

RESPONDERSTRONG

Mental Strength On and Off the Job

Mobilizing emergency responders and advocates across Colorado

Our Challenge

Every day, emergency responders face stressful and disturbing situations, and are frequently called to scenes of traumatic injury and death. Exposure to these critical incidents puts us at high risk for:

- Post-traumatic symptoms (sleep problems, flashbacks, heightened reactivity)
- Anxiety and depression
- Substance abuse and addiction
- Strained social relationships and divorce
- A decreased ability to perform duties
- Suicide (Our suicide rate is almost double that of the national adult average, and far more emergency responders die by suicide than in line of duty deaths.)

These outcomes can compromise our abilities to be there for our brothers and sisters in uniform, and to protect and defend our community. Yet, there are not enough resources that support and reinforce the mental wellness of emergency responders across all sectors. Disconnected efforts, unavailable funding, and a shortage of behavioral health experts who can meet these unique needs must be addressed.

Our Team

Beginning in the spring of 2016, representatives from the emergency responder community in Aurora, Colorado teamed up with the National Behavioral Health Innovation Center at University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. We have brought together representatives across Colorado from law enforcement, EMS, fire, and dispatch, as well as therapists and other experienced support professionals, to form a core group motivated to solve these issues. As a result, the first attempt to mobilize mental wellness efforts across emergency responder sectors in Colorado emerged and ResponderStrong was born.

Our Work

ResponderStrong is committed to the notion that mental resiliency is vital to the overall performance and wellbeing of emergency responders from recruitment through retirement, as well as to their families, and the people and communities they serve. Functioning as an umbrella entity, we are responsible for creating an accessible network of existing resources, identifying gaps, creatively leveraging and amplifying existing expertise, and brokering partnerships to address unmet needs. In the first year of our existence we have:

- Convened monthly with a core group
- Created the ResponderStrong identity for the coalition
- Selected two initial arenas of focus – wellness promotion and leadership – and established action-oriented committees for each
- Worked to identify and actively recruit any absent or underrepresented voices
- Developed a survey to identify current needs and assets related to mental wellness across all sectors
- Initiated an inventory of existing resources for emergency responder mental wellness

Building upon this foundation, over the next year we hope to expand our reach, visibility, and network of resources through the use of mobile connectivity tools.

Join Us

Thoughts, questions, or interest in joining? Please contact responderstrong@gmail.com.