

IAFF Behavioral Health Program

Behavioral Health and Wellness in the Fire Service

Traditionally, medical and physical fitness have been prioritized above emotional or behavioral fitness in the Fire Service. However, it is clear from the aftermath of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and other disasters that these priorities are now changing. With each passing year, 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 fire fighter, ratings of career satisfaction, family well-being, or adjustment to retirement.

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 their mental health and well-being.

The IAFF Occupational Health, Safety and Medicine Division

(<http://client.prod.iaff.org/#page=HealthAndSafety>) continues to develop resources that educate and supports members on behavioral health concerns. Check back often for updated information on behavioral health programs and resources.

Peer Support

The stresses faced by fire service members 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. Peer support programs have been demonstrated to be an effective method for providing support to occupational groups, including fire fighters. The IAFF Peer Support Training Program (<http://client.prod.iaff.org/#contentid=40484>) is a two-day interactive course taught by experienced peers from the fire service and behavioral health clinicians. For a program overview, please see the IAFF Peer Support Training Overview (<https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41939>). To learn more about building your peer support program, please see the IAFF program planning guide "10 Steps to Build Your Peer Support Program (<https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41972>)" – **NEW!**

Important: It may be possible to obtain a grant through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program to fund the IAFF Peer Support Training. For more information, sign-in to the IAFF website, visit the Grants Administration (<http://client.prod.iaff.org/#page=grants>) page and review the Grant Application Guidance for the IAFF Peer Support Training.

IAFF Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery

The IAFF Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery

(<http://www.iaffrecoverycenter.com>) is an in-patient residential facility **exclusively for IAFF members** to treat addiction and other co-occurring disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). With Advanced Recovery Systems (ARS), a leader in behavioral healthcare management, the IAFF Center of Excellence is staffed by a highly experienced and specialized team familiar with the unique needs of our members and the fire service culture. Located outside Washington, DC, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, the Center opened March 5, 2017. Learn more (<http://www.iaffrecoverycenter.com>) about the Center and the resources available to IAFF members.

NEW! For an overview of the treatment program offered at the Center, see the IAFF Center of Excellence Clinical Program Guide (<https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41963>).

Watch the latest edition of Kitchen Table – Center of Excellence Webinar: Access, Expectations and Treatment (https://youtu.be/BC_od7bsNW4) – where General President Schaitberger and Center of Excellence staff respond to questions about the Center submitted by IAFF members.

IAFF Behavioral Health Resources

The John P. Redmond Symposium/Dominick F. Barbera EMS Conference, scheduled for August 6-10, 2017, in Vancouver, British Columbia, includes plenary sessions and workshops addressing behavioral health issues in the fire service. The 2017 Vincent J. Bollon Affiliate Leadership Training Summit (ALTS) – held in January in Anaheim, California – included a two-hour panel presentation on Addressing PTSD Through Peer Support (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTHBtB92uDA>). Other presentations at past IAFF events include Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the Fire Service (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkzztWPuto8>).

The IAFF has created an Online Behavioral Health Awareness Course (<http://lms.iaff.org/course/view.php?id=64>). The two-hour course is self-paced and tailored for the fire service. The overview course covers depression, substance abuse, trauma, PTSD, suicide risk and prevention, and strategies for maintaining balance and emotional wellness. Use IAFF login credentials to access the course.

The IAFF highlighted the risks of PTSD in the fire service through its cover story “Bringing PTSD Out of the Shadows” (<http://www.iaff.org/mag/2015/01/html5/>) in Fire Fighter Quarterly magazine (Winter 2015).

IAFF national meetings regularly include plenary sessions and workshops to educate members, such as this two-hour panel presentation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkzztWPuto8>) on behavioral health at the 2015 Affiliate Leadership Training Summit in Anaheim, California. The panel included: Suzy Gulliver, Director, Warriors Research Institute and Professor at Texas A&M; Frank Leto, Uniformed Fire Officers Association Local 854; Joe Schulle, President, Philadelphia Local 22; Kenneth Stuart, President, Seattle Local 27; and Patrick Morrison, IAFF Health and Safety (moderator).

The IAFF has updated the Fire Service Joint Labor Management Wellness/Fitness Initiative (3rd Edition) to include a behavioral health (<http://www.iaff.org/HS/wfiresource/BehavioralHealth/behavioralhealth.html>) component to help departments develop successful and comprehensive behavioral health programs.

Funded by a FEMA Fire Prevention and Safety grant, the IAFF has worked with researchers from Texas A&M and Baylor Scott & White Healthcare to offer new resources on suicide awareness and prevention, including SOPs to use following a suicide (<http://client.prod.iaff.org/#contentid=1748>).

A set of guidelines – Responding to Members' Behavioral Health Needs: A Three-Month Action Plan for IAFF Leaders (<https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/30684>) – was developed for the 2017 Vincent J. Bollon Affiliate Leadership Training Summit. The plan outlines concrete steps that IAFF affiliates can take to help them respond when there's a behavioral health need.

Important Behavioral Health Links

- United Phoenix Firefighters' FireStrong (<http://firestrong.org/>) website has behavioral health information for the fire service
- U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs' National Center for PTSD (<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>) is dedicated to research and education on trauma and PTSD
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>) – 1-800-273-TALK (8255) connects callers to local crisis centers and has information on suicide prevention.

NEW! Additional Behavioral Health Resources

[Fire Fighter Suicide: How to Cope With Grief and Loss \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41969\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41969)

[Understanding the Difference Between PTS and PTSD \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41690\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41690)

[Coping with Grief \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41691\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41691)

[Finding the Right Clinician \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41692\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41692)

[Burnout and Self Care During a Disaster Relief Operation
\(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41693\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41693)

[Talking to Kids About LODD and Tragedy \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41694\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41694)

[Talking to Kids About Your Addiction \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41695\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41695)

[Talking to Kids About Close Calls \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41875\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41875)

[Creating a Behavioral Health Program: A Checklist \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41696\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41696)

[How to Support a Crew Member From Treatment \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41876\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41876)

[IAFF Peer Support Training Program Brief \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41940\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41940)

[10 Steps to Build Your Peer Support Program \(https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41972\)](https://services.prod.iaff.org/ContentFile/Get/41972)

Questions about the IAFF Behavioral Health Program?

Contact behavioralhealth@iaff.org (<mailto:behavioralhealth@iaff.org>)