



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Hanover County
Program Title: Hanover Fire-EMS Resiliency Initiative
Program Category: Public Safety & Health and Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Ivy T. Sager
Title: Executive Director
Department: Hanover County Community Services Board
Telephone: 804-365-4289 Website: www.hanovercounty.gov
Email: itsager@hanovercounty.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: James P. Taylor
Title: Deputy County Administrator
Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Hanover Fire-EMS Resiliency Initiative

Executive Summary

Hanover County Fire-EMS and Hanover County Community Services Board partnered to create the Hanover Fire-EMS Firefighter/Medic Resiliency Initiative to address the need for firefighters to have access to culturally competent, trauma-informed, and affordable behavioral healthcare. The initiative, which launched in November 2020 and is currently operational, is comprised of three phases. The first is the Clinician Awareness Training Program: Cultural Competency. This firefighter-led training is given to clinicians to help them understand firefighter culture and what firefighters are looking for when seeking behavioral health care. The second phase is the Clinician Awareness Training Program: Clinical Skills. This training focuses on specific clinical skills and techniques clinicians can use when working with a firefighter/medic. The last phase is the development of the Clinician Crisis Response Team. The CCRT is made up of clinicians who are trained in providing culturally competent behavioral health care to firefighters and are willing to be accessible to Hanover Fire-EMS providers in a time of need. Some clinicians opt to be placed on a referral list, while others have selected to join the Hanover Fire-EMS Peer Support Team to develop a deeper relationship with the fire department. Clinicians on the Peer Support Team have contracts with the fire department and will be available to assist during times of individual and collective crisis.

Brief Summary

First responders experience high levels of stress, trauma, and danger as part of their everyday jobs. These experiences take a toll on first responder mental health. In response to the growing mental health needs of this population, Hanover County Fire-EMS and the Hanover County Community Services Board have partnered with private practice clinicians to deliver the Hanover Fire-EMS Resiliency Initiative to improve firefighter/medic mental health. The initiative is designed to help meet the unique behavioral health needs of first responders by training clinicians in first responder culture and clinical practices as well as expanding the Hanover Fire-EMS Peer Support Team to include contracted clinicians who will provide mental healthcare in individual crisis situations and during large-scale crisis events such as a line of duty death.

Problem Statement

Studies continually show that, nationally, Fire-EMS personnel develop mental health problems at a greater rate than the general population. For example:

- It's estimated that up to 22% of firefighters have PTSD. *
- 47% experience suicidal ideation as compared to 6-14% of the general population.*
- 19% of firefighters vs. 4% of the general population have made plans to die by suicide*
- 16% vs. 2-9% have attempted suicide.*
- According to Dr. Thomas Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, firefighters fall into a group of individuals who are at increased risk of death by suicide because they are conditioned to face death regularly (i.e. running towards fire and other catastrophes). Therefore, their minds become practiced at pushing past a human being's primal fear of death, which is what keeps many people from following through with an attempt.

Hanover County Fire-EMS providers are no exception. The Hanover County Fire-EMS Peer Support Team averages 12 unique contacts per month from the pool of 370 volunteer and full-time Fire-EMS providers. They have intervened during active suicide attempts of their peers and have connected many others with professional help in addition to providing on-going peer support.

Firefighters in Hanover County, and in Central Virginia, have reported difficulty locating, accessing and affording behavioral healthcare professionals who understand their culture and the level of trauma they encounter on a daily basis. For example:

- Firefighters reported being unable to be properly matched with an EAP clinician and felt uncomfortable just picking someone off of a list that they didn't know anything about.
- Firefighters complained of telling their story to a clinician only for the clinician to tell them to quit their job or to ask questions about acronyms because s/he did not understand the traumatic story the firefighter shared. A firefighter reported that his story made a clinician cry and he ended up comforting the clinician and editing his stories in future sessions.
- Co-pays for on-going mental health care are a barrier. Firefighters have reported having to choose between a dependent's medical care and their own.
- While all of the fire departments in Central Virginia have Peer Support Teams, tragedies such as the line of duty death of Hanover Fire's Lt. Brad Clark, the homicide of Richmond Fire's Lt. Ashley Berry, suicides in Henrico and recent suicide attempts in Hanover among firefighters can "contaminate" entire teams who need additional support. At a regional Peer Support Team meeting in 2019 the group discussed their concerns that "when the plane falls out of the sky" and all of their teams are impacted, they won't have a way to take care of their firefighters.
- Stigma continues to be a huge barrier for firefighters. Though the culture is slowly changing, firefighters are still very concerned with privacy issues and do not want to have a bad experience in therapy. The Hanover Peer Support Team members often discuss only having "one shot to get it right" with firefighters, because they simply do not trust talking to someone they don't know. They have avoided seeking care due to

bad experiences in the past or even to avoid sitting in a waiting area where they might be seen by other community members.

- Previously, firefighters in our region relied heavily on accessing mental healthcare from one source: Checkpoint One. Checkpoint One was a non-profit organization that specialized in providing behavioral health care for emergency responders at no cost to the client. Checkpoint One would often become overwhelmed with clients. Regardless of this organization's role in meeting the mental health needs of our local firefighters, the organization lost its funding early in 2020, stopped seeing clients and officially closed its doors in December 2020.

In anticipation of this loss and the growing need for culturally competent behavioral health care for Hanover Firefighters, the Hanover County Fire-EMS Peer Support Team and the Hanover County Community Services Board's Behavioral Health Wellness Team partnered to develop the Hanover Fire-EMS Resiliency Initiative.

Project Implementation

The initiative was carried out in three phases.

1. The Hanover Fire-EMS *Clinician Awareness Training Program Part I: Cultural*

Competency is a 4-hour virtual training that teaches mental health providers about firefighter culture. The target audience are clinicians who practice within the Cigna EAP network as this provides firefighters with 5 free counseling sessions. However, since the training is held over Zoom we offered it to any clinician or Peer Support Team member interested in attending.

Staff from the Hanover CSB, in conjunction with firefighters from the Hanover Fire-EMS Peer Support team created a PowerPoint presentation, interactive polls, access to resources via Google Drive and original videos. The presentation also included a panel discussion and Q&A session. Topics included shift life, language, dangers of being a first responder, response to calls, stress and trauma, mental health statistics, impacts on family and what firefighters are looking for when they seek help from a clinician.

The training was delivered in November 2020, March 2021 and June 2021.

2. ***The Clinician Awareness Training Program Part II: Clinical Skills Training*** consists of a PowerPoint presentation created by former Checkpoint One employee, Mary Margaret Signorelli, LPC, of Half Wild Counseling, and presented in conjunction with the Hanover Fire-EMS Peer Support Team to teach clinicians who might be interested in joining the Peer Support Team additional clinical skills.

The training was delivered in February 2021. Additional trainings will be delivered the fall.

3. ***The Clinician Referral List and the Clinician Crisis Response Team***

At the conclusion of each of these trainings clinicians are given the option to be added to a referral list. Clinicians who indicate interest in this were invited by Fire-EMS Peer Support Team members to attend a Meet n' Greet. The purpose of the Meet n' Greet was to learn more about each clinician's specialty and to give the clinicians an opportunity to get to know the Peer Support Team members who would be making the referrals.

Clinicians are then welcomed to spend more time getting to know local firefighters through station visits, ride-a-longs, and by attending social events. They are invited to join the Peer Support Team and have access to additional training with the potential of entering into a contract with the fire department to provide on-call mental health services to Fire-EMS staff.

Project Staffing & Costs

Five staff members from Hanover Fire-EMS served as facilitators in the training. Four additional firefighters were featured in original videos created for the PowerPoint presentation. The PowerPoint presentation was created by one Fire-EMS staff member and one staff member from the Community Services Board with input from all five facilitators. One Community Services Board staff member helped facilitate the training, coordinated advertising, evaluations and certificates. A second CSB staff member assisted with technology during program delivery. She also produced two original videos used in the presentation. One clinician was hired on a contract basis to facilitate the clinical portions of the presentations.

The program's budget was \$7,500. Funding was secured through a mini-grant from the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. This was initially meant to be used to cover travel expenses for three staff to visit Florida to observe a 2-day intensive clinician awareness program that is coordinated by the Florida Firefighter Health and Safety Collaborative. COVID caused the group to cancel these plans. The funds were then used to cover the cost of additional technology, the contract with the clinician, lunch at the Meet n' Greet, and to purchase suicide prevention materials for the trained participants. Total costs to

implement all three phases has come to \$4,300 so far. Remaining funds will be used on additional training for the Clinician Crisis Response Team members and teambuilding efforts.

Project Results

- 157 clinicians throughout Virginia attended Clinician Awareness Training Program: Cultural Competency. Of these, 100% of participants indicated that they increased their knowledge of Fire-EMS culture. 98% indicate feeling more confident in interacting with firefighters. 91% said they knew of more suicide prevention resources as a result of the training. 30% said they planned to contact their local fire department to arrange to meet with firefighters. Others stated they planned to wait until the end of the pandemic to reach out in person.
- 30 clinicians, most from the Central Virginia region, attended Clinician Awareness Training Program: Clinical Skills. Of these 100% said they had new ideas for how to build rapport with the Fire-EMS community and to build trust. 100% said they felt more confident interacting with firefighters after this training. 100% stated they learned new information regarding firefighter suicide and non-suicide deaths in the fire service. 82% said they learned what therapeutic interventions are most helpful when working with the Fire-EMS community. 91% said they understood the role of Peer Support Teams. 100% said they learned about diversity in the fire department and how race, class, gender and sexuality impact the firefighter experience.
- 12 Clinicians attended an online Meet n' Greet to learn more about Hanover Fire-EMS and meet other members of the Peer Support Team.

- 8 clinicians from the Hanover area are on the referral list
- 4 clinicians from the Hanover area have joined the Clinician Crisis Response Team
- There are now plans in place to contract with up to 12 clinicians to provide on-going, on-demand mental health services to Hanover Fire-EMS providers. Hanover Fire-EMS and the Hanover Community Services Board leadership are working to integrate the program's needs into the infrastructure and budgets of each department.

Some of the qualitative feedback received about the training included:

- I enjoyed hearing from the firefighters themselves because that gives me an understanding on their bias towards therapists.
- I understand on a deeper level the work that is involved in firefighting. I learned about the barriers firefighters face in obtaining mental health treatment. Firefighters are apprehensive towards seeking counseling to address trauma, stress and burnout due to stigma.
- Firemen and EMS workers are an underserved population who like most are afraid to identify their underlying mental health issues due to stigma.
- [My favorite part was...] the videos that were shared with us, showing firsthand what they experience and go through when called out to respond to the scene of a fire and accident. I had heard stories, but I never imagined it the way I saw it on the videos. Helps to empathize and have more understanding.
- I appreciated the tour of the firehouse as it provided a glimpse into the realities of life as a [firefighter]. The interview with [firefighters] who have sought help for mental health

concerns was beyond inspiring. The courage and honesty they displayed underscored the importance of the entire workshop.

- My favorite part was the honesty and vulnerability of the presenters. Their dedication to making it ok to talk about mental health was so inspiring. I especially enjoyed their humor and comfort with one another. Each of the presenters allowed their true personalities to shine which gave such insight into their culture. Laughter seems so important as a resiliency tool, I am glad they shared themselves with us! The conversations in the chat box were helpful and insightful.
- I learned that firefighters, EMTs or dispatchers go through similar experiences with MH providers that they don't want people to know their vulnerability or issues because of pride or trust. I learned they are human and have struggles just like everyone else.

State how the program fulfilled the awards criteria

The project required a partnership between Hanover County's Fire-EMS and Community Services Board departments as well as Half Wild Counseling services and other mental health clinicians who are in private practice. This is a program that can easily be replicated in other communities. There is no other program like this in the state of which we are aware. This program is modeled after the Clinician Awareness Program provided by the Florida Health and Safety Collaborative, but was modified to be offered online, be more accessible to clinicians across the state and include clinicians who have physical limitations (the Florida program is very physically intensive). Also, instead of relying on external volunteers, our model integrates the program into local government infrastructure and budgets. Lastly, the program was

implemented in November of 2020 and continues to be operational.

*<https://www.firehouse.com/safety-health/health-fitness/article/21010041/firefighter-peer-support-firehouse-magazine>



*The Hanover County Fire-EMS
Peer Support Team
presents the*



Clinician Awareness Training Program



**First responders
need access to
culturally
competent
mental health care
now more than ever.**

**Will you be there
for them?**

June 10, 2021

9:00am-1:00pm

Offered online via Zoom

No cost to attend

CEU Eligible Course

**Certificates issued by Hanover
County Community Services Board**

This highly interactive online course is for mental health clinicians who desire to learn more about the unique features of the first responder culture in order to be more effective at treating firefighters and EMS workers.

- Discussion of culture, lingo & unique job stressors
- Mental wellness in the fire service
- Tips for engaging first responders in therapy
- Fire-EMS worker experience panel
- Opportunity to join the Peer Support Team's referral network

To register email:

Laura Robertson

larobertson@hanovercounty.gov