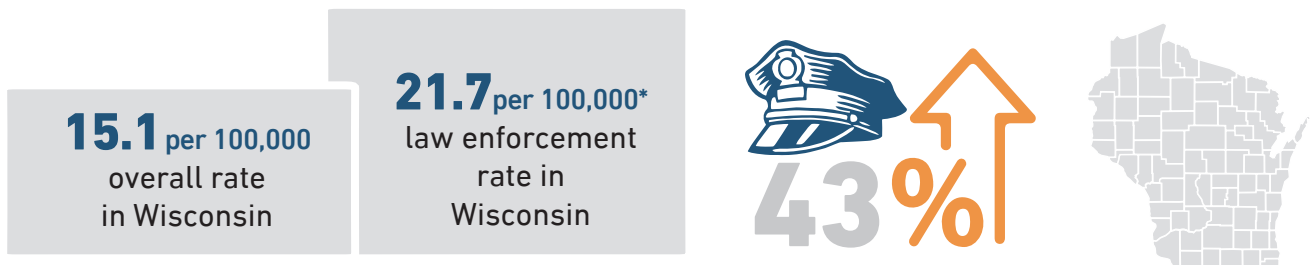


Law Enforcement Suicide in Wisconsin

Problem Statement:

Wisconsin law enforcement rate of suicide is higher than the overall state suicide rate. Stigma is the number one barrier to seeking help.¹



** This data is from the Wisconsin Violent Death Reporting System and is based on reports from coroners/medical examiners and law enforcement reports after a suicide.*

#1 help-seeking concern... appearing unfit for duty

(elevated consequences in a highly competitive profession)

DATA HIGHLIGHTS from recent studies that illustrate increased risk of suicide among law enforcement and expand on risk factors and societal impacts.

Suicide among law enforcement vs. other occupations^{2,4}



Lifetime critical incident exposure among law enforcement vs. average person³



RISK FACTORS

unique to or disproportionately affecting law enforcement^{2,4,5,7}

- Lack of proper sleep
- Staff shortages and overtime
- Poor treatment due to recent (societal) mentality on policing
- Post-traumatic stress resulting from high critical incident exposure (repeated small traumas)
- Access to lethal means
- Retirees have greater loss of identity associated with a high visibility profession, especially for males



“Officers are socialized into a state of invulnerability and feel they must always be impervious to complications such as depression.”

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

✓ Comprehensive Framework for Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention^{2,5}

for implementation within policing organizations

3 CATEGORIES **11** STRATEGIES

Includes targeted **Recommendations**⁵ if implementing the entire framework is not immediately possible



Due to shared lived experience, peers can impact suicide prevention by^{2,5}:

- Increasing at-risk person's comfort level
- Encouraging shared true feelings/responses
- Increasing social connectedness
- Decreasing help-seeking barriers
- Reinforcing healthy coping strategies
- Recognize signs of suicide risk



✓ Provide Wellness Training for Officers and Family/Friends⁵

Individuals in law enforcement are more likely to reach out to a family member or friend outside of the department about needing help for mental health. Providing regular QPR and Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety⁶ trainings is critical to saving lives. Training on interpersonal skills, vicarious trauma, burnout and suicide prevention are important.

✓ Provide Annual Wellness Sessions With a Mental Health Provider^{4,5}

Professionally trained CISM or peer debriefing after critical incidents provides officers with:

- Understanding of what a "normal" critical event response is
- Healthy ways to cope
- Guidance on when to seek help

✓ Addressing Lethal Means Security^{2,4}



Storing lethal means securely is an evidence-based way to prevent suicide.

- Temporarily remove firearms from the home - place in the possession of a trusted friend or at a secure storage facility
- Put time and distance between a person in crisis and their chosen method to attempt suicide during at-risk times

Staying away from alcohol and other substances during times of crisis.

Turning to alcohol and/or substance use is a common response for law enforcement officers, which can strain relationships and become a precursor to suicide^{2,7}.

CONCLUSIONS

National and state data show that individuals in law enforcement have higher rates of suicide than the general population. Suicide can be prevented⁸. Suicide prevention efforts should be implemented at the organizational, interpersonal level and individual level. This multi-tiered approach offers multiple layers of safety nets. Encouraging law enforcement professionals to seek mental health help can improve overall job performance, build resilience and coping skills, and improve overall quality of life.

Sources

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