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City of San Diego Announces Behavioral Wellness Treatment Programs for First Responders

FIRST IN THE NATION COLLABORATION TO BENEFIT FIRE AND POLICE EMPLOYEES

SAN DIEGO – As part of an effort to expand behavioral wellness services for first responders, the City of San Diego Risk Management, Fire-Rescue and Police departments today announced a new program with Cigna. This program allows firefighters, police officers, lifeguards, dispatchers and other civilian employees to easily access treatment options.

“Cigna has contracted with several facilities to offer residential and out-patient treatment for our first responders,” said Julio Canizal, Director of the City’s Risk Management Department. “The care providers have received training from firefighters, police officers and clinicians who have extensive experience treating first responders.”

First responders throughout the nation experience repeated exposure to traumatic events and have been known to suffer from related insomnia, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Having a variety of treatment options relevant to the unique job experiences of first responders is important for a full and healthy recovery. This unprecedented collaboration allows any first responder in the nation to access care providers who offer a rapid intake and diagnosis process. Each facility has developed internal policies that ensure confidentiality.

“So often, police officers feel their careers may be in jeopardy if they ask for help. This partnership provides confidentiality and the ability for our employees to seek help without fear of any negative impact on their job,” said Police Chief David Nisleit. “We want first responders to know that when they need assistance, we will support them.”

The concept of this program began nearly two years ago when employees from Risk Management and the wellness teams at San Diego Police and Fire-Rescue departments teamed up to discuss current care limitations and the struggles in navigating the healthcare system. The solution was to ask the City's insurance providers to expand the options for first responders and civilian public safety employees. About a year ago, Cigna researched and contracted with four treatment facilities – Aurora Behavioral Health Care San Diego, True North Recovery Services, Alvarado Parkway Institute and First Responders First. These facilities provide residential treatment for a variety of health challenges.

“The health and wellness of our employees is one of our top goals,” said Fire-Rescue Chief Colin Stowell. “Public safety employees spend their careers helping others, but often are reluctant to ask for help. Our health and safety team along with the Police Department’s wellness team is well aware of the unique challenges first responders face. Once they got together with Risk Management, this great solution was born. We are so fortunate to be the first organization in the nation to offer these first responder treatment options.”

First responders from anywhere in the United States can take advantage of this collaboration once the employee receives approval from their insurance provider.

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