

# RESPONDERSTRONG™

## Mental Strength On and Off the Job

### Our Challenge

Every day, emergency responders face stressful and disturbing situations, involving traumatic injury and death. Frequent exposure to these critical incidents and other occupational stressors can place us at heightened risk for:

- Anxiety and depression
- Substance abuse and addiction
- Stress injury formation and post-traumatic symptoms (sleep problems, flashbacks, reactivity)
- Suicide
- Strained social relationships and divorce
- Decreased performance

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

### Our Team

Beginning in 2016, representatives from the emergency responder community in Aurora, Colorado teamed up with the National Mental Health Innovation Center at University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. We have united representatives from law enforcement, EMS, fire, and dispatch, as well as therapists and other experienced support professionals, to form a core group motivated to address these issues. Together, we are working to mobilize mental wellness efforts across emergency responder sectors as ResponderStrong.

### 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 and filling the gaps, creatively leveraging and amplifying existing expertise, and brokering partnerships to address unmet needs. Highlights since our inception, include:

- Selected three initial areas of focus: culture change; education and empowerment; and resource improvement
- Created a 4-hour curriculum module regarding responder mental wellness for community college emergency response programs (has been implemented in 25% of programs in Colorado)
- Collaborated with the Center for Relationship Education to create “Responding to Your Relationships” workshops- a Train the Trainer workshop is in development
- Initiated an inventory of existing resources for emergency responder mental wellness and care
- Created a Crisis Text Line partnership for emergency responders (text “BADGE” to 741741)
- Developed a resiliency maintenance program containing 13 Proficiency Standards for use by agencies
- Supported the Lifelines documentary series created by Status Code 4, Inc
- Hosted the first Colorado Emergency Responder Trauma Retreat May 19-25, 2019

Building upon this foundation, we continue to move forward supporting responders and their families!

### Join Us

Thoughts, questions, or interest in joining? Please contact [info@ResponderStrong.org](mailto:info@ResponderStrong.org).