



MILWAUKEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING INSTRUCTION

WELLNESS TEAM

ISSUED: December 17, 2025

EFFECTIVE: December 17, 2025

REVIEWED/APPROVED BY:

Assistant Chief Craig Sarnow

DATE: November 5, 2025

ACTION: Amends SOI (March 25, 2024)

WILEAG STANDARD(S): NONE

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this standard operating instruction is to establish policy regarding the department's Wellness Team. The Milwaukee Police Department is responsible for supporting a safe and inclusive City of Milwaukee where all can live, work, and raise a family protected by a diverse police department with the highest level of integrity. The department's key resource in meeting this responsibility is its employees. The department is therefore concerned about problems that its employees experience, which may interfere with their job performance and/or jeopardize their ability to effectively carry out their job responsibilities. It is the policy of the Milwaukee Police Department to maintain and promote a work culture that will help employees and their family members/significant others deal with personal, behavioral, or medical problems, by implementation of the Milwaukee Police Wellness Team.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. CONFIDENTIALITY

An ethical duty/obligation of an individual to keep information private; refrain from sharing and prevent unauthorized access to information with third parties.

B. COMMUNICATION

Means an oral or written statement, note, record, report, or document made during or arising out of a meeting between a recipient of peer support services or critical incident stress management services and a peer support team member or a critical incident stress management services team member.

C. CRITICAL INCIDENT

Means an actual or perceived event or situation that involves a crisis, disaster, trauma, or emergency, which may provoke an intense emotional, psychological and/or physical response.

For the purposes of this SOI, an officer-involved death is an incident that involves, "A death of an individual that results directly from an action or an omission of a law enforcement officer while the law enforcement officer is on duty or while the law enforcement officer is off duty but performing activities that are within the scope of his or her law enforcement duties." [Wis. Stat. § 175.47\(1\)\(c\)](#) and SOP 453.10(A).

D. CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Means services provided by a critical incident stress management services team or a critical incident stress management services team member to any first responder affected by a critical incident and designed to assist the individual affected by a critical incident to cope with critical incident stress or to mitigate reactions to critical incident stress. "Critical incident stress management services" includes any of the following:

1. Critical incident stress defusings.
2. Critical incident stress debriefings.
3. On-scene support services.
4. One-on-one support services.

E. CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT SERVICES TEAM MEMBER

Means any first responder or other person who has been trained in critical incident stress management services and officially designated by the Chief of Police, or designee, to be a member of the department's critical incident stress management services team.

F. FIRST RESPONDER

Means any person who performs the duty as any law enforcement officer, tribal law enforcement officer, correctional officer, jail officer, juvenile detention officer, fire fighter, dispatcher, emergency medical responder, emergency medical services practitioner, public safety personnel, ambulance service provider personnel, or civilian employee or volunteer member of a law enforcement agency.

G. LEAD PEER

A peer support member, who in the absence of a wellness coordinator / or until relieved, coordinates a Wellness Team response for a major or critical incident.

H. MAJOR INCIDENT

Is an event or situation with serious consequences. A major incident is beyond the scope of "business-as-usual" operations and may involve serious harm, damage, disruption, or risk to human life, essential services, the environment, or national security.

I. PEER SUPPORT SERVICES

Means any debriefing, defusing, on-scene, or one-on-one session provided by a peer support team member that provides emotional and moral support to any law enforcement officer, tribal law enforcement officer, correctional officer, jail officer, juvenile detention officer, fire fighter, dispatcher, emergency medical responder, emergency medical services practitioner, public safety personnel, ambulance service provider personnel,

civilian employee, or volunteer member of a law enforcement agency affected by stress or an incident, whether personal or professional.

J. PEER SUPPORT MEMBER

Means any first responder or other person who has been trained in peer support services and officially designated and vetted by the Chief of Police, or designee, to be a member of the department's wellness team.

K. PRIVILEGE

A special legal right, immunity or exemption, granted to a person that protects certain relationships from compelled disclosure.

L. TRAINED

Means a person who has successfully completed an approved peer support training program or an approved critical incident stress management-training program.

M. WELLNESS TEAM COORDINATORS

Means a law enforcement officer who provides general wellness information to department members and their families, as well as referrals to the department chaplain and mental health professionals. In addition, the Wellness Team coordinators are responsible for oversight of the Wellness Team members.

III. PROCEDURE

A. The Wellness Team is composed of full-time wellness team coordinators, peer support members, a department chaplain and contracted mental health professionals.

B. A department member or family member may initiate assistance from the Wellness Team using the following options:

1. Contact the Wellness Team Coordinators

The Wellness Team coordinators provide general wellness information to department members and their families, as well as referrals to the department chaplain and mental health professionals. In addition, the Wellness Team coordinators are responsible for oversight of the Wellness Team members.

2. Contact a Peer Support Member

Peer support members have received specific training to be a resource for those seeking assistance with personal and work-related stress.

3. Contact the City of Milwaukee Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The EAP provides support for all general city employees and families who wish to be

assisted by a service outside of the department's Wellness Team.

4. Any member of the Wellness Team may initiate a "Wellness Reach Out" to check on a member based on one of several factors, including but not limited to, the member being involved in a critical incident, a referral from a member's coworker or supervisor, a death in the member's family, or any other potentially traumatic event in the member's life that may cause a disruption in day to day life.

IV. WELLNESS TEAM GENERAL GUIDELINES

- A. It will be the option of the employee to accept or decline a referral for professional treatment (except in the case of a mandatory session as the result of a critical incident). The Wellness Team encourages employees to seek help on their own initiative.
- B. The fact that an employee accepts, rejects, or fails to respond to treatment for alcoholism, drug dependency or personal behavioral/medical problems will not diminish the employee's responsibility to meet required job performance standards.
- C. Implementation of this policy will not require, nor result in, any special regulations, privileges or exemptions from administrative practices applicable to job performance requirements, nor, shall there be any inconsistency with labor agreements.
- D. Management and supervisory personnel will follow department policy and procedures, which assure employees that job security or promotional opportunities will not be jeopardized by a request and/or referral for diagnosis and treatment.

V. CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES

- A. All contacts with any member of the Wellness Team shall remain strictly confidential unless:
 1. Prior written consent is obtained from the department member that specifies what information may be disclosed, to whom, and for what purpose.
 2. An unexplained, unusual, or suspicious death.
 3. A case of suspected child neglect or abuse.
 4. A threat to one's own life or safety, or that of another.
 5. A report of committing; having committed; or threatening to commit a crime.
 6. A threat to public health or safety.
 7. A report or information required to be reported by police per [Wis. Stat. § 968.075](#) (Domestic Abuse).

Note: One on one contacts with the department chaplain or mental health providers have legal privilege and are subject to their own restrictions.

- B. The Wellness Team coordinators and the peer support members do not share the same legal privilege regarding confidentiality as the department chaplain and mental health providers. There is no guarantee that a court, whether civil or criminal, will not under some circumstances be able to order the Wellness Team coordinator or peer support member to whom the individual spoke to disclose any conversations which may have taken place unless the Wellness Team member has a confidentiality privilege under [Wis. Stat. § 905](#) (e.g., clergy, mental health professional).

VI. WELLNESS TEAM REFERRAL OPTIONS

- A. Alcoholism, drug dependency and personal/emotional problems may become progressively more serious and uncontrollable. This process often culminates in a person becoming involved in a crisis situation resulting in disciplinary action, dismissal, criminal prosecution, hospitalization, or even death. The Wellness Team recognizes that this process may be interrupted and reversed with effective intervention and treatment.
- B. Often persons affected will be unaware or deny the extent of the problem, and they may not be motivated to seek help. It is in the employee's best interest that positive or aggressive steps are taken to intervene before the situation deteriorates to a crisis point and coworkers and supervisors intervene prior to that time whenever possible.
- C. There are four types of referrals to the Wellness Team:

1. Self-Referral

Employees with personal problems are encouraged to seek help on their own initiative before health or job performance is affected. They can discuss their problems with the Wellness Team coordinators, a facilitator of their choice (including peer support members), or the department chaplain or mental health professionals. The Wellness Team will assist the employee in working with the department's Human Resources Division – Medical Section or in contacting appropriate resources to provide service for a specific problem. The Wellness Team will also follow up with employees to make certain they gain access to needed services.

2. Supervisor

Whenever an employee with an established record of acceptable work evidences a pattern of inconsistent or deteriorating job performance and fails to respond to supervisory input (e.g., verbal instructions, written job instructions, discussion of job performance), the supervisor should encourage the employee to contact the Wellness Team coordinators, one of the peer support members, the department chaplain or a mental health professional.

3. Co-Worker

When an employee believes a coworker is experiencing problems, but is not seeking treatment or is denying the problem, the employee should attempt to intervene by expressing concern in a caring manner and by making an informal referral to the Wellness Team. The employee may also contact the City of Milwaukee's EAP

coordinator, who can discuss other available options in addition to the Wellness Team.

4. Officer-Involved Deaths and Other Critical Incidents

See SOP 453.55(F) regarding confidential debriefs related to officer-involved deaths and other critical incidents.

VII. WELLNESS TEAM

- A. The purpose of the Wellness Team is to provide a core group of personnel who are trained to provide support, information and referral to employees and family members seeking assistance related to a critical incident, day-to-day work stress, or personal life stress.

B. SELECTION OF WELLNESS TEAM

1. To participate in the Milwaukee Police Department Wellness Team, department employees, both sworn and civilian, interested in this position and having the qualifications listed below should submit a brief *Department Memorandum* (form PM-9E) to his/her commanding officer stating their interest in the position. The *Department Memorandum* shall be addressed to the applying member's commanding officer demonstrating the member's traits and qualities.
2. In addition to the *Department Memorandum*, a minimum of four (4) letters of recommendation shall be attached (two (2) from peers and two (2) from supervisors). The letters of recommendation from fellow officers and direct supervisors are critical as they reflect the candidates' consistent honesty, confidentiality, and empathy over time.
3. Commanding officers shall forward the *Department Memorandum* and letters of recommendation to the Training Director, along with their recommendation on whether the member should be considered for the team.
4. The Training Director, or designee, will make decisions related to assignments to the Wellness Team.
5. Selected applicants will be required to complete Wellness Team peer support training.
6. Employee participation is voluntary and members selected must have attended the prerequisite 40-hour Advanced CIT training course to become members of the Milwaukee Police Department Wellness Team.

C. CANDIDATE REQUIREMENTS

1. Candidates will not be considered for any assignment if they have been subject of a sustained disciplinary action resulting in suspension(s) causing a break in service of five (5) cumulative days or more, within the previous three years of the date of the posting.

2. Candidates shall commit to and have the following:

- a. Be able to convey trust and assure confidentiality, within legal guidelines, to those who seek assistance.
- b. Interest in the assignment and a willingness to support/help co-workers with issues such as:
 1. Substance Abuse
 2. Critical Incident Stress
 3. Job Stress/Cumulative Stress
 4. Depression
 5. Family/Relationship Issues
 6. Unresolved Grief
 7. Emotional Distress
- c. Provide assistance, support, and referrals on a voluntary basis.
- d. Be willing to respond to critical incidents (e.g., officer involved shootings, injuries, line of duty deaths, attempted or completed suicide of department members or family, etc.).
- e. Be supportive of those in need during emotional distress, possess the ability to actively listen and assist co-workers in securing appropriate professional services, as needed.
- f. Be available to the Wellness Team regarding referrals and team activities.
- g. A high degree of professionalism and the ability to represent the department when working with other agencies and vendors.
- h. Proven ability and desire to work as a part of a diverse and high performing multidisciplinary team.
- i. Critical thinking skills, positive and forward-looking attitude.

D. PARTICIPATION

Members of the Wellness Team shall attend training and events when required. Being a member shall be considered a privilege and commitment is a requirement. Members are expected to be available on short notice for critical incidents, major incidents, or other approved details as representatives of the Wellness Team.

E. REMOVAL FROM WELLNESS TEAM

1. Members shall be removed from the Wellness Team with documented cause including, but not limited to:
 - a. Sustained discipline resulting in suspension;
 - b. Chronic tardiness or absences from work, Wellness Team training, and/or critical/major incidents;
 - c. Lack of availability for critical/major incidents, debriefs, on-call status, etc.;
 - d. Inability to perform Wellness Team duties required during training or critical/major incidents;
 - e. Failing to submit monthly documentation of activity (contact/referral numbers) twice;
 - f. Failure to maintain a professional demeanor;
 - g. Failure to maintain confidentiality;
 - h. Failure to comply with Wellness Team standards;
 - i. Failure to attend required training;
 - j. Inability to successfully perform the required tasks and duties of the Wellness Team; and/or
 - k. Activities, both professional and personal, that expresses a risk factor to the function and safety of the Wellness Team.
2. Wellness Team members shall return all equipment to the Wellness Team coordinators within fourteen (14) days of the member's removal from Wellness Team.
3. Any member of the Wellness Team may request, without cause, to be removed from active status by submitting a *Department Memorandum* (form PM-9E) to the Training Director who will take into consideration the needs of the department before granting the request.

F. ROLE OF WELLNESS TEAM MEMBERS

1. To serve as a peer support for employees and their families seeking information on the Wellness Team and resources for issues such as work or personal stress, emotional stress, addictions, financial stress, relationship difficulties, and family concerns.
2. Wellness Team coordinators or peer support members will not provide therapy or counseling, but will act as a referral person to other available resources.

3. Wellness Team members will coordinate group critical incident defusings / debriefings by working with the responding Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) provider to assess specific intervention needs.
4. Wellness Team members will conduct follow-up contacts with affected officers at intervals to be determined by the mental health provider.
5. Wellness Team members shall be trained to act as family liaison officers and shall serve as the central point of contact between the designated family representative and the department following the death of a member or a line of duty death.

G. ROLE OF LEAD PEER

1. During times of planned and unplanned absences (e.g., sick leave, FMLA, vacation) of a wellness coordinator, a lead peer will temporarily coordinate responses to major or critical incidents.
2. A lead peer shall demonstrate an ability to perform the duties of a Wellness Team coordinator during such events.

H. ROLE OF WELLNESS TEAM COORDINATORS

1. Oversight of the Wellness Team.
2. Work with the other members of the Wellness Team to facilitate program use and assure adherence to program guidelines.
3. Responsible for supervision of Wellness Team and overall program implementation and utilization.
4. Work with the Wellness Team to provide ongoing training for Wellness Team members as well as other Milwaukee Police Department wellness topics.
5. Coordinate regular meetings and share information with Wellness Team members.
6. Coordinate annual and semi-annual debriefings for members assigned to sensitive work locations (e.g., Homicide Division, Sensitive Crimes Division) or any work location that requests a debriefing.
7. Manage early intervention program (EIP) referrals.
8. Regular visits to all work locations with/without a facility dog to foster positive relationships with members and supervisors.
9. Creating a health and wellness curriculum and training design.
10. Assist in recruit training, in-service and specialized training.

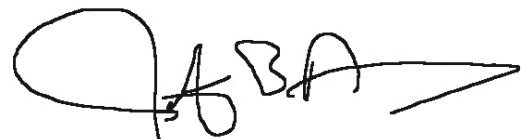
11. Maintaining the database with department psychologists for follow up and end of year report.
12. Researching and monitoring law enforcement trends to bring new ideas to the department and ensure that programs and instruction are at the forefront of national training.
13. Follow policies outlined in SOP 320 Canines regarding department facility dogs.

VIII. TIME SPENT ENGAGING IN WELLNESS TEAM - RELATED ACTIVITY

- A. The Chief of Police, or designee, may allow Wellness Team members to engage in Wellness Team-related training during the member's normal hours of work so long as a request for such time is submitted in writing to the Chief in advance and the request is approved. The Chief reserves the right to deny any such requests.
- B. This is an unpaid, voluntary position, meaning there is no compensation when performing duties as a Wellness Team / Peer Support member unless authorized by a supervisor to do so while on duty, or the duties performed are in conjunction with a critical incident.

IX. RECORDKEEPING

- A. Wellness Team records of referrals and actions taken under this program will be maintained in strictest confidence and paper or electronic records shall not be accessible by non-Wellness Team members unless authorized by the Chief of Police, or designee.
- B. No records shall be maintained when employees refer themselves as only non-identifying information for statistical evaluation will be recorded.
- C. No reference to any Wellness Team records will be placed in an employee's personnel file, except as it applies to specific charges leading to disciplinary or corrective actions.
- D. Discussion or speculation about an employee's personal problems violates Wellness Team confidentiality requirements and is prohibited.
- E. Wellness Team members who are referral facilitators must, in good faith, follow all Wellness Team guidelines and may deviate from them only when they are in conflict with applicable city ordinance, state statute, and/or departmental policy. Prior to any deviation, contact with the Wellness Team coordinators shall be attempted.



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