

# Providing a Path to Recovery

Behavioral health issues are not new in the fire service, but addiction, substance abuse, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress are all becoming more widely recognized as major health concerns affecting fire fighters and paramedics.

Until now, no existing treatment facility offered the specialized care fire fighters and paramedics need from behavioral healthcare professionals who understand the fire service culture and unique pressures of the job.

The new IAFF Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery fills that void. A first-of-its-kind residential treatment facility, the Center of Excellence grand opening was held in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, on March 5, 2017, and is now providing treatment and support to IAFF members struggling with addiction and other co-occurring disorders.

## Addiction Treatment Facility Exclusively for IAFF Members

“We have made it a priority to raise awareness of behavioral health issues,” says General President Harold Schaitberger. “We want our members who struggle with addiction and co-occurring conditions to have the necessary support and access to resources.”

Providing treatment exclusively to IAFF members, the Center of Excellence — located on a 15-acre campus in Prince George’s County, Maryland, just outside Washington, DC — is already helping dozens of members.

“The Center of Excellence is there for IAFF members to receive the help they need in taking the first steps towards recovery and a successful return to the job,” says Schaitberger.

## Recovery Is Possible

The IAFF has partnered with Advanced Recovery Systems (ARS), a leader in behavioral healthcare management and addiction treatment, to build the facility and offer specialized treatment from a professional team of experts who know and understand the kinds of traumatic events members respond to daily.

The entire Center of Excellence staff also participated in a FIRE OPS 101 to experience for themselves the physical stress and strain members face on the job.

Able to accommodate up to 64 IAFF members at a time, the Center of Excellence offers multiple levels of evidence-based treatment to meet members’ needs as they progress in their recovery, including



PHOTOS BY JOCELYN AUGUSTINO

Staff at the Center of Excellence participated in FIRE OPS 101 to get a better understanding of the stress fire fighters face on the job.

detox, intensive in-patient and residential care, medical monitoring and 12-step meetings.

The goal of a member’s stay at the Center of Excellence is to successfully complete treatment and return to work. The activities and classes they participate in and relationships they build while at the IAFF Center of Excellence will give them the tools for a life in recovery. Each person follows a daily schedule that promotes recovery, starting with gym sessions, education classes — such as “Setting Yourself Up for Success” — individual and group therapy, medical appointments, 12-step meetings and yoga or resilience training in the afternoon. There’s also designated free time for reading, reflection, journaling or a pick-up game of basketball — all essential parts of the recovery process.



The 15-acre campus is located in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

## Treatment Costs

Treatment is paid for by a member’s health insurance. Center of Excellence staff work with multiple insurance companies to add the IAFF Center as a certified in-network provider. In some jurisdictions, current insurance plans already provide comprehensive coverage for behavioral health treatment and recovery. Center staff members negotiate with insurance carriers on behalf of individual patients to achieve the highest level of coverage possible for appropriate care. A member’s out-of-pocket expenses will depend on insurance coverage, co-pay amount, deductible and cost to travel to the Center. The IAFF does not own or have any financial interest in the Center of Excellence.

Treatment is completely confidential. Center of Excellence staff cannot discuss treatment with anyone and cannot talk to a member's fire department or local — or even acknowledge whether someone's been referred or evaluated — unless members give explicit permission. All treatment staff and records are bound by HIPAA and/or Confidentiality of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Patient Records regulations.

### Aftercare

The recovery process does not end upon leaving the Center. Follow-up to treatment is critical for long-term success. Center of Excellence staff work with members and their families to ensure a successful return to home and work, regardless of where they live, including setting up a structured support network, developing accountability plans and providing links to available peer programs so that members continue with their recovery at home.

Patients are encouraged to take part in outpatient treatment and alcohol and drug screenings to help with self-accountability, as well as work with recovery mentors and participate in self-help support groups. Following the discharge protocol maximizes their chances for long-term success.

The Center recommends that these supports remain in place for at least 18 months. Research shows that intensive treatment is most successful when followed by longer-term treatment and support.

### Firehouse Away From the Firehouse

Designed with fire fighters in mind, the Center's surroundings, facility and furnishings have the look and feel of the firehouse so treatment

## 24/7 Call Center

### Dedicated Line for IAFF Members

(855) 900-8437

[www.iaffrecoverycenter.com](http://www.iaffrecoverycenter.com)

takes place in a comfortable setting. The campus includes a state-of-the-art gym and other features that encourage physical activity.

The IAFF Center of Excellence is open to all IAFF members throughout North America, including active duty and retired members diagnosed with addiction and substance use disorder, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress.

"IAFF members will feel as though they are among their brothers and sisters — because they are," says Schaitberger.

### You Are Not Alone

If you or one of your brothers or sisters is considering treatment for addiction, post-traumatic stress or any behavioral health issue, call the 24/7 Call Center's dedicated line for IAFF members at (855) 900-8437.

Staff will determine treatment needs, discuss insurance coverage and, if appropriate, outline next steps for admission. The length of stay is driven by the treatment plan and insurance authorization. Typically, treatment is four to six weeks, but may be more or less depending on the individual member's needs. ■



General President Harold Schaitberger and Advanced Recovery Systems Director Lewis Gold cut the ribbon to officially mark the grand opening of the IAFF Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery.

### Journey to Recovery

The Center of Excellence will also be used to train and educate peer support members, conduct additional research and develop needed protocols for fire departments to address behavioral health concerns. The goal is to advance best-practice treatment through research and training to benefit all IAFF members across North America. Once the initial Center of Excellence is fully established, the IAFF will assess the need and explore opportunities for expansion.

IAFF affiliates are encouraged to educate Human Resources, EAPs, department medical personnel and community counselors about the Center of Excellence and its unique capacity to successfully treat IAFF members.

Visit [www.iaffrecoverycenter.com](http://www.iaffrecoverycenter.com) for a brochure, FAQs and other materials about the Center of Excellence to share with local members and other stakeholders.



Fitness Center



Center for Excellence resident cabins

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