

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

# **SUICIDE PREVENTION STAND DOWN WEEK TOOLKIT**

Sept. 9-13, 2024



[iaff.org/behavioral-health](https://iaff.org/behavioral-health)

# SUICIDE PREVENTION STAND DOWN WEEK

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To protect and promote the behavioral health of IAFF members, open conversations about fire fighter mental health, coping with personal and occupational stress, and suicide prevention are essential. To elevate these important conversations throughout the IAFF membership, **the IAFF is instituting a Suicide Prevention Stand Down the week of Sept. 9–13<sup>th</sup>, 2024, in recognition of National Suicide Prevention Month.**

## WHY IS THE IAFF HAVING A SUICIDE PREVENTION STAND DOWN?

Over the past few years, many IAFF Locals have participated in various safety stand downs, positively impacting thousands of IAFF members across Canada and the United States. The goal of an IAFF Suicide Prevention Stand Down is to:

- Raise awareness of suicide in the fire service
- Educate IAFF members on suicide risk factors and warning signs
- Connect members to available behavioral health resources
- Promote social connection
- Increase help-seeking behavior

By encouraging Locals and fire departments to participate in a Suicide Prevention Stand Down, the IAFF hopes to reduce the number of suicides in the fire service and enhance the overall behavioral health of our sisters and brothers.

A Suicide Prevention Stand Down also provides each Local and fire department the opportunity to discuss safety policies, behavioral health goals, and resources available to their members.

During the Suicide Prevention Stand Down, the IAFF will host a webinar on World Suicide Prevention Day, *Suicide Prevention in the Fire Service: Strategies to Save a Life*. Please visit [iaff.org/behavioral-health/recovery-month](https://iaff.org/behavioral-health/recovery-month) to register and learn what you can do to save a life.

## WHO CAN BE INVOLVED IN THE IAFF SUICIDE PREVENTION STAND DOWN?

Any Local/fire department can host an IAFF Suicide Prevention Stand Down in their respective municipalities throughout September 2024 and beyond. Locals/fire departments can provide focused discussions on topics such as suicide prevention, recognizing the risks factors and warning signs of suicide, and where to find resources and assistance. IAFF Locals/fire departments can take advantage of the suggested five-day action plan offered in this toolkit.

It is important for Peer Support teams, Local affiliate leaders, fire department administration, and health and wellness personnel to identify local resources available to members, such as your local Peer Support team, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), as well as national resources, like the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#), the [IAFF Center of Excellence](#), and Canada's [Edgewood Health Network \(EHN\)](#).

## CONNECT ONLINE

IAFF Local affiliates, IAFF Peer Support teams, IAFF members, and fire administrations can follow the IAFF on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and X. The IAFF encourages members to post a message about suicide in the fire service, using **#SuicideSafetyStandDown2024** and tag the IAFF at **@IAFFOfficial** to show support to our brothers and sisters and help promote awareness of fire fighter suicide.

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## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT FIRE FIGHTER SUICIDE?

While the **actual rate of fire fighter suicide is difficult to determine**, we know that too many fire fighters die by suicide each month. Research tells us that fire fighters experience higher rates of certain behavioral health disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and alcohol use disorder. These behavioral health disorders increase the risk of suicidal behavior for anyone, including fire fighters.

### SUICIDE STATISTICS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION<sup>i,ii</sup>

- Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the U.S.
- In 2022, 49,476 Americans died by suicide and there were an estimated 1.6M suicide attempts in the U.S.
- In 2022, men died by suicide 3.85 times more than women.
- White males accounted for 68.46% of suicide deaths in 2022.
- In 2022, firearms accounted for 54.64% of all suicide deaths.
- In Canada, approximately 12 people die by suicide each day and 4,500 deaths by suicide per year.

### SUICIDE STATISTICS IN THE FIRE SERVICE

- In a national sample of fire fighters, current post-traumatic stress symptoms were found to be associated with 5.2% higher odds of attempting suicide during their firefighting career.<sup>ii</sup> (Stanley et. al., 2018).
- In a 2022 cross-sectional IAFF survey of over 8,000 IAFF members, 28% of fire fighters reported being at risk for suicide or suicidal thoughts, based on the Suicide Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised<sup>iv</sup> (SBQ-R)
- The rate of male fire fighter suicide in the U.S. is 33.8 per 100,000 population, compared to 17.8 per 100,000 population among all working-age adults 18–64, according to the 2021 National Vital Statistics System compiled by the Center of Disease Control and Prevention.<sup>v</sup>

## A CALL TO ACTION: WHAT CAN YOU DO?

We can all help prevent fire fighter suicide through awareness, education, connection, and action. On the next page is a five-day action plan for a suicide prevention stand down that can be enacted in your community, IAFF Local or fire department.

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## A FIVE-DAY CALL TO ACTION

### MONDAY, SEPT. 9: SPREAD THE WORD

Help spread the word that immediate, confidential help is available 24/7 through the 988 Suicide Prevention Lifeline, in both the U.S. and Canada. Individuals and organizations can visit the [988 Partner Toolkit](#) website.

- Access free [branded social media sharables](#) post on your social media feed. Search by resource type such as videos, graphics, or fact sheets.
- Order free [branded print materials](#), posters, and magnets to display in your station house. Bulk orders are available.
- Canadian IAFF members can also visit [988 Canada](#) to order print materials in English and French.

### TUESDAY, SEPT. 10: TUNE IN TO LEARN

Join us at 12–1:30 pm EST for a special webinar, *Suicide Prevention in the Fire Service: Strategies to Save a Life*, for a practical hands-on discussion that could save the life of a fire fighter you know. Topics will explore available research on fire fighter suicide, identification of suicide risk and warning signs, and how to use an evidence based 5-step action plan to intervene if someone you know is considering suicide. Visit [www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/recovery-month/](http://www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/recovery-month/) to register.

### WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 11: COMPLETE TRAINING TO HELP OTHERS

Proactive training and education can go a long way in helping to prevent suicide. During Suicide Prevention Stand Down week, consider completing a self-paced training that can better equip you to help others coping with behavioral health challenges or crises. Trainings are free, on-demand, and take about two hours to complete.

- [Helping Members in Recovery](#) is an awareness-level training for fire service personnel who want to support a colleague that is recovering from a mental health or substance use disorder. An IAFF account is needed to register.
- [Safety Planning Intervention for Suicide Prevention](#) training is available to IAFF-trained peers and is designed to support a fire fighter who has made or is at risk to make a suicide attempt. This Safety Plan acts as an emergency plan, or standard operating guide (SOG), to help a fire fighter recognize personal suicide warning signs and develop a prioritized list of coping skills to keep themselves safe during crisis. IAFF login is required to register.

### THURSDAY, SEPT. 12: TAKE CARE OF YOU

Serving your community as first responder can place great strain on your physical health, mental health, and relationships. Take a moment today and complete one intentional action to put yourself first. Need some ideas? Check out this list from [Mental Health America](#).

### FRIDAY, SEPT. 13: CHECK ON A FRIEND

The research is clear that one of the most important ways we can prevent suicide is to preserve social connection.

- Is there a friend, family, or crew member that you've been meaning to check on? Don't wait. You could save a life. A simple phone call, text, or visit goes a long way to communicate, "You are not alone."
- If you think someone could be coping with thoughts of suicide, directly ask the question, "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" If the answer is yes, maybe, or not sure, call for help immediately. Call/text 988 in the U.S. or Canada.

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## IAFF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCES

The IAFF Behavioral Health Division offers free online training, onsite in-person training, branded behavioral health literature, access to treatment partners, online recovery meetings, technical assistance, and much more. Visit [iaff.org/behavioral-health/](https://www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/) to familiarize yourself with IAFF resources.

- Peer Support Training <https://www.iaff.org/peer-support/>
- Resiliency Training <https://www.iaff.org/resiliency-training/>
- IAFF Center of Excellence <https://www.iaffrecoverycenter.com/>
- EHN Canada [www.ehncanada.com/iaff](http://www.ehncanada.com/iaff)
- IAFF Online Recovery Meetings [www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/#online-recovery-meetings](https://www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/#online-recovery-meetings)

## REPORT A SUICIDE

If your IAFF Local has experienced the suicide death of an IAFF member, affiliates are strongly encouraged to report the suicide death to the IAFF. Suicide death reports help the IAFF collect data to understand the scope of fire fighter suicide and to connect the Local affiliate to resources. Reports must be made by a Local officer. Visit the IAFF Report a Suicide Death page at [www.iaff.org/lodd/#report-suicide-death](https://www.iaff.org/lodd/#report-suicide-death).

## IAFF BRANDED SHARABLE DOCUMENTS

- [Fire Fighter Suicide: How to Cope With Grief and Loss](#)
- [How to Talk About Fire Fighter Suicide](#)
- [Understanding the Difference Between PTS and PTSD](#)
- [Understanding Reactions to a Potentially Traumatic Event](#)
- [Finding the Right Clinician](#)
- [Creating a Behavioral Health Program: A Checklist](#)
- [How to Support a Crew Member After Treatment](#)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- [A Manager's Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace: 10 Action Steps for Dealing with the Aftermath of Suicide](#)

## VIDEO RESOURCES

- [IAFF Suicide Awareness Roundtable](#) June 2024
- [How to Approach a Member in Need](#) IAFF Center of Excellence Webinar
- [Suicide and Suicide Prevention in Fire Service](#) (2019 Redmond Health and Safety Symposium)

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## REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) Fatal Injury Reports. (2020). Retrieved May 19, 2023, from <https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html>
- <sup>ii</sup> Suicide in Canada: Key statistics (infographic). Government of Canada. August 23, 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/suicide-canada-key-statistics-infographic.html>
- <sup>iii</sup> Boffa, J. W., Stanley, I. H., Hom, M. A., Norr, A. M., Joiner, T. E., & Schmidt, N. B. (2017). PTSD symptoms and suicidal thoughts and behaviors among firefighters. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 84, 277–283.
- <sup>iv</sup> Gulliver, Suzy (2022). Unpublished raw data assessing behavioral health of career firefighters. COMBUST: COVID-19 Occupational Measures of Burnout and Understaffed Teams. Baylor Scott and White Health Research Institute's Trauma Research Consortium in collaboration with the International Association of Fire Fighters.
- <sup>v</sup> Sussell A, Peterson C, Li J, Miniño A, Scott KA, Stone DM. Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation - National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. 2023 Dec 15;72(50):1346–1350. doi: 10.15585/mmwr.mm7250a2. PMID: 38096122; PMCID: PMC10727139.