

Improving Law Enforcement Resilience

BUILDING PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

Five Pillars of Resilience

Many officers discuss known risk factors that officers face in regard to their physical health. They have little time to eat during their shifts and may frequently resort to fast food. They work night shifts or overtime or may have a second job, leading to inadequate sleep. A fast-food diet coupled with lack of exercise can lead to obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and an increased risk for cardiovascular disease. These risks exist even before the emotional stress of the job is added into the equation. A point made earlier in the day was that we cannot speak about different aspects of health and wellness in isolation. Hypertension, obesity, and diabetes are serious problems in law enforcement. While more research is needed to fully understand the stress patterns of law enforcement jobs and how that can lead to heart disease, it is common knowledge that officers often have little time to eat during shifts. Time constraints can lead to heavy reliance on a diet of convenience, which is a known risk factor for obesity and diabetes.

Moreover, shift work, overtime, and second jobs are known to contribute to sleep problems that can also raise the risk of metabolic syndromes and heart disease. The meeting attendees acknowledged that some of these risks are unavoidable in the profession. Law enforcement will always be a 24/7 job necessitating shift work. Overtime is crucial to ensuring coverage in shorthanded agencies and is often an important part of an officer's overall financial compensation package. While the job may offer opportunities for exercise, not every beat is walkable or bikeable. These obstacles do not mean that the health risks should be ignored. The lack of exercise combined with an individual's genetic predisposition can place stress on officers' bodies even before the emotional factors of the job are considered. Everyone in an agency needs to be cognizant of the physical and emotional risks and work to mitigate those that can be controlled, whether at the individual or organizational level.

The following pillars of officer health and wellness should be given high priority in every law enforcement agency as the building blocks of resilience:

1. **Tactical trauma care.** Law enforcement agencies must have standardized equipment, including trauma care kits, and training in tactical trauma care such as hemorrhage control. When an officer is shot, the first responder to the scene is often a fellow officer (see the sidebar "Tactical Trauma Care" on page 28).
2. **Cardiac screening.** The risk of heart disease appears higher among police officers than the general population and may be exacerbated by the acute surge of adrenaline that officers experience in critical incidents. Screening for potential heart problems is necessary, relatively inexpensive, and likely to save money in the long run.
3. **Fitness.** Lack of fitness is a health risk for officers and a liability for their agencies. Every agency should have fitness standards for all of its officers. In addition, agencies should have consequences—though not necessarily punitive—for failure to meet the standards and a benefit or reward structure for those who meet or exceed them.
4. **Overweight and obesity.** The risk of shift work and having a sedentary job places law enforcement officers at higher risk of being overweight or obese, both of which increase the risk of heart disease and stroke and make the law enforcement officer less successful in certain job-related performance measures.

5. **Emotional or mental health**. On a daily basis, law enforcement officers see small traumas that, over time, can have as significant an impact as a major incident. This can lead to a higher risk of self-medicating behaviors such as alcohol use. When addressed together by agencies, these factors should lead to healthy, resilient officers.

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If you're interested in learning more specifics on how to implement these pillars in your organization, click [here](#) for the full article "Improving Law Enforcement Resilience: Lessons and Recommendations".