



Promoting Officer Mental Health

For this year's National Police Week, the Comp Alliance will again start with the vital importance of police officers' mental health and wellness. Traditional occupational safety and health risk management programs primarily concentrate on ensuring that work is safe, and workers are protected from workplace hazards that arise from the work itself. This includes dealing with hazardous chemicals, improved housekeeping, and PPE procedures. Police officers need to understand these physical controls. Additionally, officers deserve mental health protection from the hazards of stress, fatigue, burnout, and substance abuse. Employees who endure work-related struggles that negatively impact their well-being are at a substantially higher risk of poor health and injury.



The Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 (LEMHWA) was signed into law in January 2018, providing support for law enforcement agencies' ongoing efforts to protect their employees' mental health and well-being. Good mental health is just as essential as good physical health for law enforcement officers to be effective in keeping our communities safe from crime and violence^[1].

To promote police officer mental health, consider these resources and share applicable information with your department staff at all levels:

- ✓ **Municipal Employee Assistance Programs:** These programs are important and should be promoted by police agencies. Every officer is different and not everyone will come to their police agency if they are unable to sleep or if stress is harming their lives. Multiple options should be made available to police officers through their agency. Consider peer support groups or officer-led programs where discussions on trauma-related stress can be held in confidence with trusted coworkers taking the lead.
- ✓ **Supervisor Training:** Field Training Officers (FTO) who recognize adverse stress reactions and signs of chronic stress can identify trauma or stress-related challenges in their subordinates. Administrators can follow up to provide troubled officers with resources and support including a change in shift assignment, time off to resolve an acute stressor, sleep concerns, or more formal support such as professional counseling.

^[1] U.S. Department of Justice - <https://cops.usdoj.gov/lemhwaresources>

✓ **Stress-Related Meetings:** Positive police management includes routine discussions with police staff on the importance of mental health improvements. Talking about stress management during employee reviews, meetings, and briefings provides an opportunity for the trained supervisor to encourage an honest discussion of any problems officers may be experiencing. Such a discussion opens the door for an officer who is struggling to reach out for support. It also provides an opportunity for supervisors to identify a potential problem before any adverse stress reactions could affect the officer's safety.

✓ **Create Motivation Programs:** Develop ideas where officers are encouraged and motivated to attend stress-reducing programs that build comradery including yoga, exercise events, and sporting activities. Include family and spousal support organizations where officer families and spouses can come together to provide insight into common stressors and experiences. After an officer experiences a traumatic event, offering counseling for spouses might also be effective. When police families cope well with stress, it is more likely that the officers will remain focused while on duty.

This week we honor the vital work of our police departments. The Comp Alliance recognizes the incredibly important and difficult jobs that you all have. We appreciate all you do and hope these short safety bulletins will be a reminder of our appreciation and help to improve the safety of the department.

Resources on Mental Health:

NYS Alliance on Mental Illness: <https://www.naminy.org/nys/mental-health-awareness-month/>

U.S. Department of Justice: <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/pmhc>

International Association of Chiefs of Police: <https://www.theiacp.org/topics/mental-health>

May is National Mental Health Month: <https://mhanational.org/mental-health-month>