

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE
Pursuant to P.A. 64 of 2019
Section 312(3)
Psychological Issues Among Correctional Officers

By September 30, the department shall submit a report detailing strategies and goals determined, programs established, the level of employee involvement in the creation of programs, the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological issues among corrections officers that are exacerbated by the corrections environment and exposure to highly stressful situations, and details on expenditures. The department shall submit the report to the senate and house appropriations subcommittees on corrections, the senate and house committees on oversight, the senate and house fiscal agencies, the legislative corrections ombudsman, and the state budget office.

Wellness services have modified goals and focus to incorporate the many additional complex stressors which have arisen or intensified since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Wellness-based services and initiatives throughout the MDOC have adapted to the safe-distancing guidelines by incorporating virtual means. Teleconferencing meetings, presentations and training have provided the “face-to-face” collaborations and contacts.

The goals of the MDOC Wellness Program continue to be to facilitate accessible, relevant, and diversified wellness resources and services for the MDOC employees, family members and retirees.

The Wellness Unit is comprised of four FTE employees. Three employees are licensed mental health clinicians, with one clinician serving as the Program Manager. All clinicians serve as clinical support for employees. The fourth employee serves as a chaplain for employees and is the designated Chaplain Coordinator.

Throughout the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MDOC Wellness Unit has continued to provide professional and confidential wellness services to employees, retirees, and eligible family members. Virtual means has been incorporated to create accessible and safe contact services for the MDOC community. Most intervention services include 24/7 crisis response, brief counseling, consultation, evidence-based wellness training, and educational opportunities which are provided outside of a clinical setting.

The following are specific departmental-wide formal wellness initiatives and status for the FY21.

Peer Support Program

Peer Support Persons (PSP) provides confidential support and assistance to employees in times of stress and crisis. Services provided by the PSP may include emotional support, encouragement, help with communication and coping skills, and referrals for professional services. The Program has been intentionally developed to respect and embrace the diversity of roles, experiences, and backgrounds within MDOC. The PSPs will mindfully be considered to represent and respect these many diversities.

MDOC has initiated the nomination process for the Peer Support Program. Training has been revised to be offered virtually. Following the nomination and selection process, formal training of the first cohorts of PSP volunteers will begin in the early months of 2021. The Program will continue to develop, organize, and grow within the next year. The initial goal of 100 Peer Support Person (PSP) volunteers will be in MDOC facilities and regions.

Chaplain Program

The purpose of the Chaplain Program is to offer assistance and appropriate spiritual support to all eligible MDOC employees, retirees, and family members when personal or professional stressors negatively impact their lives. The accumulation of stress negatively effects the health and well-being of our employees to varying degrees, but the impact of the distressed employee may be felt by all. The MDOC Chaplain will be specially trained to help address these stressors in a natural and confidential manner.

The initiative of developing the MDOC Chaplain Program is in the stage of finalizing the organizational components, functions, and procedures for the administration of the program. Pending final approval, the Chaplain Program will begin nominations and selection of the Chaplain volunteers. The extensive training program for the volunteer MDOC Chaplains will include onsite orientations and acclimation to worksites and facilities. This onboarding stage will be contingent on the safe distancing guidelines for these worksites.

FY21 Building Resiliency Training

The goals of this four-hour training are to provide an interactive opportunity for employees to explore and identify their individual stressors, learn the concepts of resiliency and develop skill-based strategies to building resiliency in their personal and professional lives. All MDOC employees will participate in this training and will be encouraged to share information with their families.

MDOC Wellness Unit Metrics

During the timeframe October 2019 – August 2020, the Wellness Unit completed **2424** direct service contacts from individuals requesting mental health assistance. Direct services contacts include clinical or chaplain services for individuals. This does not include any contacts made for trainings, TISM, developmental, or consult work.

Of the **2424** individual contacts, the primary reasons for assistance included the following:

- Suicide-Risk: **4%**
- Suicide related: **8%**
- Alcohol/Substance Abuse: **6%**
- Traumatic Incident Stress Management or critical incident response services: **26%**
- Job related: **30%**
- Mood related: **13%**

- Domestic violence (May 2020-Aug 2020): **1%**
- Other mental health related: **13%**

Symptoms that may be self-reported by an individual who speaks with a Wellness team member are not indicative of a mental health disorder.

While many of the Wellness Unit services are provided by licensed clinicians who adhere to rigorous licensing standards, diagnostic screening instruments and scoring are not used at this time. Any formal diagnoses would require a number of clinical activities that occur in a clinical setting, including a complete health history, and the ruling out of medical and other conditions that may explain symptoms of a specific diagnosis (such as post-traumatic stress disorder).

There are known challenges within a corrections environment, with the emphasis more often being on negative factors including danger, hypervigilance, organizational stressors, and more. While important to know that negative factors often have a harmful effect on physical, mental, social, and emotional health outcomes for correctional employees, providing ways to mitigate the impact of these negative stressors, as well as incorporating ways to enhance wellness and well-being among officers requires intentional and proactive steps.