

# IACP



# NEWS

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**CONTACT:**

**Sarah Guy**  
703-647-7226  
[guy@theiacp.org](mailto:guy@theiacp.org)

**IACP AND NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION  
RELEASE REPORT OF THE IACP NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON LAW ENFORCEMENT  
OFFICER SUICIDE AND MENTAL HEALTH: BREAKING THE SILENCE ON LAW  
ENFORCEMENT SUICIDES**

**Alexandria, VA** – On June 5, 2014, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (Action Alliance) jointly released the report of the National Symposium on Law Enforcement Officer Suicide and Mental Health: *Breaking the Silence on Law Enforcement Suicides*. The project was supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office).

The Symposium report summarizes the findings and recommendations from a National Symposium on Law Enforcement Officer Suicide and Mental Health that the IACP convened with the COPS Office in July of 2013. The Symposium gathered subject matter experts from the fields of law enforcement, health, mental health, and suicide prevention to raise awareness regarding suicide and mental health issues in law enforcement and to move toward a culture of support and understanding; identify and evaluate existing resources, best practices, and training related to suicide prevention, intervention, and response programs; and to create a strategic plan to guide police chiefs in taking proactive measures to mitigate the risk of suicide and openly address officer mental health as a core element of officer safety.

The successful path to suicide prevention occurs at the front of the mental health continuum. Law enforcement leaders must send a strong and consistent message to their officers that mental health is equally as important as physical health and it must be nurtured through awareness, support and well-designed programs. It is our hope for the future that an officer seeking mental health support should be viewed as positively as an officer seeking help for a physical ailment.

“Law enforcement officers are not immune to mental health issues”, said IACP’s President, Chief Yousry “Yost” Zakhary (City of Woodway, Texas). “Our jobs often place us in the middle of highly traumatic situations and this can cause a lot increased emotional stress and trauma for officers. While there are no definitive statistics on the number of law enforcement officers who take their own lives annually, estimates put that figure at roughly double the number of officers killed in the line-of-duty each year by felonious assault or traffic-related injury.”

President Zakhary continued, “In a profession where strength, bravery, and resilience are revered, mental health issues and the threats of officer suicide are often topics few are willing to address or acknowledge openly and candidly. The hope is that this report will provide guidance for law enforcement agencies to increase awareness of suicide and the importance of attention to mental health and to create a culture of change that normalizes mental health issues for law enforcement officers.”

Ronald L. Davis, Director of the COPS Office, noted, “We must remain vigilant in our efforts to prevent officer suicides and to provide critical resources to those same officers who put their lives on the line to keep our communities safe. Those efforts fall short if we fail to bring to light a culture that impedes an officer’s ability to get the mental health services that they need, want, and deserve. This publication is an important resource in our collective effort to drive that conversation in communities and law enforcement agencies across the country.”

“This is a breakthrough body of work for the Law Enforcement field. The Action Alliance commends the IACP and DOJ, both who our member organizations, on catalyzing this much-needed paradigm shift,” said Bob Turner, the Action Alliance Private Sector Co-Chair and Senior Vice President of Union Pacific Corporation. “The report brings to light how this very important sector of our society needs strategic guidance to prevent suicide. This overall approach stems directly from the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention*’s systematic recommendations on integrating suicide prevention into practices to saving lives.”

This report is a major leap forward in the work that needs to be done to prevent officer suicide. It is imperative that all police executives and leaders commit to the report’s recommendations and to not only changing the culture, but also to institutionalizing effective mental wellness support, so that agencies can address mental health issues successfully and foster resilient and productive police officers.

The numerous strategies outlined in this report are intended to address officer mental wellness and suicide prevention. This report is designed as a roadmap for federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement seeking to include officer mental wellness as a core element of officer safety and well-being and to reduce the number of deaths of officers by suicide. These strategies are designed to prevent and mitigate the destructive effects of emotional trauma, mental illness, and officer deaths by suicide on a police community; to successfully intervene when officers confront mental health crises, mental illness, or suicidal behavior; and, to provide effective event response protocols when an officer dies by suicide in an agency.

The work of the IACP in this area will be ongoing through the Center for Officer Safety and Wellness. With additional support from the COPS Office, the IACP will expand on the symposium findings and recommendations and implement them in the field over the coming years.

A copy of the complete report can be found by visiting the COPS Office website at <http://ric-doj.zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P281> or the IACP’s website at <http://www.theiacp.org/Preventing-law-Enforcement-officer-suicide>.

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### **About the IACP**

*The International Association of Chiefs of Police is a dynamic organization that serves as the professional voice of law enforcement. Building on our past success, the IACP addresses cutting edge issues confronting law enforcement through advocacy, programs and research, as well as training and other professional services. IACP is a comprehensive professional organization that supports the law enforcement leaders of today and develops the leaders of tomorrow.*

### **About the COPS Office**

*The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation’s state, local, territory, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.*

**About the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention**

*([www.ActionAllianceforSuicidePrevention.org](http://www.ActionAllianceforSuicidePrevention.org)) is the public-private partnership working to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and make suicide prevention a national priority. Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) operates the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which was launched in 2010 by former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates with the goal of saving 20,000 lives in five years.*

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*The International Association of Chiefs of Police  
44 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 200, Alexandria, Virginia 22314  
[www.theiacp.org](http://www.theiacp.org)*