# Wellness and Peer Support Program

## 1033.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance and oversight to grow and sustain a proactive wellness and peer support program for department members. The Fargo Police Department places the highest possible value and emphasis upon the welfare of its members and recognizes all department personnel may face situations which create significant stress and trauma. Supporting our members through wellness and peer support ensures that they are best positioned to provide outstanding service to our community while de-stigmatizing the use of supportive services that are focused on helping them to maintain a long, healthy, and productive career. The program is focused on the two main goals of overall wellness and peer support.

The Department shall utilize a combination of best-practice approaches to include education, wellness counseling, training, and annual physical and mental health checks.

Additional information on member wellness and peer support is provided in the following policies:

- Chaplains (335)
- Line-of-Duty Deaths (1032)
- Drug- and Alcohol-Free Workplace (1005)
- Officer-Involved Critical Incidents (305)

### 1033.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

**Critical incident** – An event or situation that may cause a strong emotional, cognitive, or physical reaction that has the potential to interfere with daily life.

**Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)** – A standardized approach using a discussion format to provide education, support, and emotional release opportunities for members involved in work-related critical incidents.

**Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) -** A partnership between mental health professionals and emergency service employees, who are interested in preventing and mitigating the negative impact of acute stress on them and their peers.

**Debriefing -** Small group, phase sensitive, peer driven, formal crisis intervention tool usually accomplished within one to 10 days after a traumatic event or critical incident.

**Defusing -** A shorted version of the debriefing, generally lasting less than one hour. A defusing is a small group, peer driven, loosely guided discussion usually accomplished within 12 hours of a traumatic event or critical incident. The defusing may be used to determine the need for debriefing and/or other services.

**Demobilization -** Usually after shift/event, large group, information process which provides for information, rest, and assessment. Also, serves as a screening opportunity to assure an individual

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who may need assistance is identified early after a traumatic event, critical incident, natural disaster, or terroristic event.

**One-on-One Peer Support -** Initiated by a peer support program member or at the request of an employee for assistance in peer support to include personal or professional situations.

**Peer Support Program** – Mental and emotional wellness support provided by peer members trained to help other members cope with critical incidents and certain personal or professional problems.

**Personal or Professional Crisis -** Any incident which causes severe physical or mental injury, usually due to an external agent. One of these events may include, but are not limited to:

(a) The use of deadly force.
(b) Assault on an employee involving a deadly weapon.
(c) Hostage situation where an employee is the victim.
(d) Injury, illness, or death of an employee or family member.
(e) Assisting family with an employee's death.
(f) Catastrophic incidents such as an airplane crash, natural disaster event, or fatal crash.
(g) Investigations involving death, such as S.I.D.S.
(h) Substance abuse.
(i) Marital, relationship, health, family, financial, employment, or other personal problems.

**Wellness Program -** Physical, mental, financial and overall wellness support provided by trained department members or approved subject matter experts.

**Wellness and Peer Support Team (WPST) -** Formally established and trained team of peer members capable of providing peer or wellness support based on their area of expertise. This may include one-on-one support, referrals, stress awareness/reduction help, small group defusing, and debriefing, as well as all aspects of physical, mental, financial and overall wellness.

## 1033.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Fargo Police Department to prioritize member wellness to foster fitness for duty and support a healthy quality of life for department members. The Department shall maintain a wellness program that supports its members with proactive wellness resources, critical incident response, and follow-up support, as well as trained peer support personnel to provide support and resources.

## 1033.3 WELLNESS AND PEER SUPPORT COORDINATOR

The Assistant Chief of Police shall serve as the Department's Wellness and Peer Support Coordinator (WPSC). The WPSC shall function as the primary liaison between the wellness and peer support leadership committee chair, the contracted police psychologist, the wellness coordinator, and the Chief of Police. The WPSC shall be responsible for the following activities:

(a) Annually evaluate the wellness and peer support team program and identify resources, training, funding or policy updates that are needed to grow and sustain the program.

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(b) Review and approve supervisory and member assignments to the WPST, as well as the chair of the wellness and peer support leadership committee.

(c) When peer support activation is requested to assist another agency, the WPSC should consult with the Chief of Police to determine what assistance and scope peer support can provide.

(d) Fiscally responsible for budgetary requests and administrative oversight of the WPST program.

## 1033.4 WELLNESS COORDINATOR

The Chief of Police should appoint a trained wellness coordinator who shall report to a supervisor assigned to the Department's Wellness Unit. The coordinator shall work collaboratively with other department members within the wellness and peer support team, the chaplain team, and other entities, such as Department of Human Resources, legal counsel, licensed psychotherapist, and qualified health professionals, as appropriate, to fulfill the responsibilities of the position, including but not limited to:

(a) Identifying wellness support providers (e.g., licensed psychotherapists, external peer support providers, physical therapists, dietitians, physical fitness trainers holding accredited certifications).

1. As appropriate, selected providers should be trained and experienced in providing mental wellness support and counseling to public safety personnel.
2. When practicable, the Department should not use the same licensed psychotherapist for both member wellness support and fitness for duty evaluations.

(b) Providing referrals to licensed psychotherapists and other resources, where appropriate.

(a) Referrals should be made to department-designated resources in situations that are beyond the scope of the wellness coordinator's training.

(c) Develop management and operational procedures for department peer support members, such as:

1. Training and applicable certification requirements.
2. One on one deployments.
3. Managing potential conflicts between WPST members and those seeking service.
4. Monitoring and mitigating WPST member emotional fatigue (i.e., compassion fatigue) associated with providing peer support.
5. Using qualified WPST personnel from other public safety agencies or outside organizations for department peer support, as appropriate and approved.

(d) Ensure all peer support members contact information is posted throughout department facilities.

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(e) Verifying members have reasonable access to wellness and peer support or licensed psychotherapist support.

(f) Establishing procedures for Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD), including:

1. Defining the types of incidents that may initiate debriefings.
2. Steps for organizing debriefings.

(g) Facilitating the delivery of wellness information, training, and support through various methods as appropriate.

(h) Verifying a confidential, appropriate, and timely Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available for members. This also includes:

1. Obtaining a written description of the program services.
2. Providing for the methods to obtain program services.
3. Providing referrals to the EAP for appropriate diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up resources.
4. Obtaining written procedures and guidelines for referrals to, or mandatory participation in, the program.
5. Obtaining training for supervisors in their role and responsibilities, and identification of member behaviors that would indicate the existence of member concerns, problems, or issues that could impact member job performance.

(i) Assisting members who have become disabled with application for federal government benefits such as those offered through the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program (34 USC § 10281 et seq.).

1. The coordinator should work with appropriate Department liaisons to assist qualified members and survivors with benefits, wellness support, and counseling services, as applicable, when there has been a member death (see the Line-of-Duty Deaths Policy for additional guidance).

(j) Ensure all CISM training is completed and current.

(k) Oversee the WPST member's required training.

(l) Maintain the WPST statistics, report the activities and programmatic feedback, and make recommendations to the WPSC annually.

## 1033.5 WELLNESS AND PEER SUPPORT LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE (WPSLC) RESPONSIBILITIES

The Assistant Chief shall designate a supervisor assigned to the Wellness Unit to chair the leadership committee as it carries out its duties to support and oversee the WPST. The chair shall report to the Assistant Chief and work collaboratively with the other members to carry out the responsibilities of the committee, which includes:

(a) Wellness and peer support team (WPST) member selection and retention.

(b) The daily oversight of WPST operations, and the implementation of the vision and goals of the team.

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(c) Delegating tasks and assigning duties to the various team leaders.

(d) Maintaining statistical data for the purpose of program evaluation, to include hours/ time spent by WPST members on training, meetings, peer and wellness support.

(e) The activation of the team when requested for department members.

(f) Function as a resource for supervisors, who may call the committee chair to ask advice on situations.

(g) Ensure all peer support members contact numbers are provided to RRRDC and department supervisory staff, and create peer support activation procedure for department supervisors to ensure there is an efficient method for obtaining peer support.

(h) Ensure resources are readily available for the team (i.e: training, defusing and debriefing materials, equipment, etc.)

(i) Assigning a peer support member to all critical incidents.

(j) Contact and securing locations for critical incident stress debriefings.

(k) Arrange food and beverage purchases, if necessary.

(l) Being available at debriefings to lend advice and support to those members conducting the debriefing.

(m) Assigning a WPST member to follow-up with individuals identified as needing additional assistance.

## 1033.6 DEPARTMENT WELLNESS AND PEER SUPPORT TEAM (WPST)

Given the sensitive nature of the peer support program, as well as the knowledge that may be needed to participate in the wellness program, coupled with the additional commitment required of team members, the Department recognizes that the functions, skill sets, and training within each program are different, although interrelated, and will function best as one team. Not all employees may be suited to be a peer support or wellness program member. The WPST leadership committee shall be responsible for recruiting employees to fill vacant positions within each program. Selection to the (WPST) shall be based on the Department needs, position vacancies, employee experience and qualifications, and leadership committee recommendations.

### 1033.6.1 WPST MEMBER SELECTION CRITERIA

Selection of members for the WPST shall be at the discretion of the WPST leadership committee with approval of the Assistant Chief. Although those members interested in the peer support program will have additional selection criteria and responsibilities pursuant to this policy, overall WPST selection shall be based on the member's:

(a) Desire and willingness to perform the requirements and tasks associated with each program and be a contributing member of the team.

(b) Life experience or professional tenure.

(c) Demonstrated ability as a positive role model.

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(d) Ability to communicate and interact effectively.

(e) Evaluation by supervisors and any current peer support and wellness program members.

1033.6.2 PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES
The responsibilities of department peer support members include:

(a) Providing support before and after a critical incident.

(b) Presenting department members with periodic training on wellness topics, including but not limited to:

1. Stress management.
2. Suicide prevention.
3. How to access support resources.

## 1033.7 PEER SUPPORT ACTIVATION PROTOCOL

Trauma takes a variety of forms and cannot be accurately or exhaustively quantified in description. There are certain events which are of such magnitude they should be considered disruptive to nearly anyone involved. Situations appropriate for WPST activation and usage include, but are not limited to:

(a) Line of duty deaths/serious injuries.

(b) High risk incidents.

(c) Incidents involving serious injury or death to others.

(d) Natural disasters.

(e) Significant events (duty and non-duty related).

When such incidents occur, the on-duty Shift or Unit Commander shall assess the situation and if appropriate, contact WPST for support. The need for group intervention or immediate peer support shall be assessed and mobilized when appropriate. Department supervisors should be aware of situations which may require WPST activation and usage. Supervisors or the shift commander may contact the WPST leadership committee chair or a WPST supervisor anytime to activate WPST or inquire if activation may be necessary.

This program is dependent upon the identification of all traumatic and critical incidents, large and small, to help reduce the emotional impact and to minimize or address the effects of post-traumatic stress on our members. Department employees may access any WPST member trained in peer support for one-on-one informal peer support and referrals anytime at their discretion.

Requests for department defusing can be made through any WPST member. A department supervisor(s) may request a WPST member to conduct a defusing as needed without prior approval from the WPST leadership committee chair. All requests for WPST assistance involving formal debriefings and demobilization shall be made through and coordinated with the WPST leadership committee chair, assigned peer support member and the Shift or Unit Commander.

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The WPST leadership committee chair, in conjunction with other team members, shall identify the type of service and staffing required.

In events involving multiple officers or shifts, an external agency peer support team service may be utilized.

### 1033.8 OUTSIDE AGENCY PEER SUPPORT ACTIVATION

There are several instances where the Department's peer support members may be activated to assist other agencies. The following is a non-inclusive list of those instances:

(a) Line of duty death.

(b) Officer involved shooting.

(c) Natural disaster with mass casualties.

(d) Terroristic event.

(e) Conflict of interest identified.

(f) Other agency does not have peer support available for use.

All activations will be brought to the WPSC or their designee for approval prior to activation. Approval of the Chief of Police is required prior to activating the Department's peer support personnel to assist another agency.

### 1033.9 MULTI-AGENCY INCIDENTS

The Fargo Police Department has a mutual aid agreement with the surrounding law enforcement agencies, which includes peer support utilization. Each agency has their own respective peer support members and should utilize them when available for defusings. The WPSC shall collaborate with their designated counterpart from the other agencies to determine which department's peer support members will defuse/debrief specialized work groups (i.e. SWAT, Negotiations, and other designated groups).

Since debriefings are scheduled at a later date, the peer support member assigned to the event shall determine, in conjunction with the other agencies peer support leads, if a multi-agency debrief is necessary. It will be the responsibility of the peer support member assigned to the event to communicate with the WPST leadership committee chair about the details of their efforts with the other involved agencies.

### 1033.10 PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM REPORTING

No written note taking or recordings are allowed in any peer support intervention. Peer support members providing any type of assistance shall complete and forward a peer support usage report form to the WPST leadership committee chair. The only names included on this report will be those of assisting peer support members. The report shall include the type of assistance provided, peer support members involved, location, date and times, number of attendees or agencies, and

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type of incident involved. The WPST leadership committee chair shall provide an annual report to the WPSC.

### 1033.11 COMPENSATION FOR PEER SUPPORT MEMBERS

All peer support members who are activated to perform peer support related functions or tasks will be compensated in accordance with the Compensation policy (1019).

### 1033.12 CONFIDENTIALITY

Matters discussed between peer support members and attendees or department members shall be handled as strictly confidential in nature. Peer support members shall maintain confidentiality of all discussions they have with attendees or department members unless required by law to disclose the details of such conversations.

### 1033.13 CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFINGS

A Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) should occur as soon as practicable following a critical incident. The WPST leadership committee chair is responsible for organizing the debriefing. Notes and recorded statements shall not be taken because the sole purpose of the debriefing is to help mitigate the stress-related effects of a critical incident.

The debriefing is not part of any investigative process. Care should be taken not to release or repeat any communication made during a debriefing unless otherwise authorized by policy, law, or a valid court order. Information relating directly to persons engaged in an organized public safety peer counseling or a public safety peer debriefing is an exempt record pursuant to North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) § 44-04-18.1(5) and is only releasable with approval of the Chief of Police.

Attendance at the debriefing should only include peer support members and those directly involved in the incident. Pursuant to the Officer-Involved Critical Incidents policy (305), involved officers should not attend a CISD until such time as they have provided a voluntary statement to the investigators conducting the criminal investigation into the use of force. In the event an involved officer has decided not to provide a voluntary statement within a reasonable amount of time, other department policy may apply and the participation in a CISD shall require approval of the Chief of Police in order to maintain the integrity of any potential internal investigation (FPD policy 305.7 (c)).

### 1033.14 PEER SUPPORT COMMUNICATIONS

Although the Department will honor the sensitivity of communications with peer support members, there is no legal privilege to such communications.

### 1033.15 WELLNESS PROGRAMS

The wellness coordinator shall collaborate with WPST supervisors to establish guidelines for any on-duty physical wellness program, including the following:

(a) Voluntary participation by members

(b) Allowable physical fitness activities

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(c) Permitted times and locations for physical fitness activities

(d) Acceptable use of department-provided physical fitness facilities and equipment

(e) Individual health screening and fitness assessment

(f) Individual education (e.g., nutrition, sleep habits, proper exercise, injury prevention) and goal-setting

(g) Standards for fitness incentive programs. The coordinator should collaborate with the appropriate entities (e.g., human resources, legal counsel) to verify that any standards are nondiscriminatory.

(h) Maintenance of physical wellness logs (e.g., attendance, goals, standards, progress)

(i) Ongoing support and evaluation

## 1033.16 ANNUAL MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-IN

All department members shall attend an annual mental health check-in with the Department wellness coordinator or a department-approved and licensed mental health professional who has expertise working with public safety personnel.. The visits are intended to reduce any stigma related to mental health assistance while providing department members with a vital resource that should assist them in sustaining their important public safety position.

Annual mental health visits are not:

(a) A fitness for duty evaluation--see the Fitness for Duty Policy (1015).

(b) A substitute for a critical incident defusing, tactical debriefing or crisis management debriefing following a critical incident

### 1033.16.1 MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER RESPONSIBILITIES

The mental health provider or wellness coordinator shall discuss mandatory reporting with the member to ensure a mutual understanding of what situations create that requirement.

Unless required by mandatory reporting laws, annual mental health check-ins and/or referrals for further counseling following the annual check-in shall be confidential and strictly between the member and the mental health provider or wellness coordinator and not shared with the Department or the City of Fargo. Any subsequent follow up appointments and expenses shall be at the discretion of the member.

The mental health provider or wellness coordinator shall provide a record of attendance for each member to the human resources department who shall work collaboratively with the Department to ensure attendance compliance.

## 1033.17 ANNUAL PHYSICAL FITNESS ASSESSMENT

All sworn members shall participate in an annual physical fitness assessment, as scheduled by the Department. The assessment is based on the Montana Physical Abilities Test (MPAT), which is designed to assess a sworn member's essential physical capabilities required to satisfactorily

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perform their job functions. The MPAT shall be administered by the Training and Development Unit (TDU).

The assessment is intended to help maintain the fitness of our sworn members while providing guidance from the wellness coordinator and/or the WPST to address any skill deficiency, which may include suggestions regarding fitness plans, diet and sleep.

Civilian members may participate in the assessment, but are not required to do so.

### 1033.18 ANNUAL PHYSICAL EXAMINATION

All sworn members shall complete an annual physical examination as scheduled by the City Employee Health Division pursuant to NDCC § 65-01-15.1

### 1033.19 WELLNESS PROGRAM AUDIT

Annually, the wellness coordinator shall audit the effectiveness of the department's wellness programs and prepare a report summarizing the findings. The report shall not contain the names of members participating in the wellness programs, and should include the following information:

- Data on the types of support services provided,
- Wait times for support services.
- Participant feedback, if available.
- Program improvement recommendations.
- Policy revision recommendations.

The coordinator shall present the completed audit to the WPSLC chair for review and consideration of updates to improve program effectiveness. The chair shall forward the report to the WPSC annually.

### 1033.20 TRAINING

The wellness coordinator shall collaborate with the WPST leadership committee and the TDU to provide all members with regular education and training on topics related to member wellness and peer support, including but not limited to:

(a) The availability and range of department wellness support systems.

(b) Suicide prevention.

(c) Recognizing and managing mental distress, emotional fatigue, post-traumatic stress, and other possible reactions to trauma.

(d) Alcohol and substance disorder awareness.

(e) Countering sleep deprivation and physical fatigue.

(f) Anger management.

(g) Marriage and family wellness.

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(h) Benefits of exercise and proper nutrition.

(i) Effective time and personal financial management skills.

In addition, all peer support members shall receive training on stress awareness, reduction, referrals, and critical incident stress management techniques and procedures from an accredited critical incident stress management (CISM) training program. A department peer support member should complete department-approved training prior to being assigned. The WPST leadership committee shall be responsible to ensure all members meet and maintain standardized training requirements for peer support.

Training materials, curriculum, and attendance records shall be forwarded to the TDU Lieutenant as appropriate for inclusion in training records.

## 1033.21 REINTEGRATION PROGRAM

The Department recognizes the need to properly reintegrate members who have been unable to perform their assigned duties for a variety of reasons and for disparate timeframes. These include:

(a) Family medical leave

(b) Injury on or off-duty

(c) Military deployment

(d) Except for promotions, assignment changes with new or different responsibilities

The analysis and process for each member's plan is the responsibility of the WPST leadership committee and is outlined in SOP 1033 (Reintegration Program).

## 1033.22 REVISION DATE 04/01/2025

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