



LEADING THE WAY

California Sets the Standard in Addressing Behavioral Health in the Fire Service

Firefighters are 10 times more likely to contemplate or attempt suicide than the general population. Since 2014, more firefighters have died by suicide than in on-duty incidents. Post-traumatic stress injury is the health and safety issue of the 21st Century for the fire service. (WATCH: Breaking the Stigma at HealingOurOwn.org/cafighters).

A Record of Leadership. In California, labor and management have come together to lead the response to this crisis and protect those who protect all of us.

2016

- **April:** California Professional Firefighters (CPF) Biennial Convention resolution calls for partnership with California Fire Chiefs Association (Cal Chiefs) to convene a **joint labor-management conference on behavioral health** and post traumatic stress in the fire service.
- **December:** The first in the nation Joint Labor-Management Behavioral Health Conference is held in Sacramento, drawing more than 200 attendees. Among the topics:
 - Breaking the stigma about behavioral health in the fire service
 - Exchanging strategies and experiences with national mental health experts
 - Discussing best practices for peer support programs

2017

- **May:** CPF, Cal Chiefs, Cal OES and the California Firefighter Joint Apprenticeship Committee (Cal-JAC) establish the first in the nation Fire Service Behavioral Health Task Force. The 14-member working group established as its mission:
 - **Building awareness** about mental and emotional effects of the job and breaking the stigma surrounding behavioral health issues;
 - **Gathering and disseminating information** and resources about mental health and suicide, targeting firefighters;
 - **Establishing and training peer support teams** within fire departments, including an inter-departmental peer support network;
 - **Identifying best practices** addressing prevention, intervention and post-crisis strategies.

- **October:** North Bay Firestorm
 - Peer support access immediately set up on the scene by CAL FIRE;
 - Local union and agency peer supporters deployed from Sacramento, Berkeley, Alameda Co. and other agencies;
 - Behavioral Health Task Force members participate in and help with deployment.
- **October:** Las Vegas Route 91 shooting
 - Task Force members assist in deploying trained peer supporters to Las Vegas
 - Peer support resources made available on-scene and with California firefighters who survived the shooting (15 California firefighters were shot in the attack).
- **November:** Task Force establishes HealingOurOwn.org – a **first in the nation** firefighter-sponsored website, providing behavioral health resources directly to firefighters and departments.

2018

- **July:** Behavioral Health Task Force representative placed on FIRESCOPE, a fire-service working group comprised of labor and management.
 - Through FIRESCOPE, the Task Force is working to establish a process to ensure that peer support teams can be formally ordered as part of the mutual aid response to large-scale disasters. Through the state's Resource Ordering and Status System (ROSS).
- **July:** The Carr Fire
 - Regional peer support resources engaged to aid Redding Fire Department after the horrific line-of-duty death of Fire Inspector Jeremy Stoke.
 - CAL FIRE organizes peer support center on-site at the incident command center, providing immediate support for firefighters from all agencies.
- **September:** First statewide Suicide Awareness and Safety Stand Down
 - During National Suicide Awareness Month, the Task Force and its partnering groups organize training “stand down” in fire stations throughout California.
 - During now-annual statewide effort, participants engage in discussions and training on suicide awareness and prevention, with tools and support from the Task Force.
- **November:** Camp Fire/Woolsey Fire
 - Task Force members mobilized peer supporters immediately to Chico and Malibu. ([WATCH: CAL FIRE behavioral health services on site at Camp Fire ICC at HealingOurOwn.org/cafighters](https://HealingOurOwn.org/cafighters))

2019

- **January:** A Behavioral Health Task Force member is placed on the labor-management committee rewriting **Firefighter I training**; Through the process, California establishes first in the nation behavioral health protocol directly into state-standard Firefighter I training.
- **April:** Through the [**California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists \(CAMFT\)**](#) Convention, the Behavioral Health Task Force provides direct training to clinicians on becoming “culturally competent” in the fire service. The training is so successful that CAMFT has asked that the training be provided to all of their members throughout the state.
- **Summer:** Gilroy Garlic Festival Shooting, El Paso shooting, Hurricane Dorian
 - Task Force members mobilize peer supporters to the scene.
 - Task Force chair Dave Gillotte deployed to El Paso shooting as part of IAFF behavioral health team response.

A Vision for the Future

This Fall: Cal-JAC 15th Biennial Joint Labor-Management Conference:

- Workshop on how a fire department can effectively create a peer support team and how to deploy it when necessary.

This Fall: Suicide Prevention Training in the Firehouse

- A partnership with CPF, Cal-JAC, California Fire Foundation and Living Works will provide suicide prevention workshops for firefighters throughout the state.
- Currently, a grant will pay for 1,600 firefighters to be trained in 2019.

2019-2020: FEMA – National First Responder Peer Support

- The Behavioral Health Task Force will develop a **first in the nation** peer support deployment team to be utilized in major natural disasters throughout the country.

LEARN MORE: Watch the stories of firefighters’ struggles, get the facts about post-traumatic stress injury and see how firefighters are answering the call for each other.

HealingOurOwn.org/cafirefighters