



THE NICKEL LINE

Caring for our Firefighters for over 100 years!



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San Diego Fire Relief Association
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Our Dedicated Staff



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Board of Directors



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Board Director



Geof Cummings
Board Director



Joe Kennedy
Board Director



Rachel Delacour
Board Director



Douglas Nakama
RET. Board Director



Jeff Carle
RET. Board Director



Arnell Garcia
Trustee



Dan King
Trustee



Lorraine Hutchinson
Trustee

We're dedicated to you, your families, your profession, and our community.

Letter from the President

SDFRA Members and Families,

Once again, I am writing an update on the heels of a tragedy for our SDFRA family. While we are all aware of the inherent risks of our profession, that knowledge does not make the reality any less hard to stomach. Fortunately, our brothers could return to their families and are receiving excellent care during this next stage of their recovery.

In 2024, I was honored to speak at two different 9/11 events: our 12th Annual San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb and USD's 9/11 Remembrance. My remarks centered around the theme of gratitude—not for the tragic events that took place, but for those who came to the rescue in the minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months that followed. I referenced author Austen Brower's quote, "*Gratitude gives us the lens to reflect and rebuild broken or painful moments into more positive ones.*"



While there is no reason to feel gratitude for the events surrounding CATF-8's deployment, there are many reasons to be grateful for those who responded in the following minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months. I am grateful for the iPhone crash detection that initiated a response as quickly as possible. I am grateful for the same iPhone crash detection to be off by three miles, triggering a response from a paid department with a paramedic and not the volunteer department whose district the accident actually occurred in. I am deeply grateful for the heroism and exceptional care demonstrated by the incredible individuals from the response crews to the Ochsner LSU Health Shreveport Medical Center team. I am grateful for the "southern hospitality" provided by the many fire departments and community partners in the Shreveport area so we could feel at home, even though our families were over a thousand miles away. And I am grateful for each of you back at home who have lived into the best part of the fire family, caring for one another when tragedy strikes.

I could write an entire newsletter on the impactful moments and people who have played a part in the healing journey so far, but I will leave that for the families to share on their own timelines. For now, thank you for your continued trust in our organization; your dues and contributions allowed our team to provide this much-needed care without delay.

In other news, we are pleased and honored to share the recent election results for board positions. Thank you to every member who participated and cast their vote—your involvement strengthens our organization and drives us forward! Beginning January 1, 2025, Active Board Directors Geof Cummings and Rachel Delacour and Retired Board Directors Jeff Carle and Douglas Nakama commenced their three-year terms.

As a reminder, if you want to get more involved in helping care for our friends and families, the SDFRA is always looking for volunteers for the Relief Crew. I appreciate your engagement with the SDFRA's updates and resources. The goal is always to provide meaningful support, helpful resources, and tools to make a difference within our membership. Your trust and engagement validate the work we do.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Brandt Truver".

Brandt Truver, President



SDFRA Membership Updates

By: Marisa Nunes

Thank you for your kindness and generosity in caring for your fellow firefighters. Because of you, 18 San Diego Fire Relief Association (SDFRA) members were able to receive additional support through our grant programs in 2024. Our team made 34 station visits to provide our staff with invaluable insights into our department's operations and our firefighting crews' dedication and to honor those who passed away this year. We are grateful for the opportunity to educate ourselves and strengthen our partnership with the department. These experiences have already informed us how to better support our shared mission of ensuring safety and well-being.

Station visits provide our staff invaluable insights into our department's operations and our firefighting crews' dedication. We receive so much feedback, and we are grateful for the opportunity to educate ourselves and strengthen our partnership with the department.

New One-Time Member Benefit Reimbursement

In response to your feedback, we are thrilled to introduce a new one-time benefit exclusively for our members! This unique benefit is designed to provide additional support and value. Beginning January 1, 2025, we are introducing a one-time Trust reimbursement of up to \$300 through the Flex Fund as part of the medical claims and reimbursement program.

The Flex Fund has a maximum of \$300, and here are the available options:

- **Up to \$300** for dental or vision expenses
- **Up to \$50** for home or auto insurance
- **Up to \$50** for gym memberships

Newly added option:

- **Up to \$300** (one-time) for trust creation ****Service must occur on or after Wednesday, January 1, 2025****

Active Membership Dues

As of July 1, 2024, Union members approved a 9% salary increase over a two-year contract. As a result, your bi-weekly membership dues will increase slightly, from \$35.79 to \$36.15, reflecting the second 1% contract raise. This change will apply to the pay period covering Saturday, January 4, 2025, through Friday, January 17, 2025, and will be reflected in the January 17th paycheck.

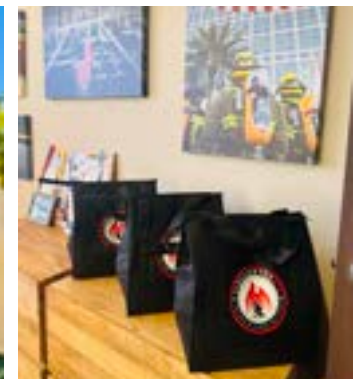
Retiring Soon?

If you have recently retired or plan to retire soon, please contact Marisa Nunes at (619) 281-0354 (Option 2) or mail@sdfra.org. According to the Bylaws, retirees have up to 90-days from their official retirement date to decide whether to continue as a retired member of the Relief Association. Retiree membership dues are \$58.30, paid once a month through the San Diego City Employee Retirement System (SDCERS), San Diego Firefighters Federal Credit Union (SDFFCU), or by personal check.

Line of Duty Death Survivor Benefit Resource List

On page 7, you will find the **Line of Duty Death Survivor Benefit Resource List**, a valuable guide designed to support families and loved ones during the most challenging times. This comprehensive resource outlines the benefits and assistance available to survivors, ensuring they have the information and support to navigate their next steps through the Relief Association, Local 145, City of San Diego, California, Federal, and SDCERS. This will also be available online.

Who Needs Estate Planning?



By: Marisa Nunes

Main Entrance Gate Code

We understand that gaining access can be challenging. Still, these measures are necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of our staff, board members, membership, and tenants of the Old Mission Plaza. It is always best to call and make an appointment before stopping by the office, and at that point, we can provide the gate code (619) 281-0354 (Option 1) or mail@sdfra.org.

Relief Crew

The Relief Crew helps in various ways:

- **Work Parties:** Assisting with yard work, home repairs, and other practical needs.
- **Meal Trains:** Providing home-cooked meals to families who could use a helping hand.
- **Comfort Bag Deliveries:** Preparing and delivering care packages with essentials and comfort items.

Notary Services

We offer a free notary service to the membership. This service can be used to establish reliable documentation or an official record of a transaction that has taken place. Document signings where notary services are generally necessary are real estate deeds, affidavits, wills, trusts, powers of attorney, bills of sale, or other official transactional documents. If you would like a notary service, we require an appointment. To make an appointment, contact Brittany at (619) 281-0354 (Option 1) or bsipe@sdfra.org.

Updating Information or Updating A Dependent

Contact us to help ensure your account details are accurate and up-to-date. To add new dependents to your account, please provide their full name and date of birth. This information is required to ensure accurate updates to your account.

Receipts Matching the Benefit Year

Receipts must correspond to the Benefit Year and have available benefits to be reimbursed.

Receipt Submittal Deadline

Members have up to six months from the date of service or purchase to submit their reimbursement request. Requests submitted after six months will not be eligible for reimbursement.

Claim Submittals

When submitting claim details, please include the following information: the provider or store name, the date of service or purchase, the prescription RX number, the days' supply for the prescription, the date range for inpatient visits or multiple visits to the same provider on different days, and the out-of-pocket expense you paid. Remember, prescription claims must be submitted separately due to their unique nature. This ensures accurate processing and prompt reimbursement.



Valuable Resources

Line of Duty Death Survivor Benefits

	SDFRA	Local 145	City of San Diego	California	Federal	SDCERS
Cash Benefit	\$10,000 Active	Voluntary Employees Beneficiary Association "Dead Man's" Fund \$20 per member to the family of the fallen firefighter ~ 20K	\$50,000 Life Insurance	\$250,000-\$320,000 The amount depends on the number of total an/or partial dependent(s)	On or after October 1, 2023, is a maximum of \$437,503 through Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program	Amount varies; up to ½ payable to the named beneficiary
Funerary Coverage	Non-Monetary (logistical)	-	Reference SDFD SOPs Manual under Memorial Service Classifications	Not to exceed \$10,000	Not to exceed \$10,000	Not to exceed \$2,000
Medical Coverage	Medical Co-pay Reimbursements	-	Benefits under any City health insurance plan up to the amount defined in the Annual Salary Ordinance and MOU	Safeguard to protect immediate loss of coverage 120 post death via CalPERS	Survivor dependent(s) will continue under the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB), must be active at the time of death	Survivor may elect City Sponsored group health at Survivor's expense; deducted from monthly continuance
Educational Benefit	N/A	-	N/A	Daniel A. Terry Scholarship award amount \$2,000	On or after October 1, 2023, up to \$1,488 PSOB educational assistance benefit for one month of full-time assistance	N/A
Other	Financial and Medical Hardship Grants	-	N/A	Non-profit/private organizations offer discounted education and job training	Public Safety Officers' Benefits program to offset education and job training	N/A

San Diego Fire Relief Association

- Membership Website - <https://www.firefighteraid.org/membership-claim-portal/>
- Medical Claim Reimbursement Portal - <https://member.portal.firefighteraid.org/portal/login.jsp>

Retired Corner

By: Arnell Garcia

As I write my final newsletter for the San Diego Fire Relief Association, I reflect on my thirteen years of service on the Board. Thank you to the then Board President, George Duardo, for believing in me and inviting me to join the organization as a Retired Board Member. I am equally thankful to our current Board President, Brandt Truver, for his exceptional leadership over the past six years.

During my time on the Board, I had the privilege of witnessing and contributing to many significant accomplishments, including:

Honoring and Supporting Members: Ensuring a continued presence at funerals for active and retired members and eliminating dues for surviving spouses of deceased firefighters.

Streamlining Member Benefits: Rebuilding the Medical Claim Reimbursement portal for smoother processing of member reimbursements.

Expanding and Diversifying Leadership: Growing the Board to eleven members, adding a second retiree board position, and introducing retiree trustee roles.

Inclusive Rebranding: Changing the organization's name to reflect inclusivity for all members.

Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic: Addressing the challenges of an unprecedented disease impacting our members and their families, with Brandt and Vice President Kelly Doan leading critical efforts.

CAPP Program: Launching a forward-thinking education initiative to combat the alarming cancer rates among firefighters.

FirefighterAid: Strengthening the 501(c)(3) program to provide financial and medical hardship grants for firefighters and their families.

Fundraising Initiatives: Supporting impactful events such as the San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb, San Diego Mustache Madness, and Motors for Minds.

CATF-8: We humbly provided support and care to the affected families and offered prompt assistance with essential efforts.

A special thank you to the retirees who supported me throughout my tenure: Ken Barnes, Jon Handley, Greg Donnelly, Jeff Carle, and Lorraine Hutchinson. Congratulations to Doug Nakama, the newest retiree to join the Board!

Although I am stepping down from the Board, I am staying involved as a Trustee and look forward to continuing to help others when I can.

Thank you all for your support. Wishing you a happy and healthy retirement!

Arnie Garcia

Former Retired Board Director



Last Alarms

By: Arnell Garcia



We invite you to take a moment to honor the firefighters listed below, whose legacies continue to live on within our fire family and the firehouse.

RET. CAPTAIN, WILLIAM SIMPSON

LAST ALARM MAY 30, 2024

RET. CAPTAIN, RICHARD TIBIATOWSKI

LAST ALARM OCTOBER 11, 2024

RET. CAPTAIN, EDWIN SWAFFORD

LAST ALARM JUNE 5, 2024

RET. FIREFIGHTER/PARAMEDIC, MICHAEL MEOLA

LAST ALARM NOVEMBER 14, 2024

RET. ENGINEER, JOSEPH CLIFFORD

LAST ALARM JULY 3, 2024

RET. FIREFIGHTER, JACK CAHOON

LAST ALARM NOVEMBER 15, 2024

RET. CAPTAIN, MARTIN MARUGG

LAST ALARM AUGUST 9, 2024

RET. ENGINEER, JOHN ANDERSON

LAST ALARM DECEMBER 5, 2024

RET. DEPUTY CHIEF, DERRICK KAMACHI

LAST ALARM AUGUST 25, 2024

RET. CAPTAIN, JOSEPH PIRRONELLO

LAST ALARM DECEMBER 21, 2024

RET. CAPTAIN, JAMES PFISTER

LAST ALARM OCTOBER 1, 2024

RET. ENGINEER/PARAMEDIC, ERIC RHEINHARDT

LAST ALARM DECEMBER 25, 2024

“WE HONOR THE NOBLE TRADITIONS OF THE FIREFIGHTER BY CARING FOR THEM AND THOSE THEY LEAVE BEHIND.”

By: Retired Fire Captain Tony Hancock, Retired Fire and Police Association

We are a group of retired San Diego City Firefighters, Police Officers, and Lifeguards. Our membership is also open to active employees in DROP. Dues are \$2 per month by payroll deduction. We meet regularly with the San Diego City Employees Retirement System (SDCERS) and the City's Risk Management Division. We closely monitor issues affecting retiree benefits and healthcare.

Last October, we hosted one of our quarterly luncheons at the Bali Hai Restaurant, attended by over 180 members and their significant others. Included guest speakers included representatives from the Fire and Police Departments, SDCERS, and the San Diego Public Employees Benefits Association (SDPEBA). The cost of this luncheon to our members and guests was only \$10 per person. Our other three luncheons held during the year are "free" to our members. We hope you will consider becoming a member when you retire.

The RFPA has a 501(c)(3) charitable foundation, much like the Relief Association's Firefighter Aid. We donate to other worthwhile charitable groups, including Firefighter Aid and the SDPOA's Widows and Orphans Fund. We made recent donations to the families of the three San Diego firefighters from Task Force 8 who were injured in Texas. We also made substantial donations to the families of the two SDPD officers injured in the tragic traffic accident that took the life of one of the officers.

FirefighterAid Updates

By: Jamie Inn



As I sat down to reflect on all the amazing accomplishments for FirefighterAid (FFAid) in 2024, I was overcome with emotion. All the hugs, high fives, laughs, tears, and the sound of 'Amazing Grace' played on bagpipes all flood my mind...I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude to work for this organization and serve those who selflessly serve our communities. This work would not be possible without your support.

We kicked off 2024 with several fundraisers, including the 3rd Annual Fire Hogs M/C St. Patty's Day ride, Firehouse brunch in Pacific Beach in April, and the 2nd Annual Motors for Minds Firefighter Charity Car Show for mental health in May, led by SDFD Engineer Justin Loftis. These efforts raised \$32,500! **Save the date:** the 3rd Annual Motors for Minds Firefighter Charity Car Show will be held on Saturday, May 17, 2025.

On August 31, 2024, we gathered with 1,000 climbers, 170 volunteers, San Diego Fire Chief Robert Logan, Mayor Todd Gloria, sponsors, vendors, and numerous community members at the San Diego Hilton Bayfront for the 12th Annual San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb. Participants raised \$101,000 and embarked on a 110-story climb to complete the journey of the 343 firefighters who made the ultimate sacrifice on September 11, 2001. Liam Flaherty, Retired Captain and Commander of NYFD Rescue Co. 2, flew out from New York to serve as the keynote speaker, sharing heartfelt words recounting that day as if it were yesterday. May we Never Forget.

The tradition of honoring fallen firefighters continues yearly at the California Professional Firefighters Memorial in Sacramento. FFAid honored Dale E. Mosby, Fire Captain at Rancho Santa Fe, and Firefighter Michael D. Ferguson of San Diego Fire Rescue, as their names were etched into the limestone Memorial Wall. Visiting the Memorial is something to behold. CPF Board President Brian K. Rice reminded us that whether you visit with family or stroll through the park solo, you are never truly alone—with the 1,536 brave souls who paid the ultimate sacrifice in serving our communities.

As Autumn brings forth festivities, one of our favorite festive events was the San Diego Mustache Madness in October 2024! Captains Rich Marcello and Sean Brambir led the 9th annual FUNdraiser at Maverick's in Pacific Beach, encouraging participants to "party their staches off" in style, wearing their most epic 80s attire. The night offered live music, temporary tattoos, drink specials, raffle prizes, auction items, and of course...a mustache competition! This year, more than \$11,000 was raised to support FFAid's Cancer Awareness Prevention Program (CAPP) and the three injured firefighters of California Task Force 8.

To wrap up 2024, we launched our Year-End Giving campaign, which ran through December 31, highlighting the season of giving and generosity. The new Giving Menu encouraged supporters to customize their charitable donations and the impact they wanted to make. Every gift helps FirefighterAid further its mission to serve those who selflessly protect and serve all of us in San Diego!

Your Donations at Work

In 2024, we awarded \$32,500 in Fire Family Services, benefitting 80 families. Additionally, FFAid hosted 19 widows for brunches and community activities through the Aging Heroes program; awarded 6 Cadet scholarships, and provided 9 CAPP trainings to 168 firefighters of the Miramar Fire Department, Miramar ARFF, Rancho Santa Fe, and San Miguel departments.

In addition, after 5 years of fundraising and development, we launched the First Responder Culture and Mental Health Online Training in September for existing licensed therapists to become more culturally competent in meeting firefighters' unique mental health needs. On pages 13 and 14, Board Director Ben Vernon and Dr. Elizabeth Allen inform us about the course *First Responder Culture and Mental Health Treatment Implications: A Guide for Therapists*. We are deeply grateful for the hard work and persistence of Captain Ben Vernon and Dr. Elizabeth Allen in bringing this project to life—this is just the beginning of something truly monumental!

FirefighterAid Provided the Following in 2024



\$32,500 awarded in Fire Family Services Medical, Financial and Mental Health Grants



80 Fire Families Assisted across SD County including the Surviving Spouses of our fallen



\$130,000 raised to assist families of injured SDFD CA-TF-8 Firefighters



\$6,000 in Scholarships Awarded to Cadets to help pursue their education



168 Firefighters across 3 SD County Departments Trained in Cancer Awareness and Prevention (CAPP)



1,022 9/11 Memorial Stair Climbers gathered to memorialize our fallen heroes



16 Mental Health Providers Trained in First Responder Culture



1,000,000 Thanks to everyone who has made it possible for us to continue our mission to care for the San Diego County Fire Family

By: Brandt Truver

January is Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month. As firefighters, we confront numerous hazards daily, but one of the most insidious threats we face is occupational cancer. Studies have shown that firefighters are at a significantly higher risk of developing various types of cancer compared to the general population. This increased risk is attributed to exposure to carcinogens in burning materials, diesel exhaust, and other hazardous substances encountered on the job.

We are thrilled to have introduced CAPP to three county departments in 2024: Rancho Santa Fe, Miramar ARFF, and San Miguel. This effort has helped spread valuable information on cancer prevention across the county. Thanks to the fundraising and outreach efforts of the San Diego 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb, we are already scheduling additional departments for 2025. Our goal is to remind firefighters throughout the county to take small, daily steps that make a big difference.

Need a refresher on the Three C's?

Firefighter Aid has created short educational training videos focused on the Three C's, Clean Air, Clean Body, and Clean Gear, that provide practical steps for cancer prevention in the station. These resources are designed to be easily integrated into daily routines, promoting a culture of safety and awareness. These videos and other resources are on our website under Our Programs-CAPP.

The Importance of Early Detection

Regular medical check-ups and cancer screenings are vital. Early detection significantly increases the chances of successful treatment.

A Call to Action

January's Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month is a crucial reminder of the occupational cancer risks we face. By adopting the best practices outlined in the CAPP program and utilizing available resources, we can take proactive steps to protect ourselves and our fellow firefighters. Let's commit to making cancer prevention a priority in January and throughout the year while continuing to seek more knowledge and resources for best practices. Visit our website at www.FirefighterAid.org to explore insightful videos and valuable tools designed to guide and support you every step of the way. Please stay connected for more useful insights, join the conversation, and get updates!

Follow our social media pages:

- **Instagram:** Sandiegofirefighteraid
- **Facebook:** FirefighterAid

Thank you to our generous supporters, The Dauch Family Foundation and San Diego Mustache Madness, without whom this program would not be possible.



By: Ben Vernon



See a Need, Fill a Need: This is my favorite firehouse saying. If you see something that needs to be fixed, you now own it. It is your responsibility to fix it. When firefighters are newer on the job, they are looking for simple tasks to complete, helpful tasks like washing dirty dishes, mopping dirty floors, or taking out the trash.

As I have progressed through my career, the department's needs start to present themselves on a larger scale. See a gap in training? Figure out how to bring a large-scale exercise to the department. Don't like the inefficiency in equipment repair? Write a proposal to the administration on better ways to improve it. The needs are always there, and our job as firefighters is to address those needs and fill the gaps. I've taken these words to heart throughout my career and have always tried to fill any need my department has presented me with.

On June 24th, 2015, I was injured on the job. It was a serious injury that left me with a severe case of PTSD. As I tried to find quality mental health support, I encountered several roadblocks. The first therapist I saw told me that if I was experiencing horrific nightmares, I should cut down on my caffeine intake. The second therapist advised me not to respond to any 9-1-1 calls that sounded potentially stressful. The third therapist suggested that I quit my job and pursue something less demanding, like becoming a high school teacher. I found myself navigating the world of mental health treatment without a guide. It was an unpleasant experience at best. The experience nearly cost me my life.

Luckily, I eventually found a good therapist and was able to get good mental health help. As I returned to work and shared my story, I realized I was not the only firefighter to endure this frustrating mental health roller coaster. I had found a need. This was not just my department, though; departments all over the country were struggling with this same problem. Reluctantly, I had stumbled on a national need—one I wasn't sure I could fill.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and mine started locally here in San Diego. My focus was on helping the firefighters closest to me. I recognized the need to educate therapists who assist firefighters in their darkest hours and ensure they understand our unique culture. Recommendations like lowering caffeine intake, avoiding calls, or starting a new career as a teacher were unrealistic for firefighters. Instead, I focused on equipping therapists to provide practical, culturally competent support when firefighters sought help.

I joined the board of the SDFRA with this goal in mind. My first year on the board was 2020. I came in with big plans, but COVID had other ideas. The Board worked tirelessly behind the scenes to support sick and injured firefighters and their families throughout the pandemic. I had to set my plan aside to address a different need.

After the pandemic settled down and we returned to our normal lives, I collaborated with the FFAid Board and Staff to develop a training program for therapists. My first step was finding a psychologist who shared my passion and understood our culture. Discovering Dr. Elizabeth Allen was a dream come true. Not only was she a skilled therapist, but she was also married to a firefighter, giving her deep insight into our culture. She possessed the passion, drive, and talent to help make our goal a reality.

We put together our first class last September. She was an incredible presenter. We spoke to 16 therapists with varying degrees of job and life experience and two SDFRA staff. Some of the therapists had never worked with a first responder before, so I was happy to see them take the initiative to learn about the life of a first responder before they agreed to see one as a client.

Overall, the presentation was a success. It marked the culmination of eight years of effort on my part and hundreds of hours contributed by the FFAid staff and board. The need was met, even if only for a few. I look forward to further developing the mental health program for the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department on behalf of the SDFRA. Our members and their families have many needs, and we are striving to live by the motto, "See a Need, Fill a Need" every day.

By: Dr. Elizabeth Allen



Firefighters, along with other first responder groups, are at higher risk of developing mental health problems, including Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This occurs, in part, because of the many traumatic exposures first responders face throughout their careers. Stoicism, a facet of first responder culture, has been one of many longstanding barriers to this population seeking mental health treatment. Additionally, organizational culture or structure has not always supported reaching out for mental health care. Mantras like “rub some dirt on it” or “suck it up buttercup” can diminish the perceived value of attending to the emotional experiences of first responders. Subsequently, first responders may minimize their psychological experiences and put off seeking treatment.

For the brave individuals who reach out for mental health care, finding a therapist who is proficient in first responder culture has not always been easy. Many stories of first responders attempting to participate in mental health care with therapists who lack first responder

cultural competence have been told. Horrible advice or interventions such as “Just don’t go on calls with injured kids.” Or “You need to show up to treatment every Tuesday at 3...” have been reported by numerous firefighters attempting to engage in treatment. These, and myriad of other statements by hopefully well-intentioned therapists, have deterred first responders from engaging in treatment. These therapists are lacking in cultural awareness of first responder groups.

When Firefighter Aid asked me to develop a training program aimed at promoting first responder cultural competence among therapists, I eagerly accepted. Along with Board Director of the SDFRA, Firefighter Aid, and San Diego Fire-Rescue Captain Benjamin Vernon, I, a clinical psychologist and the wife of a San Diego Fire-Rescue Fire Captain, created an introductory curriculum to help therapists gain knowledge, insight, and understanding of the first responder community. On September 13, 2024, we presented the course titled "First Responder Culture and Mental Health Treatment Implications: A Guide for Therapists." The curriculum included education for therapists about who first responders are, the values typically shared by this group, and their work schedules. Captain Vernon recounted his experience of being assaulted during a call he was handling. We reviewed research articles related to first responders. We explored the issues that many first responders face when seeking treatment, such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse, or sleep disorders. We discussed the family life of first responders, including the MANDO situation—the ultimate destroyer of many well-planned and much-anticipated days off together! We talked about the challenges first responders face, such as ongoing physical and emotional threats, exposure to death and serious injury, and the Terrible Ten, among others. We also addressed the individual differences among our first responders, particularly regarding the experiences of women and people of color in a field that white males have traditionally dominated.

Additionally, we explored how the potentially different experiences of first responders who grew up facing childhood trauma may impact them in their work roles. We utilized research and lived experiences to share with this cohort of therapists the story of who first responders are. This is just the beginning, and we plan to ensure that our members and as many first responders as possible can access culturally competent treatment providers.

This is crucial on many levels. A first responder who tries to engage in treatment with a therapist lacking cultural knowledge of first responder groups may feel devalued and misunderstood in the treatment room and may leave treatment early. First responders may mistakenly believe that therapy offers no value if the therapist lacks cultural competency. We want our first responders to have high-quality mental health care. Access to culturally competent treatment for those who have bravely reached out for help remains our primary goal. We hope that we have come close to that end. We received positive feedback from our attendees and will present the same training to another group of therapists seeking to gain cultural competence with our first responders in the future. We look forward to that opportunity.

By: Chief Picone, Health and Safety Office

Health & Safety Wellness Center Opening Soon!

We are thrilled to announce that the final touches are underway at the H&S Wellness Center. The vision for developing an Injury Rehabilitation Prevention Program (IRPP) began many years ago. This concept is modeled after a Division 1 level athletic program. As firefighters, we are regarded as industrial or tactical athletes and require the same level of care as top-performing athletes on the field. We made significant progress after securing FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grants in 2019 and 2021, totaling approximately \$1,050,000 for the equipment. Next, we integrated the Athletic Trainer into the wellness program and sought the ideal facility.

The facility spans approximately 14,000 sq. ft. and will help our members maintain peak condition and perform at a high level. In addition to the health and safety staff offices, training space, conference room, and vocational nutrition kitchen, all examinations will occur here, including appointments with the athletic trainer.

Download the app now. It is available to all Fire-Rescue members, their families, and all retired members. For retired members or spouses interested in joining our peer support team, please contact Captain Lee.



Lastly, I proudly announce that BC Kyle Smith will take over my position in early March. He will shadow me until my retirement. Kyle comes into the position highly qualified and motivated - I am confident that he will take the office to the next level and continue to ensure that the workforce is the top priority.

We are available to assist with your questions or needs:
Engineer David Hunt, Cancer & Health Coordinator - 619.318.6652
Captain Jay Lee, Wellness Officer - 858.463.1242
Chief David Picone, Health & Safety Officer, 619.792.9634

24/7 Support Line - 833-SDFD-HSO

Peer Support confidential conversations are protected under CA AB1116 and SDFD SI10 sec.18





San Diego Fire Relief Association
10509 San Diego Mission Road
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ARE YOU MOVING? Please be sure to let the SDFRA team know. The Department does not inform the SDFRA of any change of address.



We want to thank you for your generous sponsorship in 2024. Your support is vital in helping us bring valuable resources to our members and fund essential programs.