

## **Harris County (TX) Sheriff's Office 2023 Officer Wellness Summary**

The Harris County Sheriff's Office is the largest sheriff's office in the state of Texas. Harris County covers 1,788 square miles and has a population of 4.1m residents. The Sheriff's Office has a total staff of 4,614. 2,237 are sworn deputies, 1,681 work in detention and the remaining 696 are civilian employees. The department also has 200 reservists.

The department's The Behavioral Health Division (BHD) collaborates with Baylor College of Medicine (BCM). Through their association, the BHD has become the training site for the nation's first American Psychological Association (APA) Accredited Psychologist Internship focused on caring for the mental health needs of law enforcement employees and their families.

In partnership with the research consortium at the University of Houston's First Responder Program, BHD staff has led research initiatives to improve understanding of how occupational stressors impact first responders and how positive, wellness-promoting behaviors can help mitigate these impacts and lead to balanced coping.

The BHD operates a mental health clinic providing evaluation, consultation, treatment, and referral services for First Responders. These services are voluntary and entirely confidential except as required by law (e.g., the abuse of children or the elderly, imminent danger to self or others).

In the event of a Critical Incident, Behavioral Health Division staff provides on-scene support, consultation to Command Staff, supervisors, Peer Support Team members and Post Critical Incident Debriefings either in groups (typically in concert with Peer Support Team members) or on an individual basis. The BHD conducts biannual wellness checks for high-exposure units, and annual training requirements and unit-level outreach serve to bridge the gap for potentially at-need personnel.

In addition to the 24/7 crisis consultation to Peer Support Team members, CIRT, Supervisors, Command Staff, and the Sheriff, BHD Staff provides non-crisis consultation on behavioral health or supervisory issues, as well as on programs and policies related to the psychological health of employees, including policies/programs related to Suicide Prevention, Occupational Stress Management, Family Readiness, and Substance Abuse Prevention. Staff also serve on committees such as the Employee Wellness Committee (Chair), Peer Support Steering Committee, and Critical Incident Review Committee. BHD Staff serve as consultants for the agency's all-volunteer Peer Support Team, providing training and clinical oversight.

The Harris County Sheriff's Office CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) Team was established over 20 years ago and currently consists of volunteers led by a Peer Support Team Coordinator. CISM is selecting and implementing the most appropriate crisis intervention tactics to best respond to the needs of the situation at hand. CISM has multiple components that can be used before, during, and after a crisis. CISM aims to mitigate an event's impact, accelerate the recovery process, and assess the need for additional or alternative services. The CISM program intends to provide pre-incident education and resiliency tools and support work-related incidents.

The Harris County Sheriff's Office believes that preventing is more important than waiting for a crisis. An essential part of approach is that ensuring a foundation of awareness and resiliency skills training can often prevent the need for intervention (clinical services). Then, in the cases where intervention is indicated, BHD's staff involvement in the employee's development and training has created a familiarity that makes it more likely for personnel to feel comfortable reaching out for help and makes that help more effective. BHD staff provide foundational training in stress management, family wellness, substance abuse, and suicide prevention in entry (Police Academy) and transitional (Lateral Deputy Course, New Supervisor Training) courses. In addition, a 3-hour annual refresher training is provided for all sworn employees.

As an employee or retiree, members have access to a valuable Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provided by Cigna at no additional cost. EAP personal advocates will work with employees and their household family members to help them resolve issues they may be facing, connect them with the right mental health professionals, direct them to various helpful resources in their community, and more. Cigna Apps & Activities helps employees stay motivated. It puts the power to improve their health at their fingertips.

The Lighthouse Health & Wellness app is an in-hand, on-demand, 100% confidential health and wellness platform available at no cost to public safety agencies. It was designed to provide employees and their families with anonymous access to an agency's existing health and wellness programs, along with a growing library of the latest educational health and wellness information and tools that have been tailored to the unique needs of those working in public safety.

The Cigna Healthy Pregnancies, Healthy Babies® program is designed to help a mom and her baby stay healthy during pregnancy and in the days and weeks following their baby's birth. Assigned a coach, who is a nurse, is there to support you during your whole pregnancy. Participants receive a pregnancy journal with information, charts, and tools to help moms have healthier nine months and healthier babies. Mothers are also rewarded for making smart choices. When one participates and completes the program, one is eligible to receive an incentive award if one enrolls by the end of your first trimester or second trimester.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a course that gives people the skills to recognize symptoms of mental health challenges, mental health disorders and substance abuse problems, how to offer and provide initial help and how to guide a person toward appropriate treatments and other professional and supportive help. The course is held virtually through the National Council for Mental Well-being. It can be completed during working hours with supervisor approval.

HCSO also has an emotional support dog – Gabriel.

Employees are welcome to take a variety of wellness on-line training courses that are offered every month. Topics include physical health, nutrition, stress management and preventative health. There is a nutrition component featuring registered dietitians that include a cooking demonstration of healthy meals for employees and their families. One of these courses includes seminars led by certified financial specialists that will cover all topics regarding financial wellness.

The agency has gyms strategically located throughout its locations and department members are encouraged to use them. Harris County Employees can also receive credit toward their 2023-24 Healthy Actions Medical Plan (HAMP) by participating in online Fitness Training. Fitness classes are available LIVE via zoom. Each class is worth 25 points toward the 2023-24 Healthy Actions Medical Plan. These classes are free to Harris County employees and are typically scheduled during lunch and after work hours. It is up to the department head's discretion to allow employees to use work time to participate in the classes.

HCSO implemented ABLE Program training in 2021. This course is mandated by the agency that all certified peace officers and detention officers attend. As of the end of 2022, 2,852 officers have received training for a total of 22, 816 hours.

The agency has a military liaison office which supports department members, who are or will be deployed, and their families with resource information and help with access to the VA and other resources.

**\*\* This summary is only a brief overview of many of the agency's programs. In the actual submission you will see that the agency has other programs and incentives to benefit its members. Please review their entire submission and its associated documents to gain a complete understanding of their program.**