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First Responder Suicide Deterrence Task Force 2022 Annual Report

Department of Children and Families
Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health



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Key Abbreviations

Key abbreviations for this report include the following:

Abbreviation	Full Text
Task Force	Florida First Responder Suicide Deterrence Task Force
SOSP	Florida Statewide Office for Suicide Prevention
2020 – 2023 Action Plan	2020 – 2023 Florida Suicide Prevention Interagency Action Plan
SPCC	Florida Suicide Prevention Coordinating Council
Department	Florida Department of Children and Families
SAMH	Florida Department of Children and Families Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health
FDLE	Florida Department of Law Enforcement
LEO	Law Enforcement Officer
PTSD	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
2021 Task Force Report	2021 Florida First Responder Suicide Deterrence Task Force Annual report
FLVDRS	Florida Violent Death Reporting System
NVDRS	National Violent Death Reporting System
USAR	Florida Urban Search and Rescue team
UCF	University of Central Florida
FHP	Florida Highway Patrol
FY	Fiscal Year
SJTF	Safety and Justice Task Force
BHAP	Behavioral Health Access Program
FFDE	Fitness-for-Duty Evaluation



Introduction

Purpose

This report is a collaboration between the Florida First Responders Suicide Deterrence Task Force (Task Force), the Statewide Office for Suicide Prevention (SOSP), and the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) within the Department of Children and Families (Department). The completion of this report fulfills Section 14.2019(5), Florida Statutes, which requires the Task Force to “report on its findings and recommendations for training programs and materials to deter suicide among active and retired first responders.”

Background

There are over 117,600 Floridians serving in some capacity as a first responder, and this number is likely an underestimate as not inclusive of auxiliary and support services (e.g., emergency dispatcher, crime scene unit personnel). Firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical service personnel are often the first on scene when a critical incident occurs. The first responder profession can be taxing, both mentally and physically, and attracts individuals from a variety of backgrounds. These individuals risk their lives to support and protect their community members. The nature of the first responder occupation lends to repeated exposure to stressful and challenging events. This continued exposure and other occupational and individual-specific factors can lead to negative behavioral and mental health outcomes.

Certain occupational factors may contribute to the mental health of first responders. The first responder job often has high physical demands, which can lead to stress on the body and other health-related difficulties. In addition, first responders regularly face difficult and stressful events on the job. Interpersonal stressors are also often experienced by first responders and their families, as members spend time away from loved ones during long and sometimes varied shifts (24+ hours). Prior research indicates higher rates of depression and sleep disturbances for first responders. Other research has demonstrated increased rates of Posttraumatic Stress Disorders and substance misuse. Additionally, research on the prevalence of suicidal behaviors shows evidence that firefighters may have high rates of suicidal ideation, suicide plans, and suicide attempts.



Status

The Task Force initially convened in December 2020 and published the 2021 Florida First Responder Suicide Deterrence Task Force Annual report (2021 Task Force Report) in July 2021. A copy of this report can be accessed here:

<https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/publications/docs/First%20Responder%20Task%20Force%202021%20Report%20-%20Final%20-%2008-4-21.pdf>.

Since this first report, the Task Force met on a monthly basis and focused on addressing the recommendations outlined in the 2021 Task Force Report. Immediate efforts centered on drafting specific language change recommendations for Section 112.1815, Florida Statutes to expand the timeframe for notice of a Posttraumatic Stress Disorder diagnosis for workers compensation benefits to reduce barriers to accessing behavioral health services for first responders. This effort, combined with advocacy from Task Force partners, culminated in House Bill 689 sponsored by Rep Mike Giallombardo. More information about House Bill 689 and the current status of Section 112.1815, Florida Statutes, can be found below (under section Florida First Responder Initiatives, subsection Focus Area 3 Intervention).

Subsequent meetings of the Task Force included presentations from guest speakers who provided information on programming and resources of relevance to the mission of the Task Force. An overview of these guest speakers is provided below:

Guests Speakers:

Yellow Rose Campaign from Michigan State Fire Chiefs Association

In July 2021, Chief Greg Flynn of the West Bloomfield Township Fire Department in Michigan provided an overview of a suicide prevention awareness campaign utilized in the state of Michigan and at several fire departments throughout the country. The premise of the campaign is to establish mental health literacy and suicide prevention training for all firefighters and their support personnel. This campaign interfaces with behavioral health programs available to personnel by providing guidelines for easy access to culturally competent mental health providers. A yellow rose is the symbol for the campaign, and the icon appears on challenge coins distributed to participants in the program's mental health trainings who pledge to break the stigma surrounding suicide through actionable steps. The yellow rose is also incorporated into decals on vehicles, landscaping at fire stations, or work attire signifying a culture of care for those who care



for others. For more information on the yellow rose campaign, please visit:

<https://www.yellowrose.michiefs.com/>.

Florida Violent Death Reporting System (FLVDRS)

In August 2021, the Florida Department of Health provided an overview of the Florida Violent Death Reporting System (FLVDRS) focused on how the system is structured and ways the surveillance system can contribute to the Task Force's efforts to deter suicide within the first responder professions. In 2002, Congress implemented the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) as a way to gather data about death using cooperative agreements. Florida joined in 2018, establishing the FLVDRS and the goal to enhance surveillance of violent deaths and to help researchers and groups like the Task Force to design and implement violence and injury prevention efforts. It is a collaborative system working with other forms of surveillance and prevention programs. The Florida Department of Health partnered with the University of South Florida to receive technical assistance and subject matter expertise for data extraction.

Warrior PATHH - Boulder Crest Foundation

In September 2021, the Task Force heard from Bernie Gonzalez and Josh Goldberg of the Boulder Crest Foundation. They gave insight into the history of the Boulder Crest Foundation in serving military veterans and how it has transitioned into meeting needs of first responders. The philosophy of the organization is based on the science of Posttraumatic Growth and is serving to support veterans and first responders through a program titled the Warrior PATHH. The first responder portion of this initiative is being piloted in both Miami, Florida and Tucson, Arizona. The Warrior PATHH ensures that veterans and first responders can live productive lives before, during, and after the extraordinary stress of their profession. The program also educates families and other support personnel on how to assist first responders struggling with posttraumatic stress disorder. The services are provided at no cost. For more information about Boulder Crest Foundation and the Warrior PATHH, please visit:

<https://bouldercrest.org/warriorpathh/>.

Task Force Workgroups

To further propel the efforts of the Task Force, the group agreed to break into small-group discussions during main Task Force meetings to focus on specific goals and action item development inspired by the recommendations in the 2021 Task Force Report. Specifically, the Task Force diverged into two working groups: (1) Continued review of appropriate language in Section 112.1815, Florida Statutes, and (2) Develop guidelines on reputable educational and training opportunities with proven efficacy.



New Membership

The Task Force expanded its membership to include representatives from the Florida Hero Helpline/First to Respond, Last to Ask for Help campaign, a licensed mental health counselor with first responder competency, and members of Florida-based emergency medical services. These additional members have provided increased insight into avenues for addressing suicide prevention for all first responders.

Risk Factors

Decreasing suicide-related thoughts and behaviors is a major public health priority for the nation¹ and within Florida. Suicide is a complex problem with multiple and complex causes. Research indicates several characteristics may increase an individual's risk for suicide, also known as "risk factors."²⁻⁴ The following table shows a sampling of such risk factors relevant to first responder professions.

Demographic-based Risk Factors	
Gender	Males are 3.5 times more likely to die by suicide compared to females.
Age	Those aged 45 to 64 have the highest rate of suicide per 100,000 individuals.
Race	Non-Hispanic whites have the highest rate of suicide, followed by American Indian.

Experience-based Risk Factors	
Exposure	Exposure to traumatic events increases the likelihood of suicide-related experiences. Exposure to suicide-related events increases suicide risk. ^{5,6}
Sleep	Sleep deprivation, disruption, and/or poor sleep hygiene can increase risk for mental health difficulties, including suicide-related experiences. ⁷
Substance Use	Misuse of substances, such as alcohol and other drugs, is associated with a higher risk of suicide. ⁸
Moral Injury	Moral injury is a distressing psychological, behavioral, social, and sometimes spiritual struggle that occurs after exposure to a traumatic or unusually stressful event that contradicts a deeply held moral belief and/or expectation. Moral injury has been linked to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder; however, it is a distinct experience that may compound the distressing symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. ⁹



Culture of Stoicism	When altruistic characteristics are engrained in the occupational requirements and revered by coworkers and constituents, misperceptions about being stoic can be cultivated. Expectations perceived or imagined, to always be mentally and emotionally strong create a resistance to confide in others and/or seek help.
Access to Lethal Means	Research indicates suicide intent fluctuates over time with suicide attempts often occurring during short-term, highly emotional times of crisis (commonly referred as a suicide crisis). Given the short-term duration of intent, immediate access to lethal means can be an important factor that either increases or decreases an individual's safety during a suicide crisis. ^{10,11}

These risk factors are important to consider given the demographic and inherent occupational characteristics of first responder personnel. Specifically, the first responder profession is dominated by males with approximately 61 percent of the workforce identifying as male. Additionally, the majority of first responders are white (approximately 71 percent) with 37 percent aged between 20 and 30 years, 32 percent between 30 and 40 years, and 30 percent aged 40 and older.¹² Over time the profession has diversified; however, a large proportion of the current workforce exhibit inherent demographically based risk factors.

Additionally, the first responder profession has inherent risk factors driven by the nature of the work. For example, first responders are regularly exposed to various traumas, whether through direct experiences or indirect experiences such as hearing about incidents from coworkers.^{5,6} Shift schedules are often intermittent and varied requiring prolonged periods of awake and sleep times opposite of typical patterns. These variations and demands on time can result in sleep disturbances, particularly when coupled with other natural reactions to trauma exposure.

Despite the risk factors described above, first responders also have established protective factors or characteristics that guard against negative mental health outcomes. For example, a well-established protective factor against negative mental health outcomes is a strong sense of community which is inherent in most first responder professions. Strong interpersonal connections can help guard against the development of suicide ideation and engagement with suicide-related behaviors.¹³ Additionally, first responders are highly resilient, a characteristic necessary to perform their jobs. This resiliency can be cultivated and promoted to protect against debilitating job-related stress and other negative mental or behavioral health outcomes.

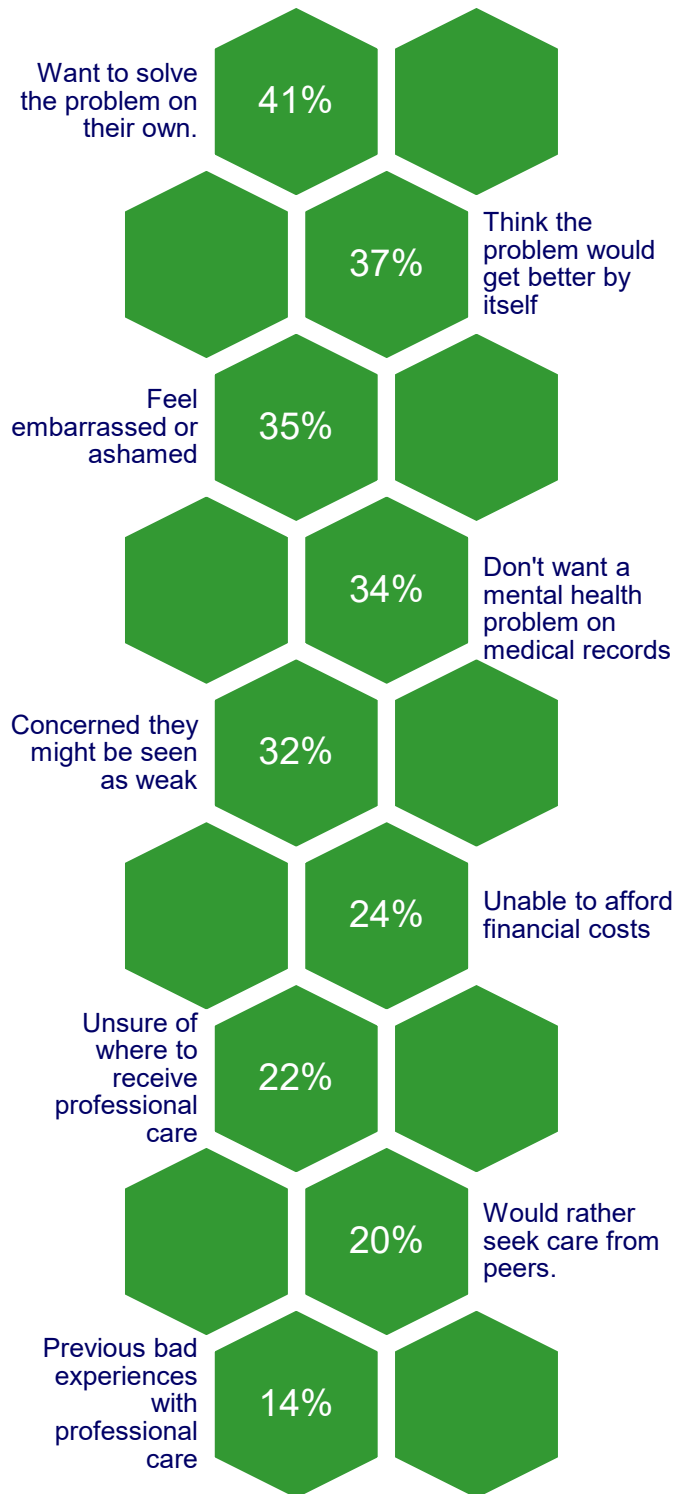


Florida Panhandle Survey on First Responder Mental Health

During fiscal years 20-21 and 21-22, the 2nd Alarm Project developed and disseminated a survey instrument to first responder organizations primarily in the Florida Panhandle. The survey included standardized, reliable, and valid measures for posttraumatic stress disorder (PCL-5), suicidal thoughts (SBQR), harmful substance use (AUDIT), depression (PHQ-9), and anxiety (GAD-7). Exposure to potentially traumatic events was also measured as a proxy for moral injury using the Life Events Checklist (LEC). Approximately 1,300 first responders participated in the survey, representing fire service, law enforcement, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and 9-1-1 telecommunicators. While the research found some variation across the type of first responder professions and geographic area, the results were informative: upwards of 24 percent of first responders reported provisional diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder, 52.3 percent reported depression; 39.1 percent reported anxiety; 38.3 percent reported harmful levels of drinking; and 15.1 percent are at higher risk for suicide. The findings indicated generally higher rates of these issues among respondents who are single certified EMS professionals and among dual certified/combined Fire/EMS personnel who serve as Advanced Life Support/transport providers.

The LEC assesses 16 events known to be related to the development of posttraumatic stress symptoms and includes one additional item measuring other stressful events. This research found on the job exposure to events such as witnessing severe human suffering, sudden violent death, responding to physical and sexual assaults have a significant correlation to a responder developing mental health concerns such as posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and harmful substance use. In addition to these mental health screeners, first responders were asked about barriers to receiving help through the Barriers to Access to Care Evaluation (BACE v2), which is a 36-item screener with higher scores indicating a greater barrier. The following are reasons why first responders reported not seeking help:







Florida First Responder Initiatives

In December 2021, First Lady Casey DeSantis partnered with Florida Department of Children and Families to expand peer-to-peer mental health services available for first responders to bolster existing prevention and intervention services for first responders and their families.

\$12 million in funding is dedicated to two projects that will increase access to behavioral health services for first responders. These services are designed to decrease mental health risk factors and enhance protective factors. The first project provides:

- prevention
- early intervention
- information and referral services
- peer support

The peer navigation aspect of this project includes direct staffing of first responder peer behavioral health navigators responsible for clinical oversight, training, and support to cadres of volunteer first responder peers embedded within participating first responder employing agencies. Peers will provide direct engagement of target population cases elevated by volunteer first responder peers, and training and oversight to expand capacity within local employing agencies.

Our partners will establish awareness campaigns regarding the stigma surrounding mental illness. Spreading awareness of this is key in helping to create an environment where people can feel comfortable discussing their feelings and seeking help when needed.

Partners will engage in development of a comprehensive strategic plan clearly specifying first responder and family needs, locally available services to address those needs, and expected standards of care in the provision of services. Some partners elected to design a provider network to access behavioral health treatment for first responders in need of services. The Department is excited to partner with the following providers:

- Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (Florida A & M University): Northwest Region
- Lutheran Services Florida Health Systems: Northeast Region
- University of Central Florida RESTORES: Central Region
- Crisis Center of Tampa Bay: SunCoast Region
- First Call for Help of Broward: Southeast Region



The second project was to design a statewide toolkit as a resource for communities, establishing access to services for first responders and their families.

Florida A&M University was chosen to develop a customizable statewide standardized resource toolkit for first responder departments. The toolkit will be designed to enable Florida first responder agencies to offer training, tip sheets, guidance, and supportive messaging campaigns to their employees. Materials included in this tactile resiliency toolkit will focus on prevention through improving mental well-being and stress management.

For more information about the progress of the behavioral health services and toolkit, please visit: [First Responder Resiliency - Florida Department of Children and Families \(myflfamilies.com\)](https://myflfamilies.com).

The following provides an overview of other first responder initiatives across the state since the 2021 Task Force Report. It is not an exhaustive list of all initiatives, but rather highlights the work of Task Force members. The 2021 Task Force Report provides a more in-depth overview of the status of programs to deter suicide among public safety personnel (starting page 5, section title “Status”).

Focus Area 1 Awareness

Awareness helps Floridians recognize when they need support to reduce suicide risk. Self-help tools and outreach campaigns are examples of ways to lower barriers to obtaining help, such as not knowing what services exist or believing that help will not be effective.

Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition Annual Conference

Four representatives of the Task Force presented at the Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition Annual Conference in Lutz, Florida, on February 21, 2022. The Task Force collaboratively designed a poster highlighting the mission of the Task Force and the primary findings and recommendations from the 2021 Task Force Report. Attendees at the conference had the opportunity to interact with the four representatives and discuss the work of the Task Force.

First to Respond, Last to Ask for Help Campaign

The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay collaborated with the Chappell Roberts agency in Tampa, Florida, to develop the *First to Respond. Last to Ask for Help* campaign. The campaign uses peer-based messaging to highlight the Crisis Center’s first responder hotline. The hotline provides confidential and immediate support for first responders and their loved ones statewide. More information on the campaign can be found at their website <http://www.lasttoask.com/>.



Focus Area 2 Prevention

Prevention programs help Floridians build life skills strategies, which include critical thinking, stress management, and coping. These strategies will prepare Floridians to safely address challenges such as economic stress, divorce, physical illness, and issues related to aging.

On the state level, the Florida Police Chiefs Association has also made Officer Wellness and Mental Health and Resiliency training a priority.

Florida Highway Patrol Peer Support Resources

The Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) command staff (represented on the Task Force by Capt. Derrick Rehming, Sr.) have worked to develop a resource for all members, including their spouses.

On June 1, 2021, FHP launched the FHP Wellness App by Cordico to provide members with instant access to valuable law enforcement wellness resources. The app is available to current and former members 24/7 and supports troopers, dispatchers, support staff, reserve staff, auxiliary, retirees, and their spouses.

The app provides resources for wellness strategies including peer support, physical fitness, proper nutrition, stress management, mindfulness, preparing for retirement, as well as a variety of helpful information centered around the law enforcement profession. The app also includes real-time access to any member of the FHP Peer Support Team and FHP chaplains.

The FHP Peer Support Team consists of 49 members that include troopers, auxiliary troopers, dispatchers, and victim advocates across the state. University of Central Florida (UCF) provides annual training to FHP's peer support team through the UCF RESTORES program which offers clinical treatment services to first responders experiencing PTSD and other trauma-related concerns. UCF is FHP's sole therapist resource on the app because of their unique approach to help those who help others.

*2,238 total
downloads*

As of April 25, 2022, there have been 2,238 total downloads since the launch of the app in June 2021, and there have been 11,181 total app visits. During the first week of the launch of the app, there were 594 downloads with a download rate of nearly 50 percent. Per the app developer, Cordico, most other agencies on average have about a 30 percent download rate for the first week after launch.



University of Central Florida (UCF) RESTORES

A non-profit clinical research and treatment center, UCF RESTORES employs evidence-based practices to address PTSD and other related factors, with a special emphasis on first responders, military personnel, and those affected by trauma. Since the establishment of the program, UCF RESTORES has trained 1,016 first responders (firefighters, law enforcement officers, 9-1-1 emergency telecommunicators) from 159 unique agencies in Florida. The REACT training includes modules specific to suicide prevention, which helps provide individuals with tools to prevent suicide within their department and among peers.

2nd Alarm Project

To date, the 2nd Alarm Project has provided:

- Over 800 hours of culturally competent, evidence-based counseling services to responders and family members.
- Mental health awareness, operations, and technical training to over 1000 first responders.
- Peer support training to 250 first responder peers.
- Hundreds of hours of peer led and professional behavioral health navigation services.
- Leadership training to 300 area company officers and command staff.

123 Total attendees
55 Fire
63 Law Enforcement
2 Telecommunicators
3 Unknown

2022
(Jan - April)



Behavioral Health Training – Online Webinar

First Responders: Preventing Behavioral Health Risks, a webinar sponsored by the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association and the Department, was developed and facilitated by a member of the Task Force. The course overviews basic principles of first responder culture that contribute to barriers for engaging in help-seeking behaviors and identifies tips for behavioral health providers to reduce these barriers. A live webinar was



hosted on March 2, 2022, with 388 participants, and it received a 99.4 percent overall rating. The recorded webinar is archived in the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association Training Library and available at https://www.fadaa.org/page/Training_Library.

Stress Management and Mental Health Training for Law Enforcement

FDLE has developed an online course to provide awareness, prevention, mitigation, and treatment information for critical incident stress and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Certified officers who complete this course are awarded credit for training that can be applied toward the 40-hour mandatory retraining requirement. While this is an “elective” course on the state level, many law enforcement agencies have required their officers to complete this course as a matter of policy.

Regionally, the various statewide Chiefs Associations have made mental health and stress management training and awareness courses available to their members. For example, the Tampa Bay Area Chiefs of Police Association, encompassing over 30 agencies from seven counties, has made mental health and stress management training a priority. Through funding from the Tampa Bay Area Chiefs Education and Research Foundation, wellness training being provided includes Trauma Behind the Badge (<https://www.traumabehindthebadge.us/>).

The Tampa Bay Area Chiefs of Police Association has partnered with Lighthouse Health and Wellness to create a confidential app officers can use to connect with valuable resources that promote officer wellness, mental health, and resiliency. The app is highly customizable and allows each agency to add and share resources. The app is in the final stages of production and should be available for use by the end of summer. (<https://chiefsfoundation.org/officer-wellness-resiliency-association/>)

Focus Area 3 Intervention:

Suicide prevention interventions such as safety planning, evidence-based treatments, and therapies delivered by trained providers can lead to significant improvement and recovery. The following is an overview of the initiative that occurred within Focus Area 3.

Florida Legislature

House Bill 689 was passed by the Florida legislature during the 2022 legislative session. This bill amends Section 112.1815 (5)(d), Florida Statutes, to expand the timeframe for notice of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder for workers compensation



benefits from the current requirement of within 52 weeks of the qualifying event to within 52 weeks of the qualifying event or the diagnosis of the disorder, whichever is later.

Focus Area 4 Caring Follow-up and Support:

Individuals may be affected after a death by suicide and after an attempted suicide. Florida communities and groups respond to and care for individuals affected by a death by suicide with caring follow-up and support efforts by reducing risks and promoting healing. The following is an overview of initiatives that occurred within Focus Area 4.

Demobilization Peer Support Follow-up Plan

The Florida USAR Demobilization Mental Wellness Follow-up Plan was developed to provide guidance for organizations with members who responded to the collapse at the Champlain towers in Surfside Florida. The guidelines were developed using best practices and current evidence-based criteria through a collaboration between UCF RESTORES, the Florida Firefighter Safety and Health Collaborative, Florida State Fire Marshal's Office, and the 2nd Alarm Project. The intent is to provide standard operating guidelines for organizations that do not have best practices in place for long-term support of first responders exposed to large-scale traumatic events. Importantly, major events, such as those described above, can lead to psychological effects that may not manifest for weeks, months, or years.

Recommendations

The Task Force submits the following recommendations for consideration:

New Recommendations

- The Task Force is scheduled to terminate in July 2023 at the conclusion of its third year in existence. The Task Force's continuous work for suicide prevention is informed and enriched by each task force member's expertise and specialization as a first responder. It has been recommended that the Task Force become a formal subcommittee of the Suicide Prevention Coordinating Council, ensuring the continuation of suicide prevention focused efforts for first responders beyond 2023.
- The establishment of formal relationships between Law Enforcement agencies and the FLVDRS to help extend data collected for violent deaths across the state. Surveillance data improves understanding of causes and circumstances of



violent death with the potential to identify where violent death occurs, who is most at risk, and what factors contribute to the type of deaths. Data collection is dependent on effective relationships between Law Enforcement agencies and the FLVDRS.

- Review by Florida first responder departments of the updated International Association of Fire Chiefs Yellow Ribbon Report for recommendations on identifying and addressing mental health difficulties within the Fire and Emergency Services workforce. The report can be accessed at the following: <https://www.iafc.org/about-iafc/sections/vcos/vcos-resource-detail/vcos-yellow-ribbon-report-update>.
- Review by Florida first responder departments the USAR Demobilization Mental Wellness Follow Up Plan and develop or enhance policy on supporting mental health for their employees and department members in the case of a large-scale incident.
- Work with the Florida A&M University to include best practices identified in this report within the statewide standardized resource toolkit for first responder departments.

Recommendations Continued from the 2021 Task Force Report

The following are recommendations the Task Force continues to make from the 2021 Task Force Report. These recommendations are presented within the framework of the 2020 - 2023 Florida Suicide Prevention Interagency Action Plan for continuity with the previous report.

Focus Area 1: Awareness

- Encourage stakeholders at all levels (e.g., department, community, and statewide) to promote awareness of information and referral services, including the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, to first responders and their families. This includes promotion of mental wellbeing on social media platforms.
- Explore the feasibility of a task force member implementing in-person, onsite visits of referral services to establish relationships and promote availability of resources (i.e., visiting all shifts at fire stations, attending roll call at law enforcement agencies).
- Promote ride-along programs with law enforcement by behavioral health providers and chaplains.



- Encourage the addition of resources for suicide helplines to first responder-related organization websites.
- Emphasize first responder families as a unique local community with the innate ability to serve as gatekeepers (for example, non-clinicians that have established repertoire with an individual. These gatekeepers may be able to identify suicide risk factors and subsequently provide support in an individual accessing mental health services).
- Expand the definition of “First Responder” by including those identified within the Florida Retirement System as “Special Risk Class” as defined in Section 121.0515, Florida Statutes, and dispatchers of public safety answering points.

Focus Area 2: Prevention

- Collaborate with federal resources for grant funding opportunities related to first responder behavioral health and suicide prevention activities.
- Utilize and leverage existing training programs within first responder organizations to host training opportunities for additional first responder-related organizations and departments (for example, if a local department has training available, invite other first responder organizations to attend their training or take turns hosting training).
- Explore the feasibility of a standardized training module that can be used by all first responder organizations within a single training location.
- Revise the language in s.112.1815(6), Florida Statutes, to include guidelines on reputable educational/training opportunities with proven efficacy.
- Collaborate with existing family/caregiver organizations and mental health service providers (internal or external) to deliver affordable, appropriate, and accessible suicide prevention training to families.
- Create standards of measurement for effective Employee Assistance Programs to increase provider accountability.
- Provide materials for departments desiring to develop a Behavioral Health Access Program (BHAP), a comprehensive and operationalized plan which clearly specifies the services members’ and families’ need, where those services are available, and levels and standards of care that are expected in provision of these services. The National Fire Protection Agency standards provide guidance to departments for developing a BHAP, including requiring the minimum services of evidence-based assessment, basic counseling, and stress crisis intervention, which should be readily available to address, at minimum, alcohol and other substance use, stress and anxiety, depression, and personal problems that may impact work performance. The standards also require the BHAP to provide for



sources of appropriate interventions for members who need more advanced or extensive levels of specialty care.

- Increase access to training with Continuing Education Units for mental health providers that builds culturally competent personnel.
- Develop guidelines for agencies to model when implementing a tracking system for critical incidents to assist in identifying the date of a traumatic event.
- Separate the process and professionals involved for a Fitness-for-Duty Evaluation (FFDE) and those seeking other behavioral health support. It should be made clear that this is not a proposal to end FFDEs. They are necessary and have a place in the first responder professions. Rather, first responder agencies with government support, should endeavor to have a bright line of separation between the two processes. A first responder must be able to seek assistance without fear that their career hangs in the balance because the mental health provider also conducts FFDEs.

Focus Area 3: Intervention

- Review section 112.1815 (6), Florida Statutes, for practicality and assurance that the language is congruent with current research on, and treatment for, PTSD.
- Revise the language in section 112.1815 (5)(a), Florida Statutes, from licensed psychiatrist to licensed mental health clinician and remove the remaining reference to a treating physician.
- Develop legislation to protect the liability of both the employers of peer support teams and the members within the confines of providing services.

Focus Area 4: Caring Follow-up and Support

- Develop a model Standard Operating Guidelines template for public safety agencies to use as a guide in establishing protocols related to suicide death of an active or retired member.
- Establish a statewide network of resources for use after a death by suicide that includes personnel with lived experience who are willing to mentor.
- Enhance and integrate locally existing support services for suicide loss survivors (such as the national organization Survivors of Blue Suicide <https://www.survivorsofbluesuicide.org>) and suicide attempt survivors to meet the unique needs of public safety families and co-workers.
- Prepare materials for social media, professional journals, or conferences with recommendations on dealing with the aftermath of suicide in the workplace (similar to the Manager's Guide produced by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention or the National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide's recommendations from the publication After a Suicide in Blue).¹⁴



- Establish guidelines that are supported by occupational therapists, mental health clinicians, and current research regarding returning to work after a suicide attempt.



Appendix A – Task Force Membership

Representing	Appointed Official
Florida Professional Firefighters Association*	Mike Salzano, <i>Chair</i>
Florida Police Benevolent Association*	Michael “Mick” McHale
Florida State Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police*	Rob Strout
Florida Sheriffs Association*	Matt Dunagan Allie McNair
Florida Police Chiefs Association*	Chief Charles Vazquez
Florida Fire Chiefs Association*	Keith Cartwright
Statewide Office for Suicide Prevention*	Anna Sever Anna Gai (former director)
Florida Department of Law Enforcement	Matt Walsh
Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles	Captain Derrick Rahming
Retired Firefighter	Ryan Gallik
Miami Gardens Police Department	Tim Adams Michael Dillon Sam Espinosa
Miami Gardens Police Department Crime Scene Unit	Willard Delancy
St. Petersburg College	Mary VanHaute, <i>co-chair</i>
2nd Alarm Project	Kellie O’Dare Lance Butler
Florida Hero Helpline/Last to Ask for Help campaign	Manny Guevara-Ruiz Eric Bledsoe
Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Compassion Focus Counseling	Alisha Singh
Lee County EMS	Nicci Reed James Nunez
Florida Firefighters Safety and Health Collaborative	Diana Hernden

* Indicates voting member



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