enforcement professionals of all ranks, as well as non-sworn leaders across the criminal justice system. Learn more about the IACP at www.theIACP.org.

In 2016, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, in partnership with the IACP and CNA, launched the Advancing 21st Century Policing Initiative. This program provides evaluations and technical support to 15 law enforcement agencies. Because these agencies are diverse in size, location, and other characteristics, their insights and lessons learned can be useful to various other agencies across the nation. Reports on their efforts in the program are published as part of the Practices in Modern Policing series. These reports offer guidance to the field for advancing practices and policies in specific aspects of community policing.

This publication is focused on officer safety and wellness. It discusses how endorsing practices that support officer safety and wellness, such as mental health initiatives, support for exercise and nutrition, occupational safety measures, and combating fatigue, helps officers to do their jobs better.



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