

Opioid crisis and police addiction

[Government](#), [Military](#)



Contemporary Approach Addressing Police and Addiction:

Most law enforcement recruits have no idea what awaits them as far as the dangers they face, not only from the work but even more, from the stress, long and sometimes unpredictable hours, sudden schedule changes, organizational stress and the toll it takes on their physical, spiritual and emotional well-being. After enduring and suppressing the compounded effects of a job that is at times unforgiving, some turn to unhealthy and sometimes deadly behaviors such as drugs and alcohol. Sadly, law enforcement agencies conduct little serious training regarding this important topic. Addictions is a disease that destroys every aspect of life.

Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies do not conduct adequate training regarding the issues of drug abuse. When managers are confronted with an employee who is struggling with issues, sometimes those employees who pose problems have an addiction issue, and agencies are not adequately trained to deal with the situation so they either administer harsh discipline or fire the officer.

It is imperative that senior managers of law enforcement agencies including the District Attorney's Office should seek to provide comprehensive, meaningful training on the opioid crisis and drug/alcohol abuse issues impacting the law enforcement profession. Reassessing agency training programs to include recruit training programs is paramount to make sure officers early in their careers are current regarding best practices of maintaining wellness and healthy outlets for stress. The training should incorporate agency awareness training each year to remind employees of

the resources available to them. Law enforcement managers need to make their personnel aware of the behaviors that are unacceptable but at the same time the support available for issues of mental health without retribution or intrusion. They should know that there are solutions for nearly every situation they may face.

All-inclusive addiction training will prepare all personnel for unpredictable events that could change their lives forever such as serious injuries and critical incidents. The training will also enhance productivity day to day. Training regarding drug addiction will aid officers when interacting with the public if these situations arise. Thorough knowledge of the disease would help officers more effectively deal with the public, as well as their colleagues. Leaders should determine now what they can do to provide at-risk employees with the support and resources they need to deal with their addictions (Vanmeter, M., FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin Leadership Spotlight, January 6, 2016).

Law Enforcement Officer Safety and Wellness:

In conclusion emergency services personnel and specifically law enforcement, face many dangers from their day to day operations and their interaction with their own organization. In addition, just the fact that work conditions are taxing on the body and emotions can cause stress. Continued exposure to various traumatic situations may not initially cause post traumatic symptoms, but in time the experiences if not addressed and properly dealt with could lead to troubles for the officer later in their career. That coupled with poor sleeping, poor nutrition, other life difficulties could

exasperate an already stressed out, burned out officer. To help officers cope and avoid undesirable behaviors such as excessive alcohol use, drug use and abuse, programs should be implemented to address all areas of health and wellness. As an officer proceeds through his law enforcement career year after year, he needs to have the tools provided by his agency to address health and wellness. The organization needs to take responsibility to provide the programs needed for the officers to be able to proactively address potential health issues. Studies show several areas that officers need to maintain for better health:

Spinal Protection:

Police officers are consistently in positions that have the potential to cause discomfort and result in spinal injuries (Williams, J., & Ramsey, V. (2017).

Cardiovascular Fitness:

Creating basic physical preparation intervention programs to improve cardiovascular fitness levels in LEP will likely improve quality of life, extend life, and improve performance (Williams, J., & Ramsey, V. (2017).

Strength and Power:

Past interventions have found success at improving maximal strength and power qualities (Williams, J., & Ramsey, V. (2017).

Speed and Agility:

Police officers often engage in foot pursuits that can involve maneuvering around objects, running upstairs, and jumping over permanent structures such as ditches and walls (Williams, J., & Ramsey, V. (2017).

Nutrition and Body Composition:

Higher protein diets can prove very effective for weight loss goals as well as high retention rates (Williams, J., & Ramsey, V. (2017).

Improving Health:

In addition to reducing healthcare and absenteeism costs, interventions should include exercise programming common to all fitness populations. Stationary bicycles, treadmills, squat racks, and dumbbells are suggested.

Managing these areas to maintain better health will also help personnel when dealing with psychological pressures that cause frustration and anger. When people are provided outlets to work thru psychological stress, they will benefit in both body and soul.

An additional program that managers should implement is the buddy system, or as they say in the Air Force, a wingman. Another officer who would be willing to befriend a troubled comrade. Accountability, chaperone, driver or whatever the officer needs.

One last note that all emergency services managers must consider. Implementing a proactive Chaplaincy program which is crucial to the wellbeing of these brave and noble few in our society who give so much of themselves. A proactive program is one where the Chaplains show up at roll calls, make personal contact with officers and offer their services to them. An officer struggling with issues may take the opportunity to share his heart in confidence.

Had these programs been in place a couple years ago, I know of three law enforcement officers who would still be on the job today. But because of the feeling of nowhere to turn, they ended losing their careers, families, friends and for a couple, their freedom.