



# HEALING OUR OWN

CA FIRE SERVICE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TASK FORCE

May 1, 2024

Brothers and Sisters:

At the turn of each new year, you embark on an everlasting journey as firefighters to provide help, hope, and assistance to people in need during their most daunting hour. Oftentimes, when you answer the call, you're risking your own life to save another, and this comes at a cost to you and more specifically to your mental well-being.

Over the years, the fire service has come a long way as it relates to coping with these details that live within. We've learned to be open, honest, and direct with ourselves and our brothers and sisters. We now know that seeking out compassion from others or finding someone to talk to is important to our well-being. But far too often we attempt to cope alone and struggle to work through their emotions, not knowing there are resources for support and treatment specifically for firefighters and first responders.

**May is Mental Health Awareness Month; we are calling on all California fire departments to participate in a Behavioral Health Suicide Prevention and Awareness Safety Stand Down.**

During the week of May 19th through the 25th, drills and activities should be canceled and replaced by kitchen table discussions with behavioral health and suicide awareness as the focus. Discuss the impact of the job, where to go for resources, and how to give and get help. We need to build up and strengthen our support networks more than ever.

**This year as part of our stand-down efforts we want to emphasize firearms means reduction. The vast majority of firefighter suicides occur by firearm, and it is critical to create time and distance between an individual in crisis and such lethal means. The ability to have a conversation with our brothers or sisters about safe storage practices, temporary transfer of firearms, and further interventions can save a life.**

Enclosed is material to help you get these conversations started. You should have received a poster with resource information – please consider putting it up in a central location so the resources are visible. The California Fire Foundation has also included 12 trifold pocketbooks for firefighters at your station. If 12 is insufficient, you may request more at no cost by emailing [cpf@cpf.org](mailto:cpf@cpf.org). Additional tools, resources, and personal testimonies to help the discussion can be found at [HealingOurOwn.org](http://HealingOurOwn.org).

It's time to create an environment where we can have these conversations and work together to create a resilient fire service. For you, your family, and your fire family, take the time next week to stand down for suicide awareness.



**Brian K. Rice**  
President, California Professional Firefighters



**Chief Mark Heine**  
President, California Fire Chiefs Association



**Nancy Ward**  
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**Yvonne de la Peña**  
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