

The Science of Support

Designing Evidence-Based Wellness Programs that Get Results

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Wellness Matters

Proven Strategies Exist

Build to Measure





Wellness Matters

Design Programs to Goals

Proven Strategies Exist

Measure

Build to Improve

Iterate

RETENTION

Excellence

Motivate Service-Oriented Performance

Wellness

Support officers who are overworked or overstressed

Support Officer Wellbeing

Early Intervention

Identify patterns of behavior related to misconduct / IA / Policy Problems

Prevent Problematic Behavior

Policy Reporting

Use of Force Reports, Accident Reports, Citizen Stops etc

Internal Affairs

Investigate and review conduct of officers

Ensure Compliance and Identify Misconduct

Academy

Familiarity with practices, physical preparation, certifications

FTO

Onboarding Officers with Agency Procedures

Training

Ongoing certification and skill development

Position for Success

RECRUITING

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Wellness Challenges in Public Service

- Government professionals face mounting stress and burnout in the post-pandemic era
- Public safety employees (police, fire, first responders) are under unprecedented strain from staffing shortages, rising calls, and public scrutiny
- Wellness issues can no longer be treated as personal matters: impact workforce readiness, safety, and costs



The Toll on Public Safety Employees

Officers suffer higher rates of **heart disease, divorce, sick leave,** and PTSD/depression than the general population

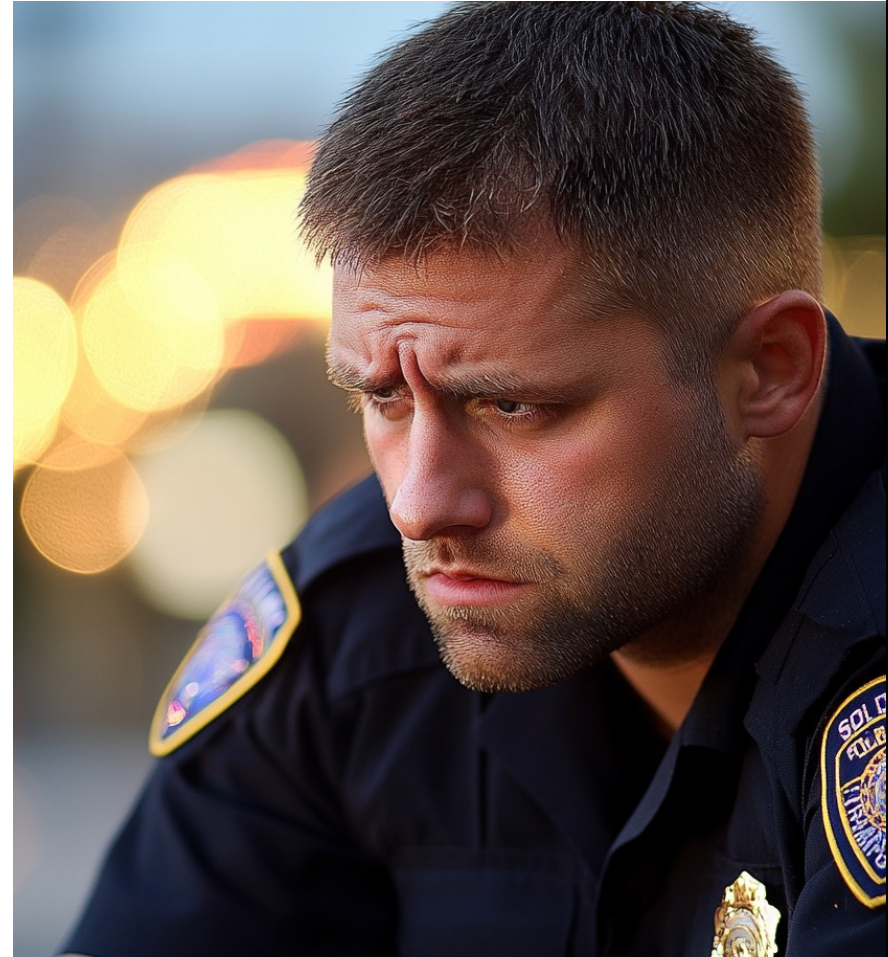
11% of officers have had **suicidal thoughts** due to work stress

39% report depression stemming from job stress

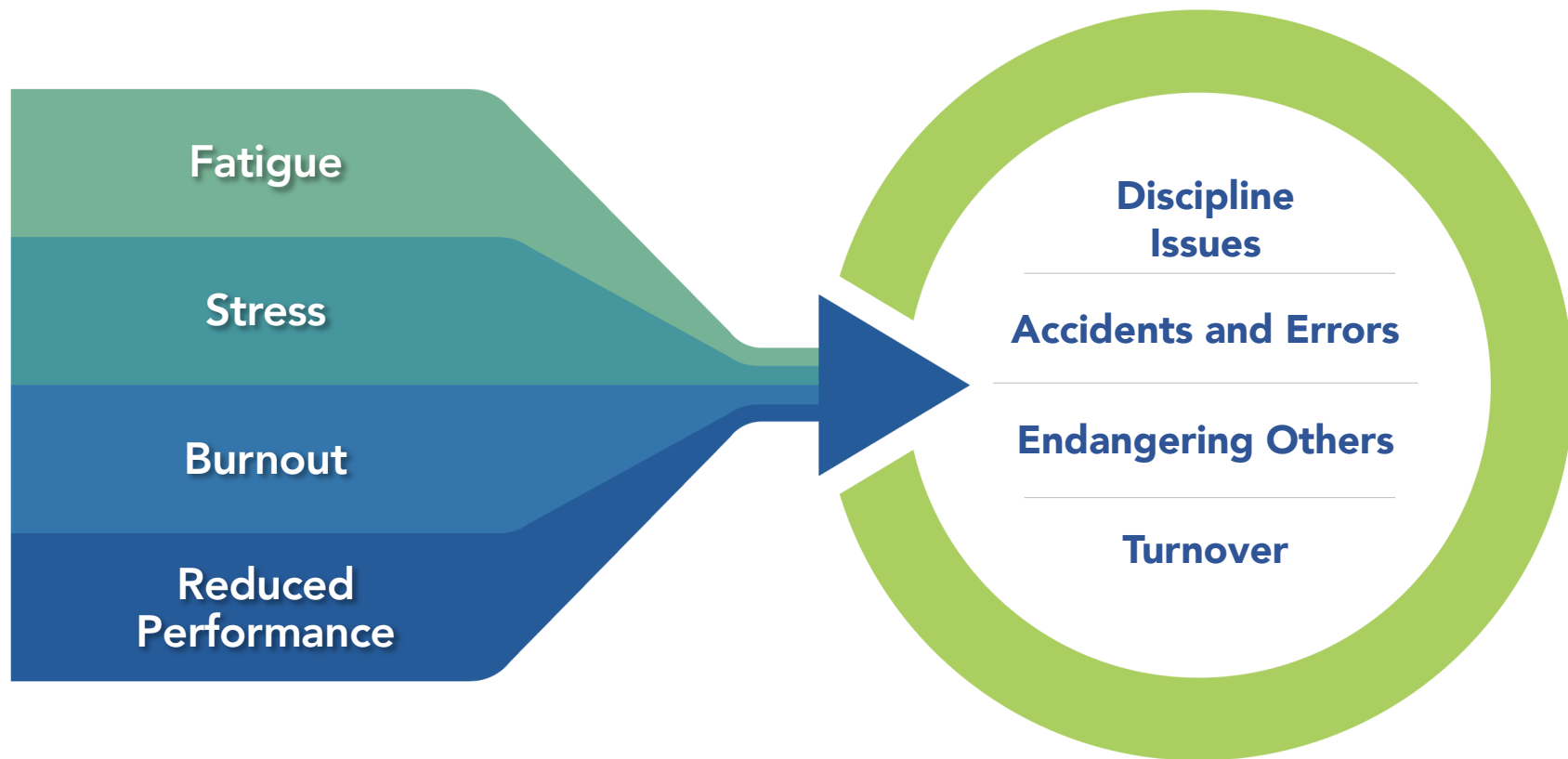
71% of officers report sleep troubles

83% of officers report their mental health negatively affects their work

police1.com. rand.org



Impact on Safety, Performance, and Liability



Fatigue degrades moral decision making and impulse control before other outcomes
(Belenky et al., 2003, 2014)

Fatigue, Burnout, and Staffing

- Staff shortages are widespread
 - Agencies average 91% of authorized staffing*
 - 65% of agencies report reducing services*
- Shortages lead to cycle of increasing shortages



*The State of Recruitment & Retention: A Continuing Crisis for Policing, International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2024

Rising Workers' Comp and Liability Costs in Public Safety

- Wellness challenges translate into **hard costs**.
- Public safety employees often account for a disproportionate share of claims.
- Santa Monica saw a 20% jump in new workers' comp claims in a single year, driven by Police Department 35% increase
- **Liability lawsuits** (e.g. from vehicle accidents or use-of-force incidents) also rise when employees are fatigued, stressed, or inadequately supported



Backdrop: Escalating Insurance Costs for Municipalities

Premiums on the rise: >50% of cities and towns recently reported insurance premium increases of 10% or more across liability and property coverage

Reinsurance spike: Global factors (natural disasters, inflation) are driving up reinsurance costs by as much as 50% for municipal insurers in 2024, costs often passed on to pools and cities

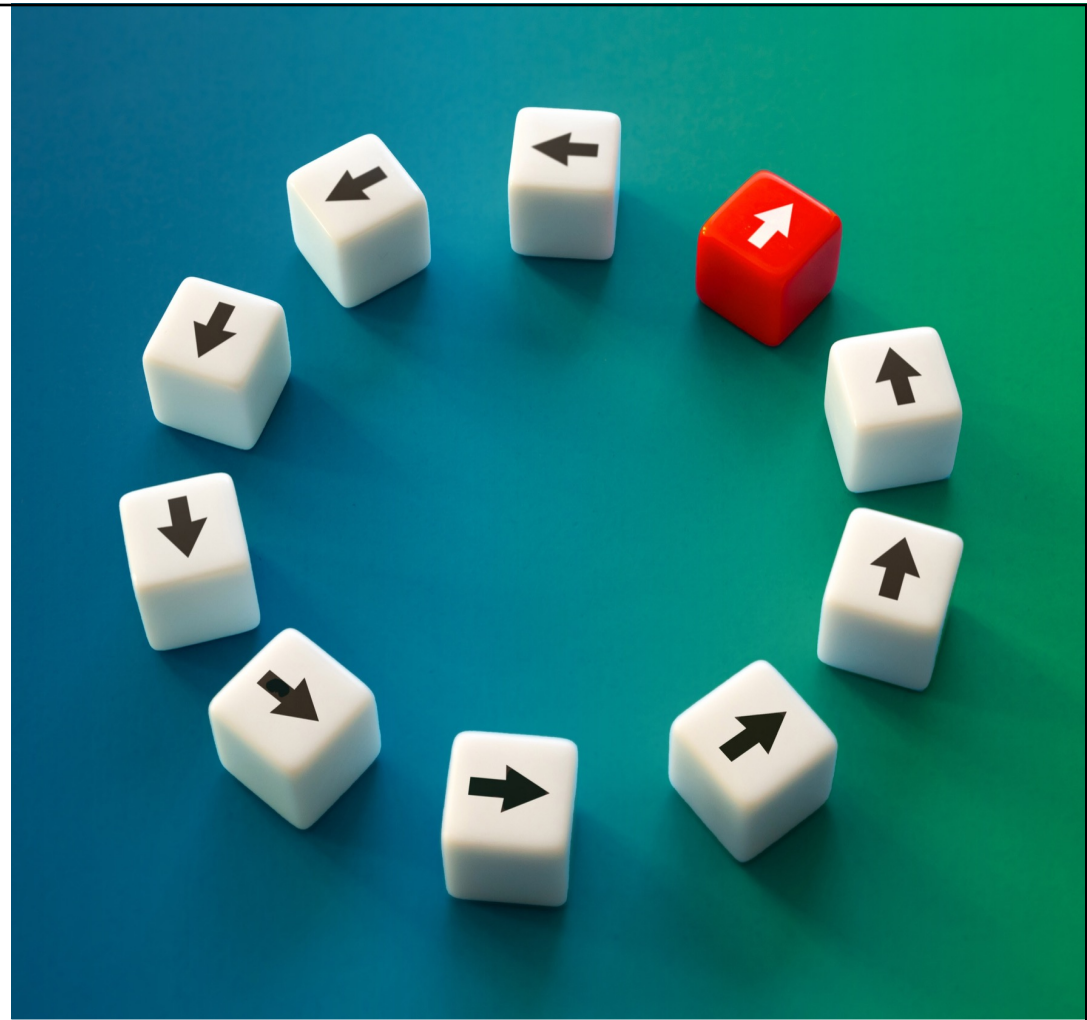
Large self-insured cities face volatility – e.g. a 29.5% surge in comp liabilities from just 3 catastrophic claims (adding \$7.9M in costs)

Insurance budgets are being squeezed



Reversing the Downward Spiral

- Investing in wellness to break the cycle
- Create a virtuous cycle: healthy staff → safer outcomes
- Promising Practices



Evidence-Based Practices

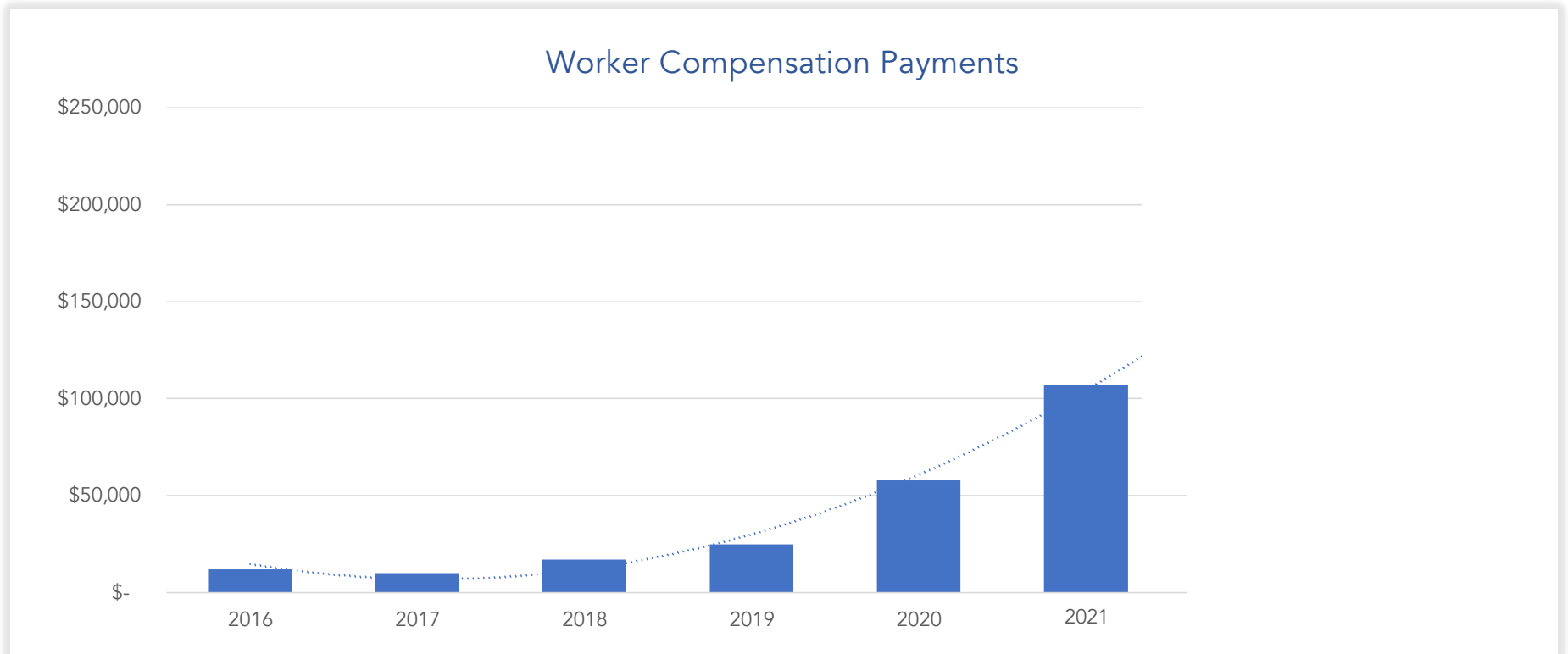
“Evidence-Based Practices” show strong statistical evidence of reducing officer injuries and incidents leading to claims payments. Sample Law Enforcement evidence-based practices are listed below:

Evidence-Based Practices	Practice Area	Liability Claims Reduction	Workers' Comp Claims Reduction	Auto Claims Reduction
After-Action Review	Operations	✓	✓	✓
Advanced Leadership Training	Training	✓	✓	✓
Wellness Programs	Wellness	✓	✓	✓
Check up from the Neck Up	Wellness		✓	
Peer Support	Wellness		✓	✓



Increasing Benefit

Annual Savings in Workers Compensation Payments



** Following rising cost of workers comp, agency began implementation of best practices in 2023, with full implementation in 2024

Early Intervention Systems – Identifying Officers at Risk

- Only 17% of officers in need seek help*
- Data-driven early warning for misconduct** and wellness
- Flag officers about areas proven to generate risk/issues
- Interventions: counseling, coaching, training



*Jetelina et al, 2020, Prevalence of Mental Illness and Mental Health Care Use Among Police Officers

** Helsby et al, 20218

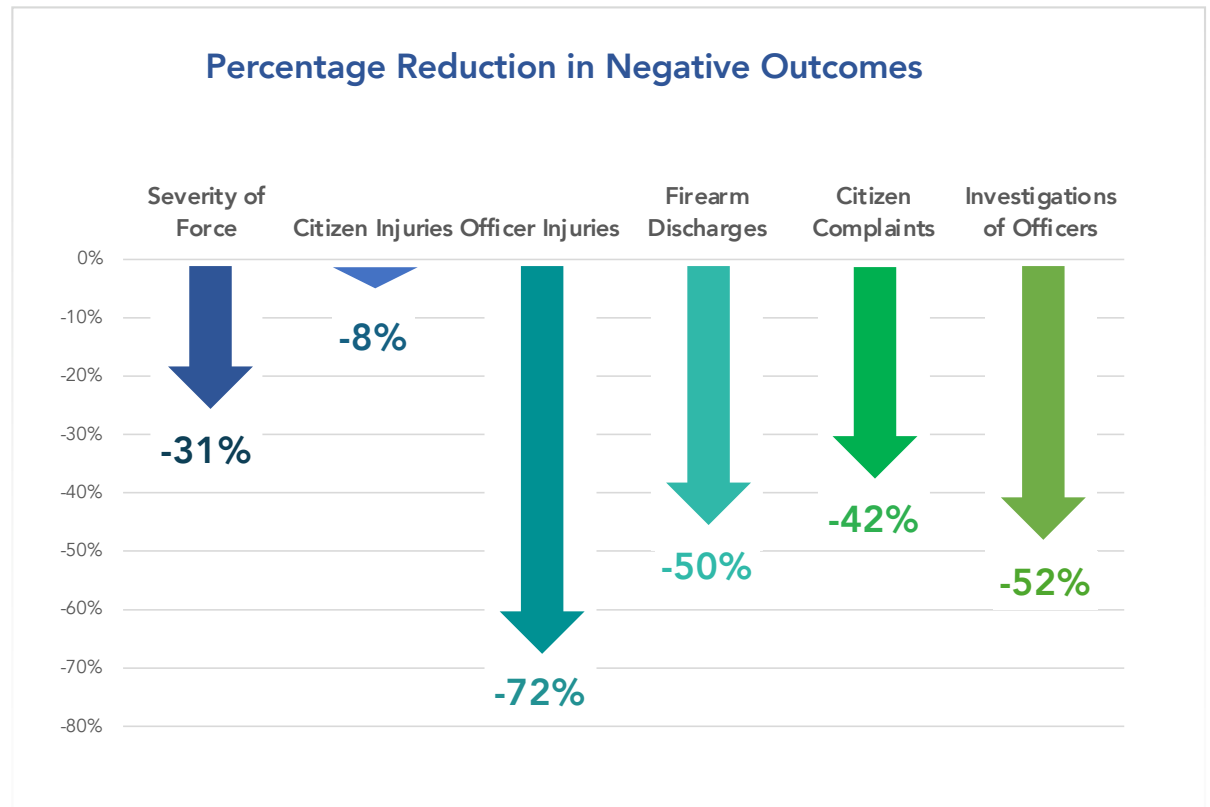
Early Intervention – Measurable Benefits

People Performance Metrics

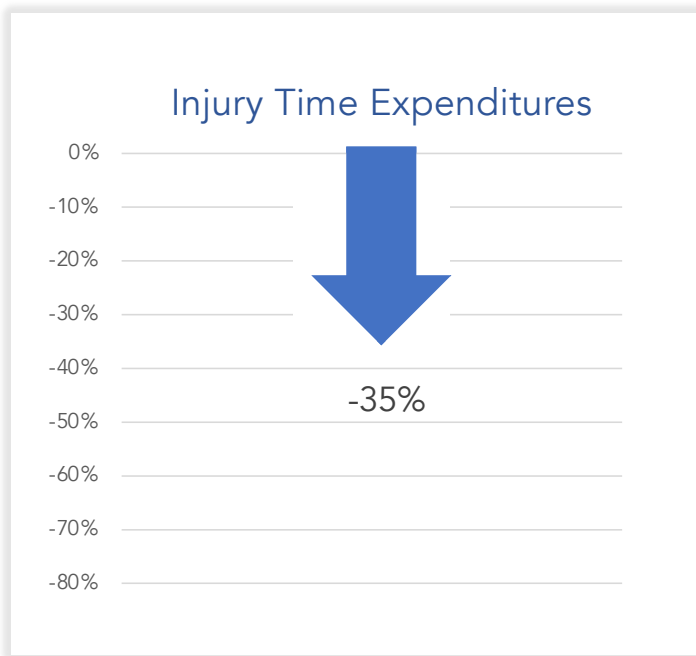
- 12.7% of Officers alerted over 2-year period
- 52% of Alerts led to follow up officer supports

Crime Statistics

- Minimal change to officer activity (arrests)
- Violent crime reduced over this timeframe



Annual Savings in Reducing Injury Time



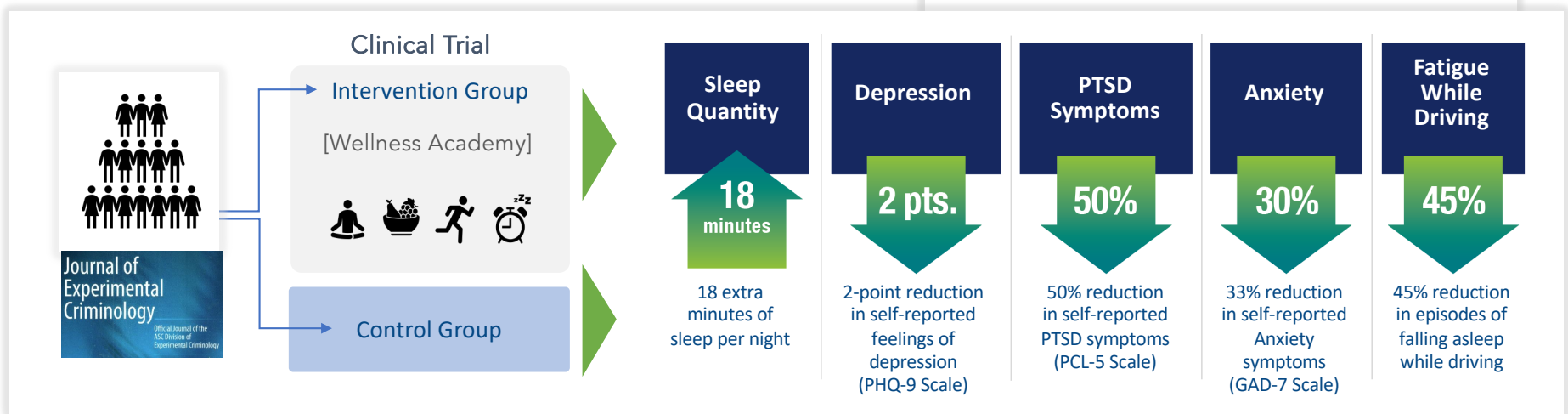
Agency time utilization data from
2017-2021 (prior to EIS) and 2022-23 (after First Sign)

- Officers spent less time on injured leave
- Reduction in injury time expenses
- Reduction in overtime as replacement

Training To Manage Fatigue and Stress Symptoms

- 3-Year RCT in Seattle
- A research-based wellness framework has been proven to have a positive, statistical impact.

Better-rested officers
are safer officers



Comprehensive Wellness Programs

Holistic wellness programs that address physical, mental, and emotional health

- Peer Support
- Counseling
- Mindfulness
- Stress management workshops
- Physical Fitness
- Nutrition Programs
- Family Support Services

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What's Working in Wellness



Physical
Fitness
Programs
Reduce Stress



Mindfulness
Cuts PTSD
and
Depression



Peer Support
& Counseling
Save Lives



Mental Health
Resources

Anecdotal

When Used

Overcoming Program Hurdles

- Stigma and confidentiality concerns
- Resource gaps & shift schedules
- Few rigorous evaluations; leadership buy-in crucial
- Connecting individuals in need

**Only 17% of officers
in need seek help***



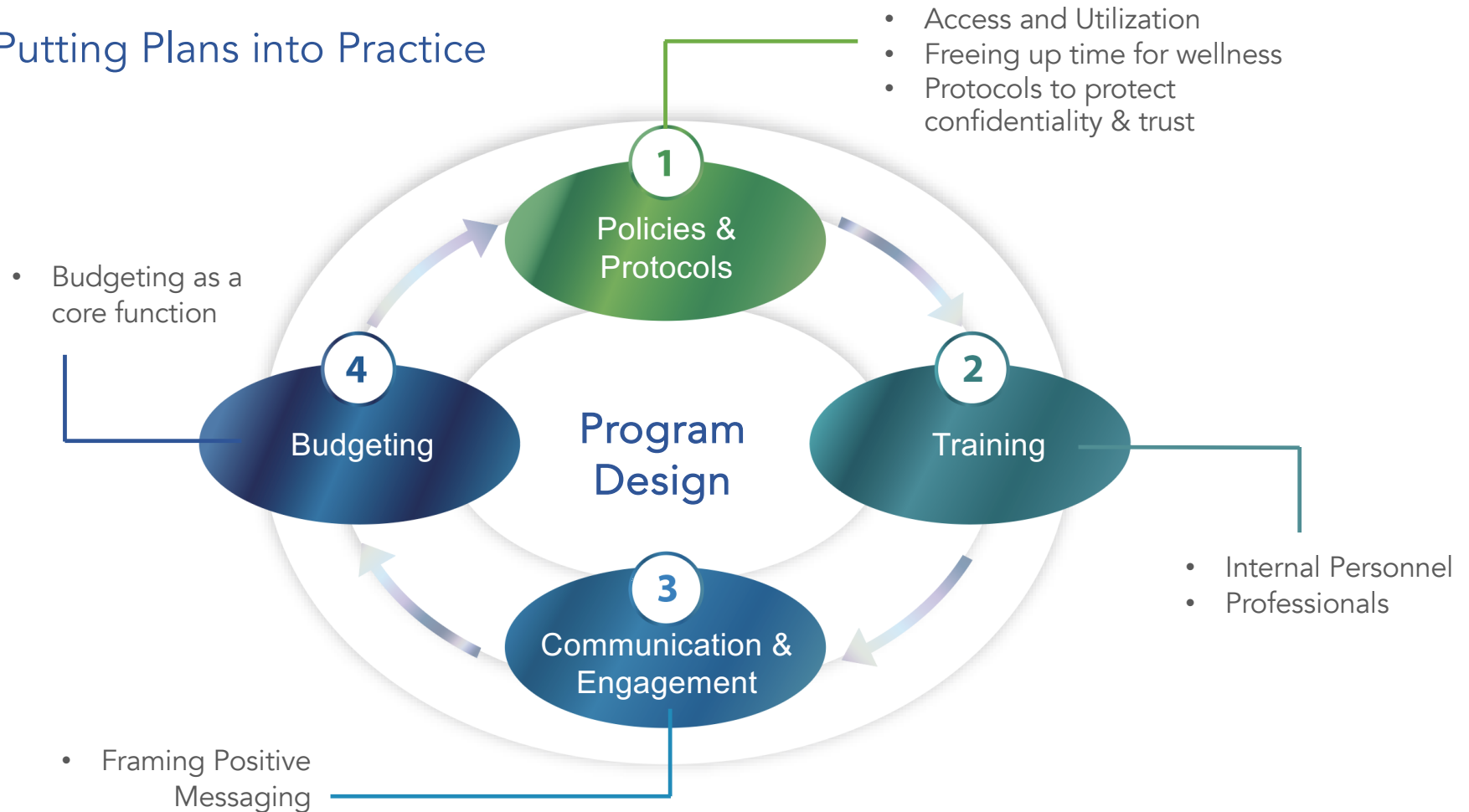
*Jetelina et al, 2020, Prevalence of Mental Illness and Mental Health Care Use Among Police Officers



Thoughtful Design of Programs for Impact

- Assess needs with data
- Blend physical, mental, organizational components
- Tailor to workforce;
- Recruit peer & leader champions
- Track utilization

Putting Plans into Practice



Evaluating Outcomes & Impact

- Set clear metrics (injuries, claims, surveys)
- Collect data, use comparison groups
- Continuous improvement and transparent reporting



Metrics That Matter



HEALTH

BP, Fitness,
Sleep, Stress



ENGAGEMENT

Participation,
Retention,
Satisfaction



OPERATIONAL

Sick Leave,
Accidents,
Force Incidents



RISK

Claim
Frequency
and Severity

Surveys, Tests, Direct Data Collection
Aggregate!

Iterating Toward Success

(Example from CIRMA)

Norwalk (CT) Fire Department

Injury-Prevention & Wellness Program (2019-2024)

Stage	Planning
Actions	2019 Risk-Analysis with CIRMA <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Firefighter injuries and slips/falls → workers-comp• Goal: cut claim severity by $\geq 25\%$ in five years
Measurements	Mapped five years of historical claim frequency, severity, and "days-lost."
Findings	Baseline severity (indemnity + medical) \approx \$919 k.

Norwalk (CT) Fire Department Injury-Prevention & Wellness Program (2019-2024)

Stage	Enact
Actions	Firefighter Injury-Prevention & Wellness Program: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mandatory fitness and mobility assessments• On-duty functional-movement workouts coached by peer “fitness captains”• Nutrition coaching• Quarterly mental-wellness sessions• Upgraded PPE to reduce slip/strain risk• Every injury investigated for root-cause, with fixes logged in a live dashboard

Norwalk (CT) Fire Department Injury-Prevention & Wellness Program (2019-2024)

Stage	Observe
Actions	<p>Quarterly dashboards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Claim counts• \$ paid-to-date,• Lost-time days,• Body-part injured,• Incident type <p>The wellness committee reviewed results and adjusted training modules (e.g., added shoulder-mobility drills after a spike in ladder-strain injuries).</p>
Measurements	Workers-comp data exported from CIRMA's claims system; attendance & fitness scores tracked in Excel.

Norwalk (CT) Fire Department Injury-Prevention & Wellness Program (2019-2024)

Stage	Reflect & Iterate
Actions	Annual “safety summit” (frontline + manager) Program tweaks documented and fed into next-year training calendar.

Source: <https://www.thehour.com/news/article/norwalk-fire-department-connecticut-award-20165477.php>

Norwalk (CT) Fire Department Injury-Prevention & Wellness Program (2019-2024)

Results after five-year action-research cycle:

- *Workers-comp costs*: **27% average annual reduction** since 2019.
- *Claim severity*: dropped from **\$919 k to \$255 k (-72 %)**
- *Incident outcome*: large bridge fire in 2024 produced only **2 minor injuries** thanks to mobility and PPE focus.
- Program earned CIRMA's 2025 Risk-Management Award for "substantial impact on total cost of risk."

Fire Chief Gino Gatto credited "the continuous feedback loop between our injury data and our training calendar" for sustaining progress—an exact illustration of **action research** (plan → act → observe → reflect → repeat).

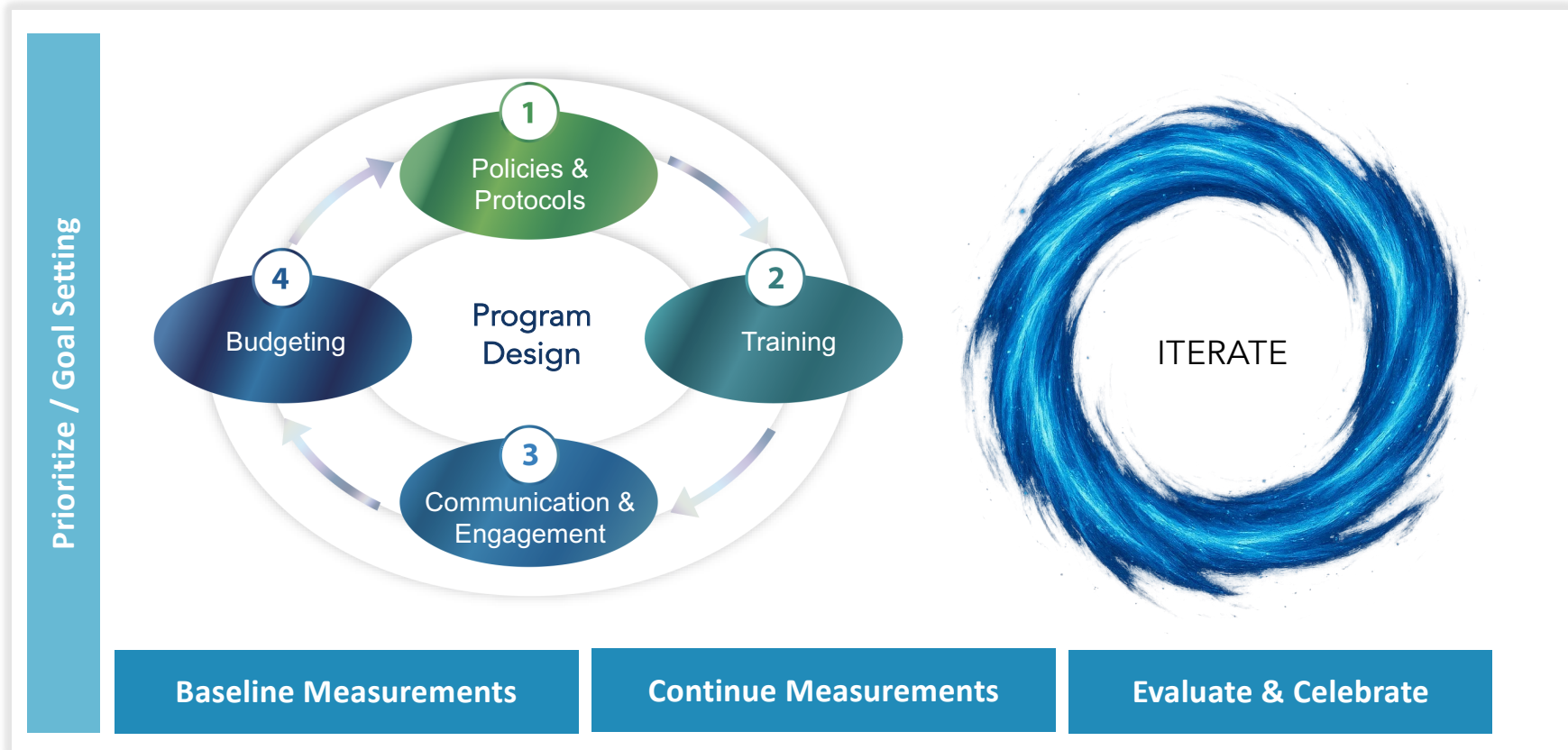
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Action Research

- 1. Iterative, data-driven cycles** – Each quarter the wellness committee reviewed fresh claims data, reflected on patterns, and adjusted fitness or training modules accordingly.
- 2. Collaborative inquiry** – Firefighters, safety officers, and risk-pool analysts jointly interpreted the data and co-designed solutions.
- 3. Just-in-time measurement** – Same metrics (claim frequency, severity, lost-time days) were tracked from baseline through each cycle, letting the city see tangible progress.
- 4. Scalable knowledge** – Findings (e.g., most ladder strains occurred after overnight calls) became SOP revisions and were shared statewide via CIRMA.

This Norwalk case shows how a municipality can **embed research into everyday practice**, generate evidence, and achieve measurable safety and cost benefits—exactly the sort of continuous-improvement model governing boards can champion in other jurisdictions.

Expanding Framework to Get Results



Improvement Science Across Organizations



1. Be problem-focused / user-centered;
2. Attend to variability;
3. See the system;
4. Embrace measurement;
5. Learn through disciplined inquiry;
6. Organize as networks

Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow, "Getting Ideas into Action: Building Networked Improvement Communities in Education."

Change is Possible

Build to Improve

Design Programs to Goals

Measure

Iterate



Questions

