

# Metropolitan Nashville (TN) Police Department's Professional Wellness Section





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# Background

The Professional Wellness Section (PWS) of the Metropolitan Nashville (Tennessee) Police Department (MNPd) was developed in 1986 by one civilian counselor. Today, the program consists of 16 personnel, both sworn and civilian. PWS is a comprehensive officer wellness program comprising the Counseling Unit, the Sworn Wellness Unit, and the Chaplain Unit. It provides various services, including psychotherapy, resiliency training, critical incident stress management, peer support, family support, mentoring, and chaplain support.

In 2013, the department developed a structured wellness check program to provide support to personnel routinely exposed to significant trauma in their assignments, such as fatal automobile crashes, crime scene investigations, homicides, and child sex abuse. The wellness check program has continued to evolve and expand. This document outlines the MNPd PWS wellness check program by discussing its purpose, structure, goals, and the types of wellness checks it conducts.

## Purpose

There is often a stigma across the law enforcement profession associated with officer wellness programs, and while awareness, acceptance, and programming in this space have increased steadily since the mid-2010s, there is more to do. Feelings of hesitancy, fear, and distrust continue to be associated with mental health needs, especially counseling and therapy. A wellness check can reach and connect with personnel in a less structured environment than formal counseling or therapy while normalizing the experience of having difficult feelings, seeking a “check-in,” and finding someone with whom to “just talk.”

### About the CRI-TAC Spotlight

The CRI-TAC Spotlight series is committed to advancing knowledge through sharing tools, resources, and information developed for the law enforcement field as a result of customized training and technical assistance delivered by CRI-TAC.

#### WHAT A WELLNESS CHECK IS

- Interaction between an MNPd employee and a representative from the PWS
- 100 percent confidential (with the normal exceptions to report a threat to harm self or others, suspected abuse, or commission of serious crimes)

#### WHAT A WELLNESS CHECK IS NOT

- Therapy
- Diagnosis
- Psychological evaluation
- Fitness for duty exam

# Structure

Wellness checks should include the following considerations:

- Respect and privacy are top priorities. No audio, video, notes, or case files.
- Typically provided in a one-on-one setting but may be offered in group settings or offered by more than one PWS representative.
- The employee can choose to share as much or as little as they want during a wellness check.
- May be a one-time interaction or may include multiple interactions over time.
- May occur in person, on the phone, or virtually through a web-based program.
- Each PWS representative is trained to recognize when an employee may benefit from professional counseling and is prepared to offer additional services when required.

# Goals

The wellness check is designed to provide supportive services to law enforcement personnel. A wellness check is also the opportunity to build a **supportive, trusting relationship** with an employee.

A wellness check shares many of the goals of a critical incident stress debriefing, including the following:

- Opportunity to talk and “vent”
- Lessening stress
- Normalizing reactions
- Processing thoughts, feelings, and reactions
- Assessing support systems
- Psychoeducation; teaching basic concepts of trauma, stress management, and resiliency
- Identifying any issues or concerns that the employee would like to change or further explore
- Assessing need for further interventions

# Types

The MNPDP model offers five types of wellness checks, while acknowledging there may be crossover or hybrid types.

1. General
2. Annual
3. Stress
4. Crisis
5. Follow-up

A **general wellness check** can occur with anyone, at anytime, anywhere.

*Key points:*

- A general wellness check is more than just a “hello, how are you?”
- A general wellness check is a more meaningful dialogue and conversation that promotes genuine care and support.

An **annual wellness check** is typically provided to personnel exposed to routine trauma. Currently at MNPDP, annual wellness checks are “encouraged and required” for personnel in the following divisions and sections:

- CSI / Forensic Services
- Cold Case / Homicide
- Crisis Negotiators
- Special Weapons and Tactics / Special Response Tactical Unit
- Domestic Violence
- Fatal Crash
- Sex Crimes
- Youth Services
- Child Death
- Specialized Investigations

A variety of topics may be addressed:

- Current and past assignments (pros/cons)
- Goals for future (career/personal)
- Challenges of past year
- Success/achievements of past year
- Identifying critical incidents and providing an opportunity to process thoughts and feelings
- Support systems, coping skills, and self-care
- Family or relationships
- Stressors at home and work

*Key points:*

- Available for anyone in the agency, regardless of assignment and rank.
- Typically provided at the PWS office, by a member of the PWS Counseling, Wellness, or Chaplain Unit. May be provided at alternate locations when requested.
- Typically aligned with the date an employee gets their annual physical exam at the health center.
- 30-60 minutes in length.

At MNPd, annual wellness checks are currently NOT mandated, and the information discussed is not communicated with chain of command unless the employee gives written permission.

A **stress wellness check** is provided to any employee who is experiencing unusual personal or professional stress.

*Key points:*

- May be initiated by the PWS representative who has knowledge of the stress or by the employee seeking support.
- Can be arranged through a third party like a supervisor or co-worker.

A **crisis wellness check** is provided to any employee who has experienced a critical incident or is experiencing some type of personal crisis.

*Key points:*

- Crisis is a very subjective concept based on a myriad of individual beliefs, experiences, and assessment and differs from person to person.
- Crisis definition does not matter as the goal is to offer support and to process thoughts, feelings, and reactions to a unique situation.

A **follow-up wellness check** is the interaction that typically occurs after the initial stress or crisis wellness check.

*Key points:*

- May also be part of a series of stress or crisis wellness checks.
- The goal is to offer personnel support and the opportunity to process any thoughts, feelings, and reactions to their unique situation.

# Acknowledgments

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The Collaborative Reform Initiative: Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC) Spotlight series is committed to advancing knowledge through sharing tools, resources, and information developed for the law enforcement field as a result of customized training and technical assistance delivered by CRI-TAC. This publication provides guidance to the law enforcement field on the purpose, structure, and goals of law enforcement wellness checks and the different types of wellness checks agencies can establish.



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