

Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) Employee Wellness Guidance

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Contents

Introduction	1
Mental Wellness	3
De-stigmatization	3
Designated Wellness Coordinator	3
Peer support	4
Confidentiality and building trust	4
Suicide prevention	4
Community building	7
Accessibility and convenience	7
Resilience training	8
Post-traumatic stress disorder awareness	8
Psychological care	9
Family mental health support	10
Effective Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	10
Organizational support	11
Physical Wellness	13
Physical fitness	13
Sleep hygiene	13
Nutrition	14
Holistic Wellness	15
Chaplain program	15
Meditation	15
Yoga	16
Work-life balance	16

Financial Wellness	17
Financial planning	17
Career guidance	17
Retirement planning	17
Conclusion	18
References	19
About the Center for Innovations in Community Safety	23
About the COPS Office	24

Introduction

The Center for Innovations in Community Safety, partnering with global law firm Sheppard Mullin, has created the Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) curriculum, which prepares law enforcement personnel to intervene effectively to prevent harm to officers, departments, and the communities they protect and creates a law enforcement culture that supports peer intervention. To ensure ABLE is implemented effectively and meaningfully, a law enforcement agency wishing to train its personnel in the ABLE curriculum, access implementation support and resources, receive other ABLE training or technical assistance, or use the registered ABLE trademarks must commit to the ABLE Standards outlined at <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/cics/able/program-standards/>.

These standards have three wellness requirements for ABLE agencies:

- 1. No- or low-cost access to licensed professional mental health service providers** to support sworn officers and nonsworn professional staff. These providers can be either employed by the agency or easily accessible through an outside referral or the agency's health insurance plan.
- 2. Internal communications** that publicize employee resources and make any employee assistance programming accessible to all agency employees.
- 3. A dedicated point of contact** knowledgeable about available wellness resources who can appropriately direct agency personnel in need of assistance.

Some ABLE agencies may wish to strengthen their employee wellness offerings beyond these requirements. Other agencies have expressed interest in learning from other ABLE agencies about how they approach health and wellness resources.

The guidance in this publication is intended to provide additional information on programs, training, and resources that agencies might consider adopting to bolster employee wellness. This guidance is intended to be informational only and is not meant to replace law enforcement agencies' independent consultation with psychologists to develop their own agency wellness plan.



Mental Wellness

De-stigmatization

Historically, widespread stigma about mental illness and the use of psychiatric help has made people reluctant to seek mental health care, no matter how necessary. For law enforcement officers, the added fear of losing their jobs if they are perceived as mentally unfit has created a lasting negative perception toward seeking help for mental health and wellness. Law enforcement officers do need to be resilient to succeed at the job, but in the past this expectation has been taken to the extreme; at the end of the day, law enforcement officers are human beings and may struggle to process complex traumas or strong emotions just like anyone else. All human beings need support when facing difficult circumstances, whether that support is from family, friends, colleagues, or a mental health professional. While each individual can choose to support the path that works best for them, it is important to make professional mental health care and substance use treatment as normalized and accessible as possible so law enforcement personnel can use it when appropriate.

The first place for agencies to start normalizing mental health care is to chip away at the expectation that law enforcement officers should handle their struggles all alone and to work on countering widespread negative attitudes about mental illness and the stereotypes associated with seeking mental health support. One way to do this is by having messaging about wellness coming from the top. It is especially important and helpful for all officers to learn that even the chief or sheriff is willing to use—or has used—available wellness resources.

Education on mental health services is also important. ABLE agencies are required by the standards to have a designated wellness coordinator. If they are not doing so already, your coordinator should be working to spread the word about what programs and services are available to officers and what they can expect from their experience with each resource.

Designated Wellness Coordinator

In order for a wellness program to be meaningful, it must be well publicized and easily accessible when someone needs it. One way to achieve both goals is to assign a wellness coordinator. This person should be experienced, well-respected, trusted, and generally well-liked by the officers and staff

of the agency. The ideal person is known to be kind and respectful to their colleagues, regardless of rank, background, or experience. In addition to adhering to relevant confidentiality laws, this person must be extremely discreet. They can serve as a point of entry or referral, but they should not be the only point of entry to services. Among the requirements for a wellness coordinator is a thorough knowledge of relevant agency policies and procedures, as well as understanding of the available services and how to gain access to them. Finally, their duties can include “spreading the word” about wellness throughout the agency.

Peer support

Peer support programs are an excellent strategy to bolster wellness at a law enforcement agency. People often feel most comfortable talking about their struggles with someone who can relate to their experience, which provides an excellent opportunity for law enforcement peer supporters to participate directly in de-stigmatization. Peer support programs are a great way to intervene early to prevent what could eventually become an officer wellness emergency. An officer may be much more likely to seek out help if their peer talks honestly about their own positive experience with therapy or counseling. Officers serving in a peer support role should of course have robust training from qualified professionals on how to handle difficult conversations with fellow officers, and a peer support program can be a wonderful first step for an officer struggling to process a traumatic event, but a peer support officer cannot offer the same depth of support or knowledge as a licensed mental health professional. Volunteers with a peer support program should be prepared to encourage individuals to seek help elsewhere in addition to using the program.

Please see the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness (LEMHWA) Program resources at <https://cops.usdoj.gov/lemhwa> and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Peer Support Guidelines at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/peer-support-guidelines> for further information.

Confidentiality and building trust

Agencies should ensure and advertise the confidentiality of working with a licensed mental health counselor and do everything possible to make appointments private, such as allowing appointments to be held virtually or scheduled after hours. To build trust, counselors and peer supporters must be trained to explain any exceptions to confidentiality in advance during the process of gaining informed consent. Other than a handful of exceptions (e.g., imminent risk of harm to self or others, observation of illegal activities; details vary by department and jurisdiction), confidentiality must be guaranteed.

Suicide prevention

Law enforcement suicide is a critical issue; more officers died by suicide than in the line of duty from 2016 to 2020.¹ ABLE stands in solidarity with law enforcement, affirming that these sobering statistics are unacceptable. ABLE knows that in addition to preventing misconduct and reducing

1. Heyman, Dill, and Douglas, “The Ruderman White Paper.”

mistakes by officers on duty, active bystandership can play a lifesaving role in preventing death by suicide in law enforcement. Agencies must equip their entire workforce with resources to ensure that when anyone courageously intervenes to save a life, they have tools ready to use for that purpose. Responding to a call for prevention of suicide in law enforcement must also include services to support surviving family members and loved ones as well as a strategic critical incident response to peer officers. Suicide prevention is everyone's responsibility, but (as shown in table 1) different employees may be able to take individualized approaches depending on their role within the agency.

Table 1. Suicide prevention roles and responsibilities in an agency

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
Leaders (sworn and nonsworn)	Take a proactive approach by ensuring information and awareness of suicide prevention among the roles & responsibilities outlined in "Organizational Support" beginning on page 11. Leaders also play an important role in leading by example. When leaders model an approach to suicide prevention that promotes health and wellness, decreases stigma, and inquires where resources are needed to support all staff, they set an example that elevates everyone to the call of suicide prevention.
Human Resources	Post suicide prevention resources to your agency's Intranet page or other locations where employee benefits are posted. Ensure agency policies regarding suicide, suicide prevention, training, and health care are in line with national best practices and posted clearly for all employees.
Public Information Officer / Communications	Disseminate strategic messaging regarding law enforcement suicide prevention, a key ingredient to successful agency initiatives. Learn about national best practices for the media specific to suicide and suicide prevention.
Training	Include suicide prevention in recruit training and provide it routinely thereafter. Consider ways to inform family members and loved ones about the signs of suicidal ideation and provide resources for them to get crisis support to their loved ones if needed. ABLE instructors are an important part of ensuring training includes a focus on the health and wellness of your employees, including suicide prevention.
Peer support and wellness teams	Ensure your agency's peer support teams or other programs designed to enhance employees' health and wellness receive additional training on suicide prevention and are equipped with tools to connect individuals in crisis to care. Please see the resources following this table for further guidance on peer support.
Mental health personnel or contracted providers	Ensure your agency's mental health professionals (on staff or on contract) are also informed about the particular risk of suicide in law enforcement and have the resources needed to connect individuals in crisis to needed support. Learn and stay up to date on national best practices regarding suicide prevention in law enforcement.
All staff	Equip all staff to recognize the signs that someone is at risk for suicide.

The following are some suicide prevention resources:

Office of the Associate Attorney General, “Officer Safety and Wellness Resources,” U.S. Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/asg/officer-safety-and-wellness-resources>.
DOJ-curated resources for officer safety and wellness including suicide prevention

“IACP Peer Support Guidelines,” International Association of Chiefs of Police, <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/peer-support-guidelines>.
International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) best practice guidelines from the Psychological Services section for development and operation of peer support teams in law enforcement

“IACP Sample Suicide Prevention,” International Association of Chiefs of Police, <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/iACP-sample-suicide-prevention>.
International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) suicide prevention sample materials

“An Officer’s Lifeline,” Copline, <https://www.copline.org>.
A nonprofit peer-led law enforcement and family support line

Veterans Crisis Line, “24/7, Confidential Crisis Support,” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>.
A confidential crisis line

“988 Suicide & Crisis Hotline,” Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988>.
National Crisis and Support Line is a no-cost public safety resource

“National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide,” International Association of Chiefs of Police, <https://www.theiacp.org/projects/the-national-consortium-on-preventing-law-enforcement-suicide>.
IACP-supported resource including policy guidance, research, recommendations, resources, webinars, and training options

“The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (Action Alliance),” National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, <https://theactionalliance.org/>.
National public-private partnership for suicide prevention

The Officer Robert Wilson III Preventing Violence Against Law Enforcement Officers and Ensuring Officer Resilience and Survivability (VALOR) Initiative, “Overview,” Bureau of Justice Assistance, <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/valor/overview>.
National initiative including resources and no-cost trainings to support law enforcement officers to address officer safety, wellness, resilience, and performance

“SAFLEO (National Suicide Awareness for Law Enforcement Officers Program,” Bureau of Justice Assistance, <https://www.safleo.org/>.

National suicide awareness for law enforcement officers

“Blue HELP,” First HELP, <https://bluehelp.org/>.

Nonprofit organization that collects law enforcement suicide data and supports surviving families with support

“Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection (LESDC),” Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/more-fbi-services-and-information/ucr/law-enforcement-suicide-data-collection>.

FBI is responsible for the Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection (LESDC) Act to manage this data collection

Community building

Agencies should offer opportunities to interact and form genuine relationships with community members, allowing officers to truly get to know the people they serve.² Agencies should encourage officers to attend community events both in and out of uniform, form relationships with active community groups, volunteer with local organizations, attend city council meetings, support local businesses, serve on local committees, or become involved in their own neighborhoods. Agencies can also provide opportunities for community members to interact with officers on the job by advertising a ride-along program or hosting an open house.

Community building is essential to individual mental health, but it also bolsters law enforcement agencies’ reputations and makes the agency more attuned to the community’s needs. Good policing is hard work, and the more the public knows about it, the better.

Building a sense of community within the agency is just as important. In one study, law enforcement officers who sought help for their mental health also reported higher social engagement and social pressure to seek help than their peers who had not done so.³ Peer support programs not only are an excellent gateway to counseling or therapy from licensed mental health professionals but also provide a feeling of camaraderie and understanding that helps to process the trauma most law enforcement professionals will eventually experience.

Accessibility and convenience

For a wellness program to be meaningful, people must be able to access it. Help in a crisis must be available in a timely and competent manner. Even in the absence of a crisis, wellness programs must be open for business at times that are convenient to officers on a variety of schedules and shifts. One of the few good things to come out of the COVID-19 pandemic is the ease of virtual formats for counseling and psychotherapy, which supports convenience as well as privacy.

2. Hofer, Guarnera, and Savell, “After That, I Was Leery.”

3. Daniel and Treece, “Law Enforcement Pathways.”

Resilience training

Public safety professionals are exposed to chronic stress and frequent traumatic events, their own and those of others, which can impact mental and physical health. One of the most beneficial actions a person can take following a traumatic event is seeking help, especially from peers. Resilience training, which can occur before or after a traumatic event, normalizes this kind of self-intervention (see the IACP Law Enforcement Resilience Training Program at <https://www.theiacp.org/projects/officer-resilience-training-program> for one example).

Evidence has shown that training officers and nonsworn staff in resilience tactics can improve health outcomes and increase job satisfaction.⁴ To prepare them for the realities of this career in public safety, it is best to require resilience training early.⁵ Research shows that the best kind of training environment for building resilience is personalized and student-centered, as it enhances a sense of connection, acceptance, and belongingness within the law enforcement community—one-way virtual training modules do not have the same effect.⁶

It is essential that trainers be well versed in the mental and physical symptoms of chronic stress and trauma and prepared to help teach self-calming methods. Studies have suggested that relaxation techniques emphasizing the mind-body connection (e.g., meditation, yoga, journal writing) are important ways to protect first responders from the effects of trauma. Similarly, peer and professional support and efforts to destigmatize therapy and other mental health care can make a significant impact on health in the first responder community.⁷

Post-traumatic stress disorder awareness

On a daily basis, law enforcement officers encounter people who have recently suffered a traumatic experience involving violence, injury, or crime. Officers are at their best when they rely on their empathy to understand a situation through the eyes of another. However, the same sense of empathy that makes one a good officer can also cause secondary trauma to accumulate over time, with potentially harmful emotional consequences.

Agencies should work to ensure that all sworn and nonsworn staff are aware of the signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related disorders. Agencies are advised to encourage their employees to check in with colleagues if they exhibit signs of these disorders. Practicing intervening in these types of situations is a part of ABLE training, but agencies should also create other opportunities to think about what a peer intervention looks like in practice.

An emerging field of research in law enforcement mental health centers on the concept of moral injury, which describes what happens when unprecedented traumatic events occur and an involved person acts in a way that goes against their deeply held moral beliefs and expectations. One study

4. Papazoglou and Andersen, “A Guide to Utilizing Police Training.”

5. Papazoglou and Andersen, “A Guide to Utilizing Police Training.”

6. Papazoglou and Andersen, “A Guide to Utilizing Police Training.”

7. Papazoglou and Andersen, “A Guide to Utilizing Police Training.”

involving law enforcement officers showed that moral injury significantly predicted PTSD as well as associated symptoms.⁸ Awareness of moral injury and its close relationship to PTSD could help officers anticipate when they might need to seek out help.

Law enforcement organizations play an active role in the success of recovery from traumatic events, and each agency should have a post-trauma follow-up support plan. Research has shown that organizational hassles can exacerbate traumatic stress symptoms.⁹ Organizational intervention seeks to uplift officers by giving them real responsibility, empowering employees to do their jobs well, and recognizing good work, all of which have been proven to improve recovery and growth following traumatic events. Agencies should evaluate whether their culture provides frequent uplifting experiences for employees, and if not should initiate a plan to do so. Organizational support for trauma-related disorders and recovery is also reflected in the organization's policies. Agencies are advised to review policies that may unintentionally create harm—such as worker's compensation policies that exclude PTSD and other trauma-related disorders—or that exclude certain job roles within emergency services, such as emergency telehealth communicators (dispatchers and call takers).

Psychological care

Agencies should ensure that all officers have access to psychological care through counselors and therapists trained in PTSD, treatment of suicidal and depressive disorders, chronic extreme stress, and ideally working specifically with first responders. Researchers recommend that law enforcement officers have access to a large variety of psychological interventions, such as exposure therapy, emotion-regulation training, cognitive restructuring therapy, faith-based interventions, and psychotherapy for PTSD, as people can differ vastly on which strategies work best for them.¹⁰ For agencies intending to pursue a formal requirement or recommendation, the IACP provides useful guidance at <https://www.theiacp.org/working-group/section/psychological-services-section>. In addition, the American Psychological Association has excellent professional practice guidelines for practitioners at <https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/>, including clinical practice guidelines for PTSD and depressive disorders at <https://www.apa.org/about/offices/directorates/guidelines/clinical-practice>.

It is common for agencies to contract with counseling groups or individual licensed mental health professionals for additional support. ABLE requires only that those counselors be licensed and in good standing and that departments provide support at no or low cost to all sworn and nonsworn staff in need. However, it is also paramount that mental health professionals ensure confidentiality when offering services to law enforcement agency employees.

Agencies looking to contract with a clinician should also consider whether the individual has competency in working with emergency responders, including law enforcement officers. Such clinicians might be members of the IACP Psychological Services Section, APA Division 18 (Public Service Psychology), American Psychology-Law Society, or the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology.

8. Papazoglou and Andersen, "A Guide to Utilizing Police Training."

9. Huddleston, Paton, and Stephens, "Conceptualizing Traumatic Stress in Police Officers."

10. Peterson et al., "Associations between Shift Work Characteristics."

Agencies can also look to the Fraternal Order of Police's (FOP) Approved Provider Bulletin at <https://fop.net/officer-wellness/approved-provider-bulletin-apb/>. Ideal candidates will have a certification, course work, or experience working in public safety or an affiliation with the National Emergency Responder & Public Safety Center (<https://www.nerpsc.com/>), the American Board of Police and Public Safety Psychology (<https://abpp.org/application-information/learn-about-specialty-boards/police-public-safety/>), or a similar organization. It is important to evaluate whether each clinician has the capability to serve the specific needs of law enforcement.

Family mental health support

Law enforcement agencies should be aware of potential family needs for psychological support and be available to take preventative measures to educate law enforcement families about the complexity of law enforcement stress and trauma. Families are essential to wellness. Officers' problems persist when they are off the clock, and family support at home is crucial to maintaining well-being on the job. Research has shown that one of the ways to promote wellness is offering mental health treatment opportunities for employees' families.¹¹ Stress in the family system can easily seep into the workplace and vice versa.

Family awareness of the symptoms of PTSD, suicidal ideation, and chronic stress is incredibly important, especially when it comes to intervening in a crisis. If agencies can provide families with psychological support and education, they should also encourage and teach their employees effective ways to share their experiences on the job with their families. In a study on retired law enforcement officers and resiliency, researchers found that "postretirement resilience was best predicted by less distancing and less withholding of work-related matters from friends and family."¹² Agencies should do everything they can to help officers maintain healthy social and home lives. For further guidance, please see the IACP's Employee and Family Wellness Guide at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/officer-safety-and-wellness>.

Effective Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Most law enforcement agencies have an EAP that covers some amount of no- or low-cost mental health care. It is important that officers who need mental health care have access to the quality care that they deserve. EAP benefits may be adequate to meet a person's need, but the reality is that EAP benefits are not always enough for the officers who need it most. Law enforcement agencies are not always able to create their own EAP program, especially when the plan is offered to all city or county employees. However, law enforcement agencies *are* responsible for evaluating the plan's effectiveness and deciding whether additional resources are needed.

Mental health professionals associated with an agency's EAP should provide services in a manner that is as confidential as legally possible. Any exceptions to confidentiality as required by state law, agency policy, or provider ethical standards should be clearly explained in advance. More importantly, the services must be widely *perceived* as confidential by the agency's employees. Services should be provided

11. Papazoglou and Tuttle, "Fighting Police Trauma."

12. Pole et al., "Resilience in Retired Police Officers."

in a private space where there is no risk of being seen by colleagues or superiors. Counselors should be appropriately credentialed (e.g., psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, licensed counselors). The service should be approachable; officers should know that even the chief would be willing to use this resource. Officers should be made aware in advance of any circumstances in which their career could be affected by what they tell an EAP counselor.

The EAP program should have the ability to refer users to a higher level of care at the agency's expense, should the need arise. A well-run EAP should have a process to record user satisfaction with the services provided while still maintaining privacy and confidentiality.

Organizational support

Ineffective or negative leadership in law enforcement organizations impacts the mental health of an entire department. Using a police stress questionnaire, researchers found that the biggest stressors for law enforcement officers in terms of organizational leadership are leaders' overemphasis on negatives, favoritism, inconsistent leadership style, and always feeling that they (that is, officers) have to prove themselves. When leaders do not reflect their subordinates' morals and values, those subordinates can feel uncomfortable, ashamed, or guilty and can even feel moral distress relating to policing in general.¹³ Agencies should coach their leaders toward positive leadership styles, grounded in encouraging those around them, emphasizing happy and healthy lifestyles, leading by example, and investing time into building community with officers and support staff.

Agencies can ensure that their leadership has competence in health and wellness by including an element of evaluation in this area when making hiring and promotion decisions. A journal article evaluating organizational solutions to the moral risks of policing proposes that a "promotion should be based on merit and a demonstrated ability to be the kind of leader who will uphold the organization's culture of wellness and ethics. Interview questions during the promotional process should require candidates to discuss their philosophy and to provide solutions to hypothetical scenarios related to the moral risks of policing. Can the candidate identify early warning signs of distress and, if so, what is the action plan? How will the candidate respond as signs of distress intensify?"¹⁴ The article goes on to suggest that "police leaders should consider implementing a mandatory training class for all supervisors and for all officers who are applying for promotion. The class can be tailored to the specific practices of each organization and provide attendees with a certificate of completion, which would be a necessary component of every candidate's promotional package."¹⁵ This training would cover aspects of the agency's values that supervisors should be aligned with and provide information on the organization's culture of wellness and ethics.

13. Simmons-Beauchamp and Sharpe, "The Moral Injury of Ineffective Police Leadership."

14. Blumberg, Papazoglou, and Schlosser, "Organizational Solutions."

15. Blumberg, Papazoglou, and Schlosser, "Organizational Solutions."



Physical Wellness

Physical fitness

Physical fitness is not only essential to job performance in law enforcement but also intrinsically linked to overall health and well-being. Research has suggested that law enforcement officers and civilian employees have “an increased risk of cardiovascular morbidity and mortality” compared to other professions.¹⁶ Agencies should consider providing incentives for officers to exercise, such as an annual physical fitness test, discounts for gym memberships, or time reserved during shifts for exercise. Some agencies host annual fitness challenges or competitions to serve as motivation. The benefits extend beyond physical health: Mental well-being is proven to be tied intrinsically to physical well-being. Research has shown that “the risk of depression is significantly higher for physically inactive individuals compared with regular exercisers.”¹⁷ Healthy and happy law enforcement professionals make for safer communities, and agencies should do all they can to support their employees every step of the way.

Injuries are also common in policing, often because of a lack of physical fitness. Shifts that involve sitting down in a car or at a desk for hours on end can lead to severe muscle tightness and make officers more injury-prone if they suddenly need to run or lift heavy objects. Maintaining mobility through exercise, strength training, and stretching can help prevent injury.¹⁸ Policing is often a physical job, and injury prevention is crucial to maintaining a strong and healthy force. Injury recovery is also essential to making sure officers are able to return to work quickly. Access to physical therapy via health insurance is important, and some of our agencies have reported choosing to contract a physical therapist to work with individual officers.

Sleep hygiene

Law enforcement officers have been shown to be at higher risk than the general public for sleep disorders.¹⁹ Sleep is one of the most important contributors to mental and physical health. As any overworked officer can attest, job performance significantly declines when sleep deprivation takes

16. Zimmerman, “Cardiovascular Disease.”

17. Weyerer and Kupfer, “Physical Exercise.”

18. Safran et al., “The Role of Warmup.”

19. Peterson et al., “Associations between Shift Work Characteristics.”

effect. Sleep disorders are significantly associated with increased risk of poor health, performance, and safety outcomes.²⁰ Agencies should provide information to employees about the risks of sleep deprivation and sleep disorders. These interventions should be targeted at law enforcement officers at the beginning of their career and those working the evening or night shift. At the same time, agencies should avoid unnecessarily contributing to their employees' sleep deprivation by, for example, frequently changing people's shifts. Other frequent threats to sleep in first responders are mandatory overtime and allowing excessive use of voluntary overtime opportunities. Agencies may consider evaluating overtime use with regard to the impact on sleep with a focus on officer wellness and community safety.

Nutrition

Healthy eating habits directly affect physical health and mood.²¹ Agencies should aim to provide education about nutrition for all employees. Offering access to healthy eating options can play an important role in employee health. Options include water bottle filling stations, healthy snack options in vending machines, providing water bottles and insulated coolers for officers on patrol, and offering healthy eating challenges as part of employee wellness initiatives. If possible, officers should be able to meet with a nutritionist for personalized advice on diet, especially for evening or night shift officers who can struggle to identify dining options outside of fast food during their shift.

20. Garbarino et al., "Sleep Quality among Police Officers."

21. Firth et al., "Food and Mood;" Moradell et al., "Effects of Diet–Exercise Interaction."



Holistic Wellness

Chaplain program

Spirituality is a large part of many officers' personal lives, and often officers are more comfortable sharing their traumatic experiences with a religious leader than a counselor. Chaplains can be especially helpful to officers who are suffering secondary trauma in the aftermath of a tragedy and are an underused resource for preventing suicide among public safety personnel. Chaplains can be critical resources in wellness crises, and they should be equipped to provide information about how officers can access mental health care should the need arise. If an agency cannot have a chaplain in-house, they can provide one or more contacts, ideally for a variety of faith traditions or someone nondenominational. Please see the IACP Police Chaplain Section at <https://www.theiacp.org/working-group/section/police-chaplain-section> and the Policy Resource Document at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/police-chaplains> for information, training, and a forum for discussion on law enforcement chaplain-specific topics.

Meditation

Breathing is an essential way to handle the fight-or-flight feeling in dangerous situations that can lead to mistakes, misconduct, and poor health. Meditation and breathing exercises are some of the best self-calming tactics and are scientifically proven to decrease feelings of anxiety or stress, especially in tense situations.²²

Like any other tactic, meditation takes practice to become second nature, and officers should be encouraged to learn and repeat breathing techniques—first in low-stakes situations to become comfortable with the exercise. In the same way that taking a deep, slow breath can calm a shaky hand before shooting at a target, the same type of breath can decrease feelings of anger, panic, or distress in a rapidly escalating situation in the field. Some agencies have encouraged healthy breathing by practicing self-calming during shift briefings. When the entire shift breathes well and together, it promotes a sense of camaraderie and gets the shift off to a calm, clear-headed start.

22. Vadivilavičius et al., "The Effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Interventions."

Yoga

The health and safety benefits of yoga include injury prevention and recovery, reduction in perceived levels of stress, and a sense of well-being.²³ Many star athletes and teams (e.g., LeBron James, Aaron Rodgers, the Seattle Seahawks, Calvin (Megatron) Johnson, Diana Taurassi, and the Los Angeles Clippers) practice yoga to strengthen and stretch muscles, prevent injury, and help maintain focus. Yoga has many physical and mental wellness benefits that can help officers personally and professionally. A regular opportunity to practice yoga at a law enforcement facility with fellow officers also offers a community-building opportunity.

Work-life balance

As much as possible, agencies should work to reduce the number of long shifts per week and prevent irregular schedules. While shift work is unavoidable, controlling overtime, creating consistent schedules, and reducing the duration and frequency of night and long shifts can help lower the high rate of burnout among law enforcement officers.²⁴ Agencies should target officers who work the night shift for wellness resources on sleep hygiene and nutrition.

23. Woodyard, “Exploring the Therapeutic Effects of Yoga.”

24. Paton, “Critical Incident Stress Risk.”



Financial Wellness

An employee's satisfaction depends in large part on a feeling that their agency cares about them as a whole person. There are many ways to demonstrate concern for employees' well-being, both now and in the future. Education and guidance about financial literacy, career goals and expectations, and preparing for life after retirement are effective messages that the agency cares about its people.

Financial planning

Financial insecurity can be a major source of anxiety; proper financial planning can help mitigate this kind of stress. Agencies should have resources for officers to become more financially literate and plan successfully for the future. People in all kinds of professions do not know the benefits of investing money or understand the different kinds of accounts they could be using to save. Financial empowerment creates opportunities and comfort outside of the workplace, which in turn greatly impacts career satisfaction.

Career guidance

Fulfillment at work impacts mental well-being. Agencies should provide their officers with guidance on their career trajectory, goals and expectations, and areas for skill development. Just as important is the provision of positive feedback, empowerment, and reinforcement. Mentoring programs are often beneficial for ambitious individuals to see an upward path at an agency and also provide an opportunity to build community and highlight officers as leaders within the agency. The disappointment of an unsuccessful application for promotion can be lessened by a discussion about ways to improve the candidate's chances for promotions in the future. When every employee is treated as a potential leader, their current performance improves as well.

Retirement planning

In many jurisdictions, law enforcement officers are able to retire at a relatively young age. Many will want to keep working, to enhance their retirement income and to replace the sense of purpose and camaraderie that they enjoyed in law enforcement. Agencies should be transparent with officers about retirement benefits and encourage them to think about saving for retirement on their own to maximize comfort and happiness. Financial planning resources should include information about retirement accounts and investments. For staff who wish to continue working after retirement, agencies might choose to offer some sort of vocational counseling to ensure that the rest of their lives are healthy and successful. For more information, please see the Retirement Toolkit published by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the IACP at https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/269171_IACP_LE_Retirement_Toolkit_508c.pdf.

Conclusion

Attention to employee health and wellness is a crucial pillar for the ABLE curriculum and program. This program aims to prepare law enforcement officers to intervene effectively to prevent harm within their departments and communities and foster a supportive peer intervention culture. Agencies interested in adopting the ABLE curriculum must adhere to the ABLE standards, which include providing access to mental health services, promoting employee assistance programs, and designating a wellness resource contact. For more detailed information on the ABLE program, its implementation, and additional wellness resources, law enforcement agencies can visit the Center for Innovations in Community Safety's ABLE website at <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/cics/able/> or contact the program directly at ABLE@georgetown.edu.

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About the Center for Innovations in Community Safety

The **Center for Innovations in Community Safety (CICS)** uses individual interventions and systems-level change to transform and end overreliance on policing and to mitigate the devastating impacts of racial and ethnic discrimination and economic inequality in the criminal legal system.

CICS leverages unparalleled expertise and experience, deep relationships with a broad spectrum of community stakeholders, and a commitment to community-based change to build programs that are designed to transform our community safety infrastructure.

Since its inception in 2020, CICS's flagship program Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) has grown exponentially and is now being implemented in more than 400 law enforcement agencies across more than 40 U.S. states and three Canadian provinces. ABLE agencies comprise approximately 170,000 law enforcement officers and serve approximately 100 million constituents. CICS's other flagship program—the Police for Tomorrow (PfT) Fellowship—is now in its fourth cohort, bringing together police officers to understand the social, historical, and scientific context within which they police and equipping them to shift the culture and practice of policing from the inside.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When law enforcement and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than \$20 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 138,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- More than 800,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations and the COPS Training Portal.
- More than 1,000 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than nine million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.

The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement. COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.

The COPS Office has partnered with Georgetown Law’s Center for Innovations in Community Safety to publish this guidance for agencies wishing to train their personnel in the ABLE curriculum—Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement. The ABLE curriculum creates a law enforcement culture of effective peer intervention to prevent harm to officers, departments, and communities; this publication provides additional information on programs, training, and resources specifically to reinforce employee wellness.



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