

# THE LOCAL'S ROLE DURING A CANCER DIAGNOSIS



This factsheet was developed by the International Association of Fire Fighters and the Firefighter Cancer Support Network.

The Local affiliate organization and its leadership team can play a vital role in supporting a member who is diagnosed with cancer.

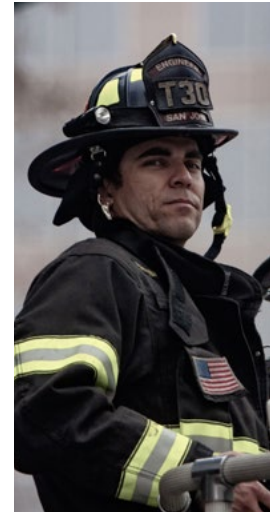
When diagnosed, the individual may initially feel overwhelmed. There will be a new focus in their life that they have likely never experienced before. Being there to provide support for them and their families, both at work and at home, will provide great comfort and relief.

## ADVOCACY, AWARENESS, AND PREVENTION

Locals should be proactive to ensure the membership is provided cancer awareness and prevention training and informed on what they should do if they are diagnosed with cancer.

Local union leadership should:

- Be well-versed in the presumptive laws for their state. They should be able to describe the law's components and how it pertains to the members.
- Understand the workers' compensation process as well as their own agencies' process for filing a workers' compensation claim for occupational disease.
- Identify a liaison to assist the member through the workers' compensation process to include interactions with fire administration, human resources, risk management, and the workers' compensation commission or insurance company.
- Advocate for insurance plans that cover cancer as well as paycheck protection plans as best practice.
- Promote and provide a method for fire fighters to document their exposures (exposure reporting after every call) on the fire ground if none exists for their organization.
  - Tracking and documenting exposures to hazardous environments is critical to establishing cancer as an occupational cause of disease in fire fighters.
- Promote best practices for cancer awareness and prevention education and operations to reduce the impact of exposures on the fire ground.
- Collaborate with management on early detection processes for their members and best practices to reduce cancer on the fire ground, at the station, and in their personal lives.
- Share information on survivorship from the Firefighter Cancer Support Network ([firefightercancersupport.org](http://firefightercancersupport.org)).



## SUPPORT

When possible, departments should support a member who is diagnosed with cancer and their families. They can do this individually or through programs set up in the department. Here are some ways to support a member:

- Peer support and behavioral health services should be offered to the diagnosed member as a cancer diagnosis can be a traumatic and stressful experience.
- If possible, offer rides to treatment or ask their families what help they may need while their family member is going through treatment.
- Be present and take the time to understand what the member is going through to see if they need assistance at home or on shift.

Most importantly, understand that a cancer diagnosis is very personal, and members will handle it in different ways. Some members will want and accept help, and some members will want to deal with their diagnosis without any assistance from the Local or its members.