

## KEY POINTS

**Fire fighters are at significant risk for PTS**

- Fire fighters and emergency medical responders routinely experience high stress at chaotic and uncontrolled settings for significant periods. While operating in stressful environments, fire fighters and emergency medical responders engage in critical rescue and life-saving activities, which are not always successful. Fire fighter and emergency medical providers experiencing multiple traumatic events have a higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress (PTS).
- Up to one-third of fire fighters and emergency medical responders will demonstrate some or all of the criteria used to diagnose PTS. The rates of diagnosed PTS among fire fighters and emergency medical responders vary due to inconsistencies in data collection methods and standards. However, reported rates are between 16 and 37 percent.
- Studies have demonstrated that rates of PTS in fire fighters are comparable to other similarly situated high-stress occupations, such as police officers and military combat veterans.

**The HERO Act will help us better recognize, educate, prevent and treat PTS in fire fighters**

- Behavioral health and wellness peer support programs within fire departments allow trained peer counselors to conduct outreach to fire fighters and their families to assist with issues associated with post-traumatic stress, substance abuse and co-related conditions in a personal and shared context.

- New guidance for fire departments and other emergency response departments will help educate on how to better identify and prevent PTS and co-occurring disorders in public safety officers. Meanwhile, new resources for mental health providers will provide a better understanding of the culture of fire departments and evidence-based therapies for mental health issues common in the profession.
- Establishing a specialized database capturing incidences of suicide among fire fighters and other public safety officers will provide scientists with detailed information regarding emergency responder suicides on a national scale, allowing researchers to more fully examine and understand PTS and broader mental health concerns among fire fighters and other public safety officers.

**Peer support is effective**

- Peer support programs have been demonstrated to be an effective method for providing mental health support to occupational groups, including fire fighters. The role of a peer support worker complements but does not duplicate or replace the roles of therapists, case managers or other members of a treatment team.
- Peer support programs train fire fighters to approach an individual of concern, establish trust and confidentiality, determine whether a crisis is developing, refer the person to available resources and educate others about behavioral health.
- Peer support offers a level of acceptance, understanding and validation not found in many other professional relationships. By sharing their own lived experience and practical guidance, peer support promotes connection and inspires hope, leading to better outcomes.