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**4 reasons public safety leaders should invest in mental wellness for first responders**

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First responders handle the most high-risk, urgent and dangerous events in their communities. Police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), paramedics and other public health workers all fall under the category of first responders, and the nature of their jobs can take a toll on their overall well-being. They often experience high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation, anxiety and depression.

[Lexipol](https://www.lexipol.com/) — a leader in policy, training and wellness support for first responders and public servants — is dedicated to helping public safety leaders promote mental health and wellness for their personnel. While there are many reasons to proactively address first responder wellness, following are four key reasons why public safety decision-makers should invest in mental health and wellness programs for first responders.

**1. Better Decision-Making**

It’s difficult for anyone to perform well at work when dealing with mental health issues. For first responders, mental illness can lead to critical mistakes and poor decision-making that impact them and the community. Firefighters, for example, [regularly suffer from sleep disorders](https://jadserve.postrelease.com/trk?ntv_at=4&ntv_ui=e5493169-488d-4610-b36d-fe2a530a9a47&ntv_a=jUAIAZdlcAwzIRA&ntv_fl=Fz9ZcMGwNjXy_vFxR6D-Uj5KW0D-l_hmQWN-neBTchDmEc71HU6pHq7RjTuauR205N09B14wAVJhAW6JRCzu0Sr5bxJ-jf6UHBs5PhDzhxbqJKnyDNBwQaCiiC-laJUo9cqx0wsa6yESeVLVVwtuCYFM3qFuFCWoceq8qldExqa1DlirIOtAqakXUG0Bhqp5tBNjWEjf_bQAnhZDWZCuvwULe-I0bZsYDz2wrEdzLwEUw2jaeuCWV4oP59GbDwLQhC8ZZBZDZvqdXKVqzUDon1v9mu-kOp2N_cV2p1x5OpEzDOG-c1d4ok4fr6fcGX9QIRHKubIw_2HX6CtrxthSnyIeigY_fPf43q2xc3vJRSA6b6Z3oSA_jyKP_8uWq6Ugh_zUTdhrE_TkhOtwkQcAyw4nrU6ws-fd4PnJEzOkIPDvazCtuGyUiFuX380o87y2&ord=-1757865155&ntv_ht=gCE7ZAA&prx_r=https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/11/141113085220.htm) that can lead to poor cardiovascular health and vehicle crashes, two leading causes of line-of-duty death among firefighters.

For law enforcement agencies, poor decision-making stemming from mental health issues increases costs associated with personnel complaints, lawsuits and settlements.

**2. Less Sick Leave**

According to a [2020 study](https://jadserve.postrelease.com/trk?ntv_at=4&ntv_ui=e5493169-488d-4610-b36d-fe2a530a9a47&ntv_a=jUAIAZdlcAwzIRA&ntv_fl=Fz9ZcMGwNjXy_vFxR6D-Uj5KW0D-l_hmQWN-neBTchDmEc71HU6pHq7RjTuauR205N09B14wAVJhAW6JRCzu0Sr5bxJ-jf6UHBs5PhDzhxbqJKnyDNBwQaCiiC-laJUo9cqx0wsa6yESeVLVVwtuCYFM3qFuFCWoceq8qldExqa1DlirIOtAqakXUG0Bhqp5tBNjWEjf_bQAnhZDWZCuvwULe-I0bZsYDz2wrEdzLwEUw2jaeuCWV4oP59GbDwLQhC8ZZBZDZvqdXKVqzUDon1v9mu-kOp2N_cV2p1x5OpEzDOG-c1d4ok4fr6fcGX9QIRHKubIw_2HX6CtrxthSnyIeigY_fPf43q2xc3vJRSA6b6Z3oSA_jyKP_8uWq6Ugh_zUTdhrE_TkhOtwkQcAyw4nrU6ws-fd4PnJEzOkIPDvazCtuGyUiFuX380o87y2&ord=-1757865155&ntv_ht=gCE7ZAA&prx_r=https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2763369), workers who experienced psychosocial stressors at work had higher rates of sick leave because of mental health issues. Increasing incidences of sick leave or disability due to PTSD or other mental illness can make it difficult for first responders to continue in their profession. Also, from a financial standpoint, public safety agencies and departments rack up overtime costs when personnel take sick or disability leave.

**Many agencies are new to wellness and lack the internal expertise and resources to create confidential wellness support tailored specifically for public safety employees.**

**3. Minimized Stress**

Because first responders are tasked with handling dangerous and complicated situations, they often experience stress that has real physical impacts. Stress isn’t just a mental health issue. It can also have physical side effects, including cardiac issues, diabetes, obesity, substance abuse and sleep issues. These health conditions make it difficult for first responders to function in their day-to-day lives both on and off the clock, and these conditions can follow them for years to come.

**4. Decreased Burnout and Turnover**

A [study from Utah State University](https://jadserve.postrelease.com/trk?ntv_at=4&ntv_ui=e5493169-488d-4610-b36d-fe2a530a9a47&ntv_a=jUAIAZdlcAwzIRA&ntv_fl=Fz9ZcMGwNjXy_vFxR6D-Uj5KW0D-l_hmQWN-neBTchDmEc71HU6pHq7RjTuauR205N09B14wAVJhAW6JRCzu0Sr5bxJ-jf6UHBs5PhDzhxbqJKnyDNBwQaCiiC-laJUo9cqx0wsa6yESeVLVVwtuCYFM3qFuFCWoceq8qldExqa1DlirIOtAqakXUG0Bhqp5tBNjWEjf_bQAnhZDWZCuvwULe-I0bZsYDz2wrEdzLwEUw2jaeuCWV4oP59GbDwLQhC8ZZBZDZvqdXKVqzUDon1v9mu-kOp2N_cV2p1x5OpEzDOG-c1d4ok4fr6fcGX9QIRHKubIw_2HX6CtrxthSnyIeigY_fPf43q2xc3vJRSA6b6Z3oSA_jyKP_8uWq6Ugh_zUTdhrE_TkhOtwkQcAyw4nrU6ws-fd4PnJEzOkIPDvazCtuGyUiFuX380o87y2&ord=-1757865155&ntv_ht=gCE7ZAA&prx_r=https://extension.usu.edu/heart/research/first-responder-mental-health) found that 70% of first responders reported not having enough time to recover from the traumatic events they experienced on the job. Without enough time to recover and a lack of access to mental health resources, many first responders experience burnout and leave the profession altogether. This means departments must spend more on recruiting, training, equipping new personnel and other turnover costs when first responders choose to leave the agency due to chronic stress or feeling unsupported.

While many agency and local government leaders want to support first responders’ mental health by providing policies, training and resources, the [cultural stigma around mental health](https://jadserve.postrelease.com/trk?ntv_at=4&ntv_ui=e5493169-488d-4610-b36d-fe2a530a9a47&ntv_a=jUAIAZdlcAwzIRA&ntv_fl=Fz9ZcMGwNjXy_vFxR6D-Uj5KW0D-l_hmQWN-neBTchDmEc71HU6pHq7RjTuauR205N09B14wAVJhAW6JRCzu0Sr5bxJ-jf6UHBs5PhDzhxbqJKnyDNBwQaCiiC-laJUo9cqx0wsa6yESeVLVVwtuCYFM3qFuFCWoceq8qldExqa1DlirIOtAqakXUG0Bhqp5tBNjWEjf_bQAnhZDWZCuvwULe-I0bZsYDz2wrEdzLwEUw2jaeuCWV4oP59GbDwLQhC8ZZBZDZvqdXKVqzUDon1v9mu-kOp2N_cV2p1x5OpEzDOG-c1d4ok4fr6fcGX9QIRHKubIw_2HX6CtrxthSnyIeigY_fPf43q2xc3vJRSA6b6Z3oSA_jyKP_8uWq6Ugh_zUTdhrE_TkhOtwkQcAyw4nrU6ws-fd4PnJEzOkIPDvazCtuGyUiFuX380o87y2&ord=-1757865155&ntv_ht=gCE7ZAA&prx_r=https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/i-team-nearly-1-in-5-cops-has-considered-suicide-amid-stigma-around-mental-health-issues/1817436/) has prevented many officers from seeking help for emotional and behavioral issues.

Another issue is that many agencies are new to wellness and lack the internal expertise and resources to create confidential wellness support tailored specifically for public safety employees. They often don’t have an existing culture or framework to support first responders’ mental health. Also, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) often don’t meet the real needs of first responders. For example, a recent survey of firefighters who used wellness resources through an EAP found that 63% of respondents didn’t find the EAP program helpful.

While there are no easy solutions to mental health crises among first responders, Lexipol has created the [Cordico wellness app](https://jadserve.postrelease.com/trk?ntv_at=4&ntv_ui=e5493169-488d-4610-b36d-fe2a530a9a47&ntv_a=jUAIAZdlcAwzIRA&ntv_fl=Fz9ZcMGwNjXy_vFxR6D-Uj5KW0D-l_hmQWN-neBTchDmEc71HU6pHq7RjTuauR205N09B14wAVJhAW6JRCzu0Sr5bxJ-jf6UHBs5PhDzhxbqJKnyDNBwQaCiiC-laJUo9cqx0wsa6yESeVLVVwtuCYFM3qFuFCWoceq8qldExqa1DlirIOtAqakXUG0Bhqp5tBNjWEjf_bQAnhZDWZCuvwULe-I0bZsYDz2wrEdzLwEUw2jaeuCWV4oP59GbDwLQhC8ZZBZDZvqdXKVqzUDon1v9mu-kOp2N_cV2p1x5OpEzDOG-c1d4ok4fr6fcGX9QIRHKubIw_2HX6CtrxthSnyIeigY_fPf43q2xc3vJRSA6b6Z3oSA_jyKP_8uWq6Ugh_zUTdhrE_TkhOtwkQcAyw4nrU6ws-fd4PnJEzOkIPDvazCtuGyUiFuX380o87y2&ord=-1757865155&ntv_ht=gCE7ZAA&prx_r=https://www.lexipol.com/solutions/wellness-resources/) to help agencies invest in and promote personnel wellness.

Cordico is an award-winning tech-forward wellness product that delivers high-quality tools, resources and assessments to public safety workers. Using this app, first responders can learn about behavioral health, build and maintain resilience and connect with therapists and peer support team members. The app does not collect personal data, ensuring anonymity, and offers a one-touch crisis response for users. To learn more about how this wellness solution can help enhance first responders’ overall wellness, visit [Cordico.com](https://www.cordico.com/).