



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 10, 2025

CONTACT: Matthew Parriott
Cell: 615-943-3172

TDMHSAS LAUNCHES NEW FIRST RESPONDER MENTAL HEALTH CAMPAIGN

*Public Service Announcements produced with support and expertise of
law enforcement and fire personnel*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) is excited to announce the release of a new campaign to reduce stigma and increase awareness of mental health resources for first responders.

Research shows first responders suffer from mental health and substance use disorders at a rate higher than civilians, but they can be resistant to seek support for several reasons. The toll of the job also takes a toll on their health, relationships, and careers. Through this campaign, the department and its partners seek to share a few key messages with first responders:

- It's OK to not feel OK.
- It's a sign of strength and not weakness to ask for help.
- There are resources designed just for first responders that are staffed and supported by first responders.

"The days of suffering in silence are over. The job has changed, and the support available for the men and women in these roles has changed too. It really is OK to speak up about your mental health because you're not alone," said TDMHSAS Commissioner Marie Williams, LCSW. "We are excited to share these first-responder specific resources, especially the ones which incorporate the peer experience of first responders, with anyone who can benefit."

[Watch the two video PSAs on YouTube at this link.](#)

A common barrier for first responders can be personal experience or that of coworkers who reached out for help only to be disappointed. One way that mental health service providers make a breakthrough is by utilizing the peer experience of current and former first responders who have lived through similar situations. The Tennessee Public Safety Network is one organization that uses the peer experience of first responders combined with specially-trained mental health professionals to respond after critical incidents, offer peer support, and provide trainings.

"The Tennessee Public Safety Network is dedicated to protecting the mental health of all emergency services workers. We are peer led by a group of dedicated peers who have all experienced stress and trauma on the job and have been specifically trained to help other first responders process similar events. We are supported by licensed mental health professionals, vetted by the Network, who work with us as volunteer team members. Services are provided free of charge. All services are confidential and protected under Tennessee's privileged communication law," said Peter Cove, Tennessee Public Safety Network CEO and Training

Manager.

The desire to support the mental health of first responders is worthwhile on a personal level, but it's also a wise investment for the cities and counties which employ them.

"Emergency responders have consistently been willing to serve others at a great and often overlooked cost. The psychological toll on responders can no longer go un-noticed, and we must strive to provide these men and women meaningful resources and care," said Dr. Derrick L. Edwards, Tennessee Tech University.

The campaign features two public service announcements featuring real-life first responders. The Tennessee Public Safety Network, Putnam County Sheriff's Office, Lebanon Fire Department, and the Tennessee Tech University Department of Counseling & Psychology all contributed to the development of the campaign with personnel, experience, expertise, and facilities.

Connect to the First Responder Mental Health campaign's webpage at this link on TN.gov:
[TN.gov/frmh](https://tn.gov/frmh)

###

About the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Our Mission: Creating collaborative pathways to resiliency, recovery, and independence for Tennesseans living with mental illness and substance use disorders.

Our Vision: A state of resiliency, recovery, and independence in which Tennesseans living with mental illness and substance use disorders thrive.