

LIVE WEBINAR

# Enhancing Wellness for Criminal Justice Professionals:

Innovative Programs for Law  
Enforcement Officers and Prosecutors



**DATE**  
19 September



**TIME**  
1:00 - 2:30 PM ET



**ADDICTION  
POLICY FORUM**

# Our Presenters



**Mary  
Ashley**

*Deputy District  
Attorney, San  
Bernardino County*



**Domingo  
Herraiz**

*International  
Association of Chiefs  
of Police (IACP)*



**Dr. Jennifer  
Johnson**

*Michigan State  
University*

# About NCHATS

NCHATS is a new research center **funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)** that will test ways to reduce suicide among justice-involved individuals.

The Center is meant to build information bridges between healthcare organizations and justice systems to identify individuals at risk for suicide and connect them to care



## The Problem

- **1 death by suicide every 11 minutes**
- Suicide is the **11th leading cause of death** nationwide
- **1 in 5 who die by suicide** spent at least one night in jail in the past year
- County and local jails do not have the capacity to coordinate care adequately due to **high jail admission and discharge volumes, short jail stays, and understaffing**



# Mission & Vision



The goal is to find scalable ways to build information bridges between healthcare organizations and justice systems to identify individuals at risk for suicide and connect them to care.

- Use contact with the justice system as a novel indicator of suicide risk

- Link big data systems that efficiently track publicly available data on justice involvement to health system records

- Evaluate the clinical and cost-effectiveness of suicide prevention activities that bridge justice contacts and community care



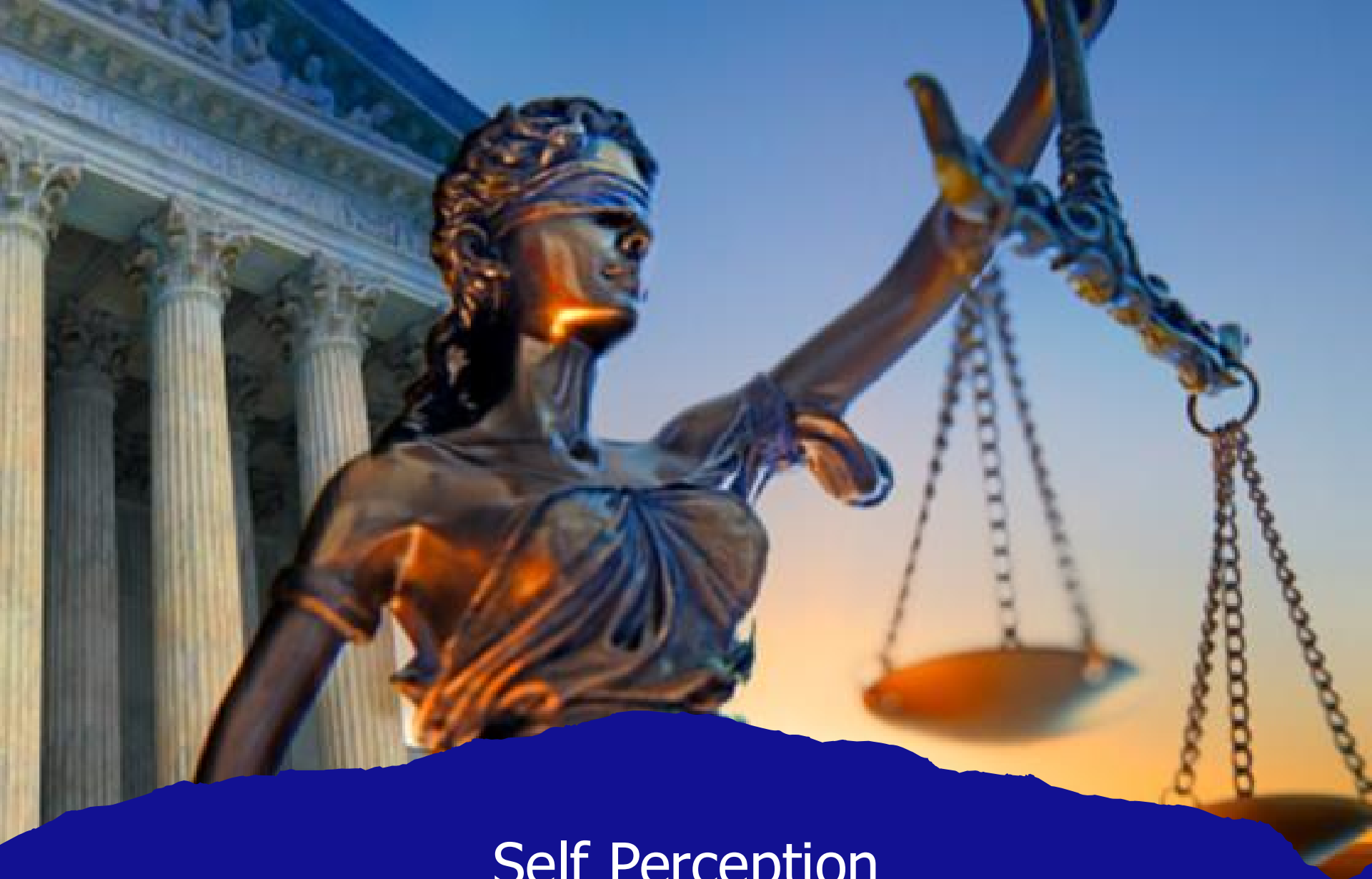
Reducing suicide risk after jail detention and ensuring better coordination of care between county jails and healthcare systems.

# The Verdict is In: Well-Being Is No Longer an Option for Criminal Justice Professionals

Presented by: Mary Ashley  
Deputy District Attorney



September 19, 2025  
NCHATS



Self Perception

Probably how I appeared to  
friends and family







# The Cost of Caring

- Secondary/Vicarious Trauma – we are exposed to far more traumatic events than the average person
- Compassion Fatigue
- Burnout



# Ted X Mile High Talk

- How Lawyers Can Struggle with Secondary Trauma – released in December, 2024
- Michael J. Rourke, District Attorney, Weld County, Colorado
- Viewed 20,000 times as of February, 2025 on *Youtube*
- Calls for an institutional reckoning and a permanent shift for how we treat mental health for prosecutors

# National Retention Survey

2024 National District Attorneys Association, June  
– Approximately 5,000 prosecutors responded  
across the country – Reasons for joining the  
profession – 93% like being a prosecutor

Doing justice for community

Belief in mission of organization

Opportunity for Trial Work

# Retention

57% responded they have seriously considered leaving employer

48% within the last month

22% within the last six months

11% within the last six to twelve months  
19% within the last year

Primary  
motivators  
for  
wanting to  
leave

1. Better Pay
2. MY OWN WELL- BEING
3. Heavy Caseloads

Why Stay?

Doing Justice for my  
community, passionate  
about prosecution, believe  
in mission of organization

# How was well-being defined?

Exhaustion, Stress, anxiety,  
coping in unhealthy ways,  
impacts to my health from  
the work

## Why the Focus on Wellbeing?

- Increase profession retention
- Increase engagement and productivity
- Boost morale
- Enhance ability to recruit young attorneys into the profession
- Competence, ethics & connection

# American Bar Association

- In 2017, the ABA released a report which includes a call to action for lawyer wellness
- Included recommendations for training, education and peer teams
- Recommended the rules of professional responsibility be modified to include well-being within competency
- California incorporated the ability to get MCLE credits – now both for general wellness and for Prevention & Detection



# Why is this important?

Law Enforcement has high suicide rates, health problems, family stress/divorce

The legal profession also has high rates of depression, alcohol abuse and suicide rates on are the rise\*

\*Cho, Attorney Suicide: What Every Lawyer Needs to Know

# The Evidence is in on Lawyer Well- Being

- 36% qualify as problem drinkers
- 28 % report mild or higher depression symptoms
- 19% report mild or higher anxiety symptoms
- Attorneys ranked #8 in a study of suicide by occupation. Rate is 1.33 times the national “norm”
- [Lawyerwellbeing.net](http://Lawyerwellbeing.net) – Institute for Well-Being in Law

# National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being

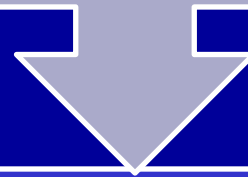
- The Path to Lawyer Well-Being, American Bar Association – Practical recommendations for positive change – released report in 2020
- Well-being is a part of a lawyer's **ethical** duty of competence.
- Well-being consists of emotional, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, spiritual
- Not merely the absence of dysfunction nor limited to being “happy”

# The Federal Government now recognizes the need

- President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice Report
- Hearing on Law Enforcement Wellness (2020)
- Report identifies prosecutors, investigators and victim advocates as criminal justice partners who are regularly exposed to traumatic situations that negatively affect their resiliency. [www.justice.gov](http://www.justice.gov)
- Identified peer support, mental health checks and education as tools

# DOJ Report

Practices to Foster a Culture of Wellness  
and Psychological Health and Well-Being  
of Law Enforcement Agency Personnel



Links to grants, Vicarious Trauma  
Toolkit, numerous articles and research  
recommendations

# What Can We Do?

- Try to create flexibility when possible – schedules, assignments, rotations
- Can teach people to take better care of themselves – sleep, nutrition, hydration, breathing, exercise, brain health, setting boundaries, activities outside of work, stress management
- Utilize peer support teams within the office or outside services for culturally competent counseling
- Create healthy spaces for stress reduction – i.e. puzzle rooms, walking breaks, adult coloring spaces
- Programs that allow for time away from office – Be Well to Serve Well – San Diego
- Provide education & training on prevention strategies (webinars, lunch & learn, training days)

Where does  
Peer  
Support  
Come  
From?

Primarily modeled after  
law enforcement and first  
responder programs

Concept is well known in  
the substance abuse and  
mental health field

We see it now in many  
areas – diet, exercise,  
motivational team building



# Resources

- [www.thecounselingteam.com](http://www.thecounselingteam.com)
  - 909-884-0133 or 800-222-9691
  - [www.copline.org](http://www.copline.org)
  - 800-267-5463
  - First Responder Wellness – 888-443-4898  
[www.firstresponder-wellness.com](http://www.firstresponder-wellness.com)
- 988 – Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

# NDAA Well-Being Committee

Free wellness app for members (Cordico)

Access to numerous wellness articles, blogs, webinars and resources

Annual Prosecutor Well-Being Conference

# **Your 24/7 Wellness Resource**

- Confidential
- Anonymous
- Accessible 24/7
- Available for you and your significant others
- Self-Assessments  
PTSD, sleep, stress and more
- Wellness Content  
videos & articles on 50+ topics
- Peer Support & Therapist Finder



## Wellness Thursdays" Webinar on The Effects of Burnout and Compassion Fatigue



# Wellness Thursdays

12:30pm-1:30pm



**Effects of Burnout and  
Compassion Fatigue**  
July 25th, 2024



**Understanding  
Behavioral Health**  
September 12th, 2024



**Diversity in the  
Workplace**  
November 14th, 2024

**Dealing With Difficult  
People in the Workplace**  
August 22nd, 2024



**Finding Life  
Balance**  
October 17th, 2024



**Cultivation Resilient  
Responders**  
December 19th, 2024





# THRIVING THROUGH CHAOS

SURVIVAL GEAR  
FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
PROFESSIONALS

Staying Well in the  
Trenches of Trauma



**KIRSTEN H. PABST**

Chair of National District Attorneys Association Prosecutor Wellbeing Task Force

+  
•  
o

# Smash the Stigma\*

- Creating an atmosphere that encourages one another to communicate, take care of themselves and prioritize their families and well-being
- Eliminating the idea that seeking help is a weakness
- \*Michael Sugrue, Retired Police Sgt., professional speaker on PTSD



# Officer Resilience Training

- Developed by IACP in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania, combining research-backed methods with IACP's deep expertise in law enforcement
- Designed to provide officers with practical, skill-based tools to manage stress, sustain optimism, and strengthen support networks
- Serves as a proactive wellness strategy by addressing burnout, hopelessness, and isolation before crises occur

# Supporting Growth After Tragedy Training

- Designed to help agencies support personnel in the aftermath of both major critical incidents (such as line-of-duty deaths, officer suicide, or mass violence) and the cumulative traumas of policing
- Emphasizes post-traumatic growth and resilience, equipping officers and agencies to process trauma in healthy ways and move toward long-term well-being
- Provides participants with practical strategies for peer support, leadership communication, and resource connection following traumatic experiences

# Supporting Growth After Tragedy Training (cont.)

- Encourages agencies to prepare in advance by incorporating recovery and growth principles into their wellness culture, reducing the risk of long-term harm
- Helps create an organizational environment where officers can acknowledge the impact of trauma, receive support, and emerge stronger, both individually and collectively

# IACP Family Wellness Work

- Help agencies design and strengthen family wellness initiatives, recognizing families as vital partners in officer well-being
- Customized training, technical assistance, and practical resources to agencies across the country
- Equip families to recognize early warning signs of stress, understand the impacts of trauma, and encourage help-seeking
- Build stronger family–agency connections, embedding family wellness into overall officer safety and wellness strategies

# National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide

- Breaking Stigma, Building Wellness
- A multidisciplinary group of law enforcement personnel (leaders and line officers), clinicians, researchers, and representatives from federal agencies and national organizations
- Partners from public health, criminal justice, and behavioral health organizations, as well as law enforcement associations
- A national platform for collaboration, policy development, and dissemination of evidence-informed strategies to reduce officer suicide

# National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide

- Current focus includes the emerging link between acquired brain injuries (ABIs) and suicide risk, broadening awareness of how neurological factors affect officer wellness
- Policies, documents and practical resources that agencies can use to strengthen prevention, intervention and postvention efforts
- Emphasis on cultural change, leadership commitment, peer engagement, and reducing stigma

# Current Gaps in Suicide Prevention Programming

- Intersection of Suicide Risk and Officer Discipline/Decertification - Officers under investigation often feel isolated, ashamed, and cut off from peer support, a major unaddressed suicide risk
- Intersection with Firearms Access and Safe Storage Police officers have constant access to the most lethal means of suicide, which require unique prevention strategies around safe storage, off-duty policies, or peer interventions
- Intersection of Suicide Risk and Relationship Breakdown Family and relationship strain is one of the strongest known predictors of suicide. While we have family wellness resources, there needs to be more integration with suicide prevention frameworks



# Community of Practice

- Functions as a peer-learning network for agencies to share lessons learned, promising practices, and challenges in implementing family wellness programs
- Engages agencies of all sizes, including smaller and rural departments, to ensure scalability and adaptability of strategies
- Strengthens national capacity for sustainable, family-inclusive officer wellness

# LEADING THE NATION IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

## AFTER A SUICIDE IN BLUE: A Guide for Law Enforcement Agencies

The tragic death of a law enforcement officer by suicide is often a shock and requires immediate next steps to support the department, family, and loved one's as they process and deal with the impact. It can be an overwhelming experience and executive level and command staff may find it difficult to determine how to appropriately respond without access to sound,

evidence-informed not. This resource outlines in suicide prevention including actions to suicide loss as well having available ex

### What is Postvention?

Postvention is the organized response to the aftermath of a suicide. A comprehensive postvention response assists in addressing the complex factors after a member of law enforcement suicide death with the goal of providing effective and compassionate support, promoting healing, and reducing the risk of suicidal thinking and behavior for those impacted. This document provides guidance for police agencies in responding to the suicide death of an officer, with considerations for several key areas.

#### Key components include:

- Protocols addressing funeral policies
- Family, agency, and community notification
- Training
- Communication including media relations
- Post-incident counseling and agency-wide mental health awareness actions

Implementing a comprehensive postvention response is a critical component of prevention. In postvention,

there is an intent supporting of also prevents mental health effects that if and possible have experienced first one in contagious contagious foundation culture, there is and pr and fi of the its is age En the Er

### Who are the Key Aud During Postve

Postvention efforts should address every member of the agency, from new recruits up to agency leadership. Police agencies are comprised of individuals who have a shared common bond of committing their lives to protect and serve. This bond can create a true feeling of family that may result in real grief, even among those who did not personally know the deceased.

Those that responded to the suicide death should also be carefully considered in postvention efforts. Police officers that responded to the suicide death may have

## Comprehensive Framework for Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention

# OSW Annual Conference

