

Wellness Program

1031.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on establishing and maintaining a proactive wellness program for office members.

The wellness program is intended to be a holistic approach to a member's well-being and encompasses aspects such as physical fitness, mental health, and overall wellness.

Additional information on member wellness is provided in the:

- Chaplains Policy.
- Line-of-Duty Deaths Policy.
- Drug- and Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy.

For procedures related to the Wellness Program, see the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office LE Procedures Manual: [Peer Support Program](#)

1031.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office to prioritize member wellness to foster fitness for duty and support a healthy quality of life for office members. The Office will maintain a wellness program that supports its members with proactive wellness resources, critical incident response, and follow-up support.

1031.3 PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The Sheriff should appoint a trained wellness coordinator. The coordinator should report directly to the Sheriff or the authorized designee and should collaborate with advisers (e.g., Human Resources Department, legal counsel, licensed psychotherapist, qualified health professionals), as appropriate, to fulfill the responsibilities of the position, including but not limited to:

- (a) Identifying wellness support providers (e.g., licensed psychotherapists, external peer support providers, physical therapists, dietitians, physical fitness trainers holding accredited certifications).
 1. As appropriate, selected providers should be trained and experienced in providing mental wellness support and counseling to public safety personnel.
 2. When practicable, the Office should not use the same licensed psychotherapist for both member wellness support and fitness for duty evaluations.
- (b) Developing management and operational procedures for office peer support members, such as:
 1. Peer support member selection and retention.
 2. Training and applicable certification requirements.
 3. Deployment.

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4. Managing potential conflicts between peer support members and those seeking service.
 5. Monitoring and mitigating peer support member emotional fatigue (i.e., compassion fatigue) associated with providing peer support.
 6. Using qualified peer support personnel from other public safety agencies or outside organizations for office peer support, as appropriate.
- (c) Verifying members have reasonable access to peer support or licensed psychotherapist support.
- (d) Establishing procedures for CISDs, including:
1. Defining the types of incidents that may initiate debriefings.
 2. Steps for organizing debriefings.
- (e) Facilitating the delivery of wellness information, training, and support through various methods appropriate for the situation (e.g., phone hotlines, electronic applications).
- (f) Verifying a confidential, appropriate, and timely Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available for members. This also includes:
1. Obtaining a written description of the program services.
 2. Providing for the methods to obtain program services.
 3. Providing referrals to the EAP for appropriate diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up resources.
 4. Obtaining written procedures and guidelines for referrals to, or mandatory participation in, the program.
 5. Obtaining training for supervisors in their role and responsibilities, and identification of member behaviors that would indicate the existence of member concerns, problems, or issues that could impact member job performance.
 6. Meeting the requirements of Md. Code PS § 3-523 for no cost mental health assistance for deputies to address their personal and work-related concerns, including stress, financial issues, legal issues, family problems, office conflicts, and alcohol and substance abuse disorders.

1031.4 OFFICE PEER SUPPORT

1031.4.1 PEER SUPPORT MEMBER SELECTION CRITERIA

The peer support coordinator will make recommendations to the Sheriff for selection of office peer support members.

1031.4.2 PEER SUPPORT MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of the office peer support members include:

- (a) Providing pre- and post-critical incident support.

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- (b) Presenting office members with periodic training on wellness topics, including but not limited to:
 - 1. Stress management.
 - 2. Suicide prevention.
 - 3. How to access support resources.
- (c) Providing referrals to licensed psychotherapists and other resources, where appropriate.
 - 1. Referrals should be made to office-designated resources in situations that are beyond the scope of the peer support member's training.

1031.4.3 PEER SUPPORT MEMBER TRAINING

A office peer support member should complete office-approved training prior to being assigned.

1031.5 CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFINGS

A Critical Incident Stress Debriefing should occur as soon as practicable following a critical incident. The coordinator is responsible for organizing the debriefing. Notes and recorded statements shall not be taken because the sole purpose of the debriefing is to help mitigate the stress-related effects of a critical incident.

The debriefing is not part of any investigative process. Care should be taken not to release or repeat any communication made during a debriefing unless otherwise authorized by policy, law, or a valid court order.

Attendance at the debriefing should only include peer support members and those directly involved in the incident.

1031.6 PEER SUPPORT COMMUNICATIONS

Although the Office will honor the sensitivity of communications with peer support members, there is no legal privilege to such communications except as provided in Md. Code PS § 3-523.

1031.7 WELLNESS PROGRAM AUDIT

February 1 of every year, the coordinator or the authorized designee should audit the effectiveness of the office's wellness program and prepare a report summarizing the findings.

1031.8 EAP REQUIRED ASSISTANCE

Before returning to full duty, the following should be offered or provided to a deputy as part of the EAP (Md. Code PS § 3-523):

- (a) A voluntary mental health consultation and voluntary counseling services if the deputy was involved in an incident that contained an accident resulting in a fatality.
- (b) A mandatory mental health consultation and voluntary counseling services for a deputy seriously injured, involved in a shooting, or involved in a use of force that resulted in a death or a serious injury.

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1031.9 TRAINING

The coordinator or the authorized designee should collaborate with the Training Coordinator to provide all members with regular education and training on topics related to member physical and mental health and wellness, including but not limited to:

- The availability and range of office wellness support systems.
- Suicide prevention.
- Recognizing and managing mental distress, emotional fatigue, post-traumatic stress, and other possible reactions to trauma.
- Alcohol and substance disorder awareness.
- Countering sleep deprivation and physical fatigue.
- Anger management.
- Marriage and family wellness.
- Benefits of exercise and proper nutrition.
- Effective time and personal financial management skills.

Training materials, curriculum, and attendance records should be forwarded to the Training Coordinator as appropriate for inclusion in training records.