

**PREPARE.  
PREVENT.  
PROTECT.™**



**FIRST RESPONDER**  
*Center for Excellence*

Reducing Occupational Illness, Injuries, and Deaths, Inc.



2025 Annual Report



## Mission

The First Responder Center for Excellence is committed to promoting quality educational awareness and research to reduce physical, emotional and psychological health and wellness issues for first responders.



**FIRST RESPONDER**  
*Center for Excellence*

## Vision

The FRCE will deliver quality educational materials and factual research through a network of professionals who are committed to reducing first responder injuries and deaths through a common set of core values.



## Table of Contents

Board and Staff .....	4
Managing Director’s Message .....	5
2025 Training Highlights .....	6
Learning Management System .....	7
New Initiatives .....	8-9
Events and Training .....	10-12
Partnerships .....	13
Podcast Reachout .....	14
Advisory Committees .....	15
John Miclot Dedication .....	16
FEMA AFG FP&S Grant Funding .....	18
Looking Ahead to 2026 .....	19

# BOARD



Joseph M. Jardin



Ernest Mitchell, Jr.  
Chairman of the Board



David Halfpenny



Cathy Rinchetti



Jeff Fackler



Daniel L. Arnold

# STAFF



Victor Stagnaro  
CEO



Nicole Prorock  
CFO



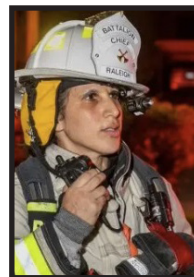
Frank Leeb  
Managing Director



Lori Jacobs  
Program Manager



Read more about  
our team!



Dena Ali  
Behavioral Health  
Program Manager



Patricia Doyle  
Senior Accountant



Mathew Riback  
Program  
Specialist II

# Managing Director's Message

2025 marked a defining year for the FRCE, with continued growth and a deepened commitment to the well-being of those who serve. Together, we have advanced the mission of strengthening the health, wellness, and safety of firefighters and first responders through research, education, and training.

This year also brought profound loss. Just before our Symposium in Nashville, we experienced the untimely passing of board member John Miclot. John played an essential part in shaping the direction and spirit of the FRCE. After retiring from a distinguished business career, he joined his local volunteer fire department and devoted himself with passion, energy, and unwavering dedication. His loss leaves a lasting void, and his legacy in firefighter health and safety will endure for generations. We dedicate this annual report to his memory.



In 2025, several major initiatives drove our mission forward. The Green Gear Bag program, our Mental Health Symposium, and the expansion of the FRCE Learning Management System (LMS) served as pillars of progress. FRCE also completed several grant-funded programs and strengthened the foundation for continued growth. We welcomed new team members who share our purpose and commitment to improving the lives of first responders.

We are encouraged by growing awareness of the “firefighter’s blind side”—the issues historically in the background: occupational cancer, mental health, PTSD, sleep, nutrition, and physical fitness. By prioritizing what we can control today, we strengthen the future and ensure it remains a profession where members can thrive throughout their careers and into retirement.

A few truths continue to guide our work:

- A firefighter’s most valuable tool isn’t the SCBA or the thermal imager—it’s their health.
- Blind-side issues, from sleep deprivation to cancer, continue to claim firefighters.
- The dangers we don’t see are often the ones that cost us the most.
- The answer is not fear—it is preparation, clarity, and disciplined training.

At the FRCE, our mission remains unwavering: to advance the health, wellness, and safety of firefighters and first responders through research, education, and training.

Frank Leeb  
Managing Director

# 2025 Highlights

## In-Person Training

**28** Total In-Person Training Events

**518** Total Fire Departments/Organizations Trained

**1045** Total Participants



“Blind-side issues, from sleep deprivation to cancer exposures, are still claiming our firefight-ers. The dangers we don’t see are the ones that are costing us the most.”



Register for Training!

- Frank Leeb, Managing Director

# Learning Management System

## Online Training

**50** Number of States Reached

**1979** Total Fire Departments/Organizations Trained

**5247** Total Persons Trained

### Increasing the FRCE LMS Offerings

In 2025 FRCE increase training content through strategic partnerships with the Firefighter Support Cancer Network, Women in Fire, and Science to the Station



**S2S - Welcome to the Science to the Station LMS**  
Enrolled on 20 November 2025

5.0 ★★★★★ (1)

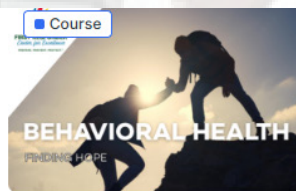
1 module



**WIF - More Than One Way to Lead: Exploring Fire Service...**  
Enrolled on 20 November 2025

4.3 ★★★★★ (3)

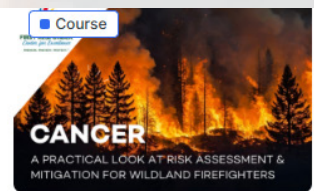
1 module



**FRCE - Finding Hope**

5.0 ★★★★★ (28)

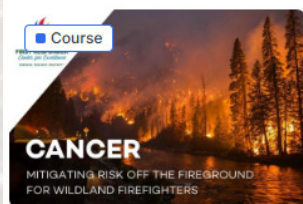
1h



**FRCE - Cancer: A Practical Look at Risk Assessment &...**

5.0 ★★★★★ (31)

45min



**FRCE - Cancer: Mitigating Risk OFF the Fireground for...**

4.9 ★★★★★ (35)

45min



**FCSN - DOING IT RIGHT: Reducing Cancer in the Fire...**

5.0 ★★★★★ (771)

1 module



**FRCE - Introduction to Well-Being and Self-Care for First...**

4.9 ★★★★★ (521)

1h 30min



**FRCE: Fire Recruit 40-Day Fitness Program**

7 courses

Access the FRCE Learning Management System



# 2025

## Fire Service Mental Wellness and Suicide Prevention Symposium

This groundbreaking event was held in March in Nashville, Tennessee. The event was dedicated to addressing mental wellness and suicide prevention within the fire service community.

It was hosted by FRCE in conjunction with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. The symposium provided opportunity for fire service professionals, mental health experts, and advocates to come together and make a real difference. This inaugural event had over 350 attendees.



**Over 350 Attendees**  
**Over 20 Sessions**



- Factors contributing to fire service suicide
- Mental health awareness & reducing stigma
- Implementing suicide prevention programs
- Enhancing peer support networks
- Self-care and resilience practices
- Best practices and lessons learned
- Advocating for change within the fire service



**FIRE SERVICE**  
**Mental Wellness &**  
**Suicide Prevention**  
Symposium



# Initiatives

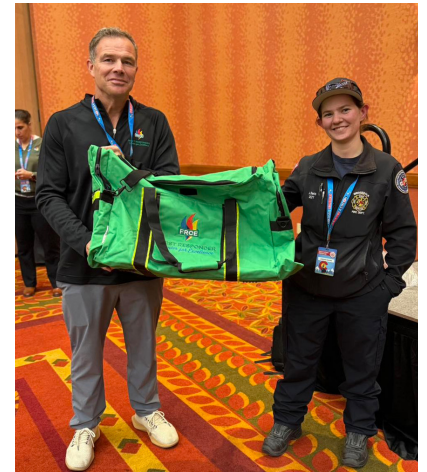
## Green Bag Initiative



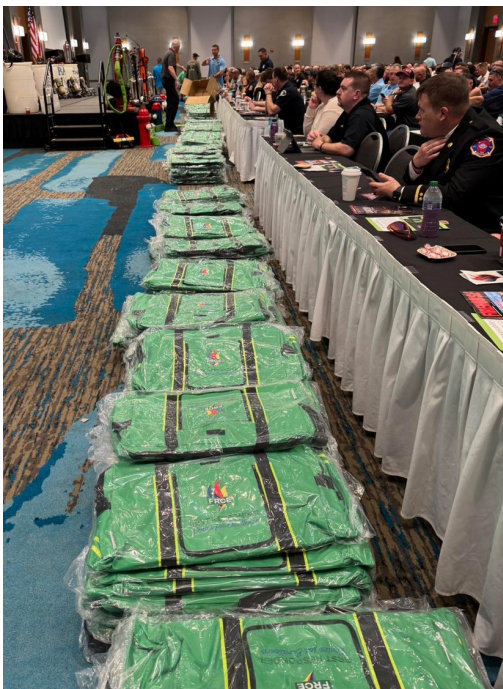
In 2025, FRCE distributed more than 2,500 green bags at conferences, trainings, and outreach events nationwide. Designed to promote on-scene decontamination and reduction of carcinogen exposure, the green bag initiative continues to reinforce FRCE’s mission to reduce occupational illness, injuries, and long-term health risks for firefighters.



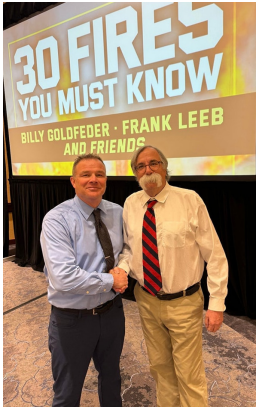
“A firefighter’s most valuable tool isn’t the SCBA or the thermal imager — it’s their health.”



## Over 2500 Bags Distributed



# Events



## FDIC

FRCE maintained a strong presence at FDIC, highlighted by Chief Frank Leeb's presentation on "Today's Fire Environment and Occupational Illness." Firefighters received FRCE's signature green bags during the Hands-On Training evolutions and at supporting events. FRCE also proudly supported the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation's outreach efforts. Additionally, FRCE's Chief Dena Ali taught "It's Not the Calls: Organizational Leadership & Mental Wellness," while Chief Frank Leeb and Chief Billy Goldfeder delivered the high-impact session "30 Fires You Must Know."



"Blindside issues are still taking our firefighters. The answer isn't more fear—it's better preparation, clearer vision, and disciplined training."

## Brothers Helping Brothers

FRCE supported Brothers Helping Brothers at their 8th annual conference which focuses on enhancing the health, wellness, and safety of firefighters across the U.S. The conference is all about real talk, real connections, and real impact. All attendees at this year's conference received an exclusive FRCE green safety gear bag.



*-Frank Leeb*

## Stress First Aid

FRCE expanded its Stress First Aid (SFA) footprint, delivering programs across the country. These hands-on trainings equipped firefighters, EMS personnel, and leaders with the tools to recognize, manage, and reduce stress reactions in themselves and their peers. FRCE also advanced its national Train-the-Trainer program, held in conjunction with the FDSOA Conference, preparing instructors to deliver SFA programs within their own agencies. FRCE offers a full suite of SFA courses providing a flexible, evidence-informed model tailored to first responders' unique operational stressors.

## DetecTogether Gala



The FRCE is proud to be a partner in DetecTogether's mission to end occupational illnesses, including cancer. Together, we're making strides toward a healthier, safer future. A huge thank you to the incredible DetecTogether team for putting on such a meaningful event.



# Training

## Cleats for a Cause – NFL My Cause My Cleats



FRCE received national visibility through the NFL's My Cause My Cleats campaign when Indianapolis Colts guard Matt Goncalves wore custom cleats featuring the FRCE logo during the game against the Houston Texans. This partnership showcased FRCE's mission on a national stage while honoring the sacrifices and needs of first responders across the country.



## Firemanship Conference



The conference kicked off with a green bag giveaway to each attendee and a keynote delivered by Chief Frank Leeb. Chief Dena Ali presented a session focused on upstream strategies to support ourselves and our departments. Key topics included sleep, trauma impacts, culture, leadership, and the importance of peer support.



## Science to the Station

FRCE helped power this one-of-a-kind gathering of researchers, clinicians, and fire service professionals. The event delivered cutting-edge science, real-world applications, and deep conversations focused on improving health, safety, and performance. Chief Frank Leeb and Chief Dena Ali both spoke at the conference, and FRCE distributed green bags to all participants as part of its national contamination-reduction mission.



## Firefighter Cancer Initiative's International Cancer Symposium



Chief Frank Leeb, had the honor of being the keynote speaker at the Firefighter Cancer Initiative International Fire Service Cancer Symposium held at the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center (University of Miami Health System). Frank shared valuable insights on understanding the evolution of the fire environment and the importance of staying safe in the line of duty.



# Events and Training

## PNW Fire Conference



Together with Brass Eagle and Brothers in Battle, PNW raised over \$15,000 in two hours for FRCE. PNW offered workshops on trauma and mental wellness, suicide prevention, behavioral health enhancement, substance use disorder, mindfulness practices, sleep improvement, and leadership development.

## North Charleston Health & Wellness



FRCE provided a seminar with valuable information to help living a healthier, more balanced life, improving physical health, mental well-being, and overall lifestyle. Topics included optimizing Sleep, Stress Management, Reducing Heart Attack and Stroke Risks, and Wellness.

## Frederick County Leadership

Chief Frank Leeb addressed Frederick County fire service recruits on sustaining fitness, readiness, mental wellness, mentorship, and loyalty throughout a fire service career. His message reinforced the importance of investing in personal and organizational health to achieve long-term operational excellence.



## FD Safety Officers Association

This year, at the Fire Department Safety Officers Association Health, Safety, & Apparatus Conference in St. Pete, Florida, Managing Director, Chief Frank Leeb was finally presented with his well-deserved green helmet right before delivering his keynote speech.

## FASNY Conference

At the FASNY Conference, FRCE's Cancer Program Manager, Tim Graves, presented during the health and wellness symposium, emphasizing strategies to reduce exposure risks and improve cancer outcomes for firefighters.



## County Fire Tactics Officer Development



At CFT, Chief Frank Leeb led discussions on strategy, tactics, leadership, and the essential role of health and wellness in sustaining a long fire service career. FRCE also distributed "green bags" to support firefighter safety on and off the fireground.

# Events and Training

## Training Tips

Throughout the year, the FRCE shared practical, actionable “byte-size” training tips designed to help firefighters first responders stay healthy, informed, and ready. These short, focused messages provide health, wellness, and safety topics into easy-to-apply guidance. Tips focus on cancer-reduction practices, mental wellness strategies, stress-management tools, or operational readiness reminders.. FRCE remains committed to supporting the field with high-impact micro-training that strengthens awareness, improves habits, and reinforces a culture of health, safety, and resilience.

**Training Tips**  
First Responder Center for Excellence  
**Health-Wellness-Safety-Resiliency**  
Crisis Card — Quick Steps When You Feel Overwhelmed

**988**  
SUICIDE & CRISIS  
LIFELINE



Scan Me for FREE Online Training

Suicide is a heartbreaking tragedy that claims nearly 50,000 lives each year. Agreeing the final decision is often made in a brief, intense moment between crisis and action can save lives. A Crisis Card is one phone or on a card you carry) helps you prepare for tough moments.

**What to Include:**

1. Three People to Call  
Pick three people you trust and give them a heads-up they're your support system.
2. Three Active, Pleasurable Activities  
Choose activities you can do anytime, alone if needed. Examples: journaling, knitting, reading, or playing music.
3. One Mood-Regulating Activity  
• Box Breathing (3-3-3-3): Inhale 4s → Hold 4s → Exhale 4s → Hold 4s  
• Grounding (5-4-3-2-1): 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste
4. Suicide & Crisis Lifeline  
Write down 988. Free, confidential, 24/7. They won't track or report you.

Together we are Strong  
[www.firstrespondercenter.org](http://www.firstrespondercenter.org)

**Training Tips**  
First Responder Center for Excellence  
**Health-Wellness-Safety-Resiliency**  
Finding the Right Therapist



Therapy isn't Weakness—it's Strategy. We're the fixer backup sometimes. Therapy isn't about being broken important tool—your mind—in top shape. It's more to heal, grow, and stay sharp.



**Tips for finding the right fit:**

**Training Tips**  
First Responder Center for Excellence  
**Health-Wellness-Safety-Resiliency**  
Breaking the Rumination Cycle



Scan Me for FREE Online Training

Stuck in your head? Break the cycle. When stress hits—bad call, tough shift, relationship stuff—your mind can spiral. Rumination steals your sleep, focus, and peace. Here are 3 quick tools to help you reset:

- Word Train:**  
Pick a word. Take the last letter and start a new word. Keep going.  
Example: Fire → Engine → Everyone → Exit...
- Alphabet Game:**  
3-letter (or 4-letter) words A-Z. Easy to start, challenging enough to distract the brain.
- Breathing Count:**  
Inhale, exhale—count "1." Next breath, "2." Make it to 10 without losing focus. If you drift? Start over. It works.

These short drills can break the loop, calm your mind, and help you sleep. Stay sharp. Stay well. You've got this.

**Training Tips**  
First Responder Center for Excellence  
**Health-Wellness-Safety-Resiliency**  
Creating a Safety Plan for Suicidal Thoughts



Scan Me for FREE Online Training

Suicidal thoughts can feel overwhelming, but they're more common than you think—and they don't mean you're weak. For first responders especially, carrying pain in silence can be heavy. Think of these thoughts like a smoke alarm: a signal that something needs attention. With time, support, and a plan, they can be managed.

- ✓ Know your early warning signs—like irritability, trouble sleeping, increased heart rate, or withdrawing from others
- ✓ Build a support circle—identify 3 people who can support and help distract you when you're struggling
- ✓ List grounding activities—try the 5-4-3-2-1 method:
  - 5 things you can see
  - 4 things you can touch
  - 3 things you can hear
  - 2 things you can smell
  - 1 thing you can taste
- ✓ Practice box breathing to calm your body and mind
- ✓ Save 988—call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline anytime
- ✓ Store firearms safely during tough times
- ✓ Add a crisis card near firearms with calming steps and contacts

You are not broken. You are not alone. Help is here.  
Together we are Stronger  
[www.firstrespondercenter.org](http://www.firstrespondercenter.org)

Issued: 03/03/2025  
#2 of 2025

# Strategic Partnerships

## National Firefighter Cancer Registry

We are honored that NIOSH National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has recognized FRCE as an NFR Champion.

We're proud to support this vital initiative to protect the future of the fire service!



**NATIONAL  
FIREFIGHTER  
REGISTRY  
for Cancer**  
Understanding & Reducing Cancer

# Podcast Reachout

FRCE Staff Participate in Podcasts to deliver key FRCE messages to our target audiences. In 2025, this included the following podcasts who collaboratively support the FRCE mission.



## Firehouse Vigilance: The Weekly Scrap

Chief Dena Ali, joined The Weekly Scrap by Firehouse Vigilance where she discussed her powerful new book, *Hope Out Of Darkness*, and the incredible impact it's already having. She'll also discussed the crucial topic of mental health in the fire service.

## Beneath the Helmet

Chief Frank Leeb, opened up about some incredibly important topics. In this episode, Frank covers everything from firefighter mental health to leadership, diversity, inclusion, and proactive ways to support firefighter well-being.



## Fire Engineering: In the Books

David Rhodes sat down with Chief Billy Goldfeder and Chief Frank Leeb, to dive deep into their acclaimed book "30 Fires You Must Know." They discuss the lessons learned from historic fire incidents, offering firsthand accounts that have shaped the modern fire service. The conversation highlights the importance of understanding past events to prevent future tragedies and enhance safety.

## Behind the Shield

Chief Dena Ali and Chief Frank Leeb had an insightful discussion about all things Mental Health, including fire service issues and the challenges our community faces.



## Environmental Mutagenesis and Genomics Society - Webinar

Chief Frank Leeb, delivered the keynote for the EMGS webinar with focus of the conference titled "Clearing the Smoke and Mirrors: Identifying and Mitigating Invisible Threats of Smoke Exposure to the Health of Firefighters".



# Advisory Committees

## Behavioral Health

Derrick Edwards, PhD  
Michelle Fayed  
Anne Germain, PhD  
Richard Gist, PhD  
Frank Leto  
Chief John Oates  
Vickie Taylor, LCSW  
Patricia Watson, PhD

## Cancer

Alberto Juan Caban-Martinez,  
DO, PhD, MPH, CPH  
Deputy Chief Tim Cowan  
Casey Grant,  
PE, FSFPE  
Jeff Hughes  
Chief Ed Mann  
Chief Brian McQueen

## Cardiac

James Brothers,  
MS, CRNP, CEMSO, CFO  
Brittany Hollerbach, PhD  
Sara Jahnke, PhD  
Tiffany Lipsey,  
M.Ed., ACSM  
Kevin Quinn  
Eddie Sell  
Denise Smith, PhD

## Firefighter Physicals

Kepra Jack, RN, BSN  
Alisa Koval  
Chief Todd LeDuc,  
MS, CFO, FIFire  
Chief John Sullivan  
James Williams

## Health and Wellness (Fitness)

Katie Dennison,  
MS, TSAC-f  
Chris Fleming,  
LAT, ATC, AEMT  
Dan Kerrigan  
Fernando Montes  
Kory Pearn  
Ursula Ulery  
Bert Vergara  
Aaron Zamnow

## Health and Wellness (Nutrition)

Rhonda Cohen  
Megan Lautz,  
MS, CSCS, TSAC-f  
Chloe Schweinshaut  
Jonathan Tate  
Aaron Zamzow



# John Miclot

John's distinguished professional background, as a successful entrepreneur, former President and CEO of Philips Respironics, and dedicated philanthropist, uniquely positioned him to influence change at scale. He brought the FRCE together with industry leaders, researchers, and innovators, dramatically expanding its reach and resources. Chief Victor Stagnaro, CEO of both the NFFF and the FRCE, said, "John was a visionary leader with an unwavering commitment to firefighter health and safety. He had a positive impact from the boardroom to the fireground."



John's passion was personal, his service was selfless, and his impact was profound. Few have served with the heart, humility, and effectiveness of John Miclot. His legacy reminds us that leadership is not defined by title or tenure, but by how deeply you care and how far you are willing to go to make a difference.

John's final act of generosity toward firefighters was his support of the FRCE Green Gear Bag Initiative—yet another testament to his steadfast dedication to reducing exposure risks and protecting those who protect others.

Rest in peace, John. Your work continues through the FRCE.

## John Miclot Awarded IAFC Garry Briese Safety Performance Award



The Garry Briese IAFC Safety Performance Award honors those who go beyond expectations to advance safety in the fire service. Few have done so with the heart, humility, and effectiveness of John Miclot.

The IAFC posthumously gave the award to John Miclot and was received by his wife, Cathy Rinchetti, Chief Frank Leeb and Chief Victor Stagnaro during Fire Rescue International 2025 in Orlando, FL.

# Grant Funding

## FRCE Awarded 2024 Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grant to Enhance First Responder Health and Safety Training

We are pleased to announce that our grant application, submitted under the Grant Programs Directorate's Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grant, has been approved for award. Firefighters continue to face three critical and interconnected health threats—behavioral health challenges, increased cancer rates, and declining physical fitness—that persist despite notable advances in fireground safety. These “blind spots” are too often overlooked due to stigma, underreporting, or systemic gaps in awareness and policy.



Today, suicide, post-traumatic stress, and stress-related injuries claim more lives than fireground fatalities, while cancer and cardiac events remain the leading causes of firefighter deaths. With this award, the First Responder Center for Excellence (FRCE) will expand efforts to confront these challenges head-on. Our projects will implement a comprehensive strategy focused on prevention, education, and cultural change—strengthening the health, safety, and resilience of firefighters and other first responders across the country.

As FRCE Managing Director Chief Frank Leeb stated, “This is a great day for firefighters and other first responders. The FRCE will continue to build on the momentum and awareness of health and wellness in the fire service, further integrating health and resilience into the fire service’s DNA.”



# FEMA

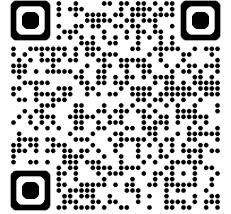
FRCE programs are funded in whole or in part through an Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) – Fire Prevention and Safety Grants.



# Looking Ahead - 2026

## SUPPORT THE FRCE: DONATE TODAY

In 2025, the First Responder Center for Excellence continued to strengthen its fundraising infrastructure to support our mission of protecting the health, safety, and well-being of first responders. Through individual giving, corporate support, events, and grants, we expanded both our reach and our capacity to deliver evidence-based programs nationwide.



This year marked an important step forward as FRCE invested in long-term sustainability, donor engagement, and improved fundraising systems to support future growth.

As we look ahead to 2026, FRCE is focused on expanding donor engagement, strengthening partnerships, and growing sustainable funding streams to meet the increasing needs of the first responder community nationwide.

“At the end of the day, the ultimate goal of the FRCE is to ensure the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation does not prematurely meet the families of firefighters.”

Frank Leeb, Managing Director

## Fire Service Mental Wellness and Suicide Prevention Symposium May 31-June 3, 2026

The Mental Wellness Symposium, a joint initiative of the First Responder Center for Excellence and the University of IOWA is bringing together leading experts, fire service professionals, and mental health specialists to discuss mental wellness.



2026  
**MENTAL  
WELLNESS**  
SYMPOSIUM

**IOWA**



# FIRST RESPONDER *Center for Excellence*

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