

FIRSTNET
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From vision to roadmap: The FirstNet Health and Wellness Program

Building a strong foundation for first responder well-being

By Ryan Fields-Spack

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Lead, EMS Strategy | Backup Lead, Fire Strategy & Events

A message from Leadership

Scott Agnew

President, FirstNet and Public Sector Mobility, AT&T

FirstNet was built to deliver the reliable, purpose-built connectivity first responders depend on every day. Today we recognize that readiness extends beyond communications. It means investing in your overall well-being—physical, mental, emotional, and financial.

Across the country, agencies must navigate increasing operational demands, workforce challenges, and the cumulative effects of stress and trauma. Supporting you holistically is essential to mission success.

That is why FirstNet continues to lead in this space. FirstNet is committed to convening partners, growing evidence-based programs, and delivering practical tools agencies can implement immediately.

First Responder Health and Wellness: An Agency Roadmap is a direct result of that commitment. It provides a practical, actionable framework to help agencies build and sustain wellness programs. FirstNet stands with you, not just in moments of crisis, but in the quiet, daily work of building resilience.

Thank you for your service. We are proud to serve those who serve.



A perspective from the front lines

I have been in your shoes.

I know what it feels like to carry the invisible weight—the calls that stay with you, the shifts that blur into one another, the quiet moments when the job feels heavier than anyone outside the uniform can understand. FirstNet recognizes these challenges and is committed to helping every agency, responder, and family access the tools, programs, and resources needed to turn struggle into strength.

Whether your department has no wellness program yet or an established one ready to reach the next level, this roadmap provides clear standards across 5 dimensions of wellness. Built by the FirstNet Health and Wellness Coalition for the community, it exists to help you move from “no program” to “good program” quickly, and from “good” to “great” with confidence.

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The opportunity

Strengthen the responder workforce

Responder wellness remains one of the most critical challenges facing public safety.

Sara Jahnke, PhD, is a leading researcher whose work has shaped national understanding of firefighter behavioral health. Her studies of repeated exposure to trauma (RET) show that firefighters experience higher rates of PTSD symptoms than the general population. First responders are at risk for:

- Post-traumatic stress
- Depression and anxiety
- Sleep disruption and burnout
- Substance abuse
- Suicide

These factors directly impact workforce readiness, retention, and long-term sustainability.

But trauma does not have to be the end of the story. Advancements in behavioral health research—particularly in post-traumatic growth (PTG)—show that with the right programs and support systems in place, responders can build resilience, strengthen connections, and sustain performance over time.

The path forward is clear: Agencies need structured, scalable solutions that move beyond awareness.



10% to 33%

of first responders experience PTSD, significantly higher than 3.5% to 6.8% for the general population.^{1, 2}

12% to 53%

of first responders suffer from depression.³ They also have higher risk for substance use and sleep disturbance.⁴

18 per 100,000

firefighters are at risk for suicide compared to **13 per 100,000** general population.⁵

151 to 228

first responder suicides were reported each year since 2020.⁶

¹ S. A. Jahnke et al., "Firefighting and mental health: Experiences of repeated exposure to trauma," *Work*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2016 pp.737–44, <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-162255>.

² S. Moslehi et al., "Silent crisis on the frontlines: A systematic review of suicidal behaviors among disaster responders—epidemiology, risk pathways, and evidence-based interventions," *Scandinavian Journal of Trauma, Resuscitation and Emergency Medicine*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2025, article 161, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13049-025-01479-z>.

³ I. H. Stanley et al., "Career prevalence and correlates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors among firefighters," *Journal of Affective Disorders*, vol. 187, 2015, pp. 163–171, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2015.08.007>.

⁴ Robin Jacobowitz et al., *New York State first responder mental health needs assessment*, Benjamin Center for Public Policy Initiatives, State University of New York at New Paltz and Institute for Disaster Mental Health, 2025.

⁵ Ruderman Family Foundation, "Ruderman white paper on mental health and suicide of first responders," *White Papers & Research*, accessed June 23, 2026, https://rudermanfoundation.org/white_papers/police-officers-and-firefighters-are-more-likely-to-die-by-suicide-than-in-line-of-duty/.

⁶ First H.E.L.P., "First responder suicides," accessed June 23, 2026, <https://1sthelp.org/the-numbers/>.

From strategy to execution

5 years of progress

FirstNet launched the Health and Wellness Coalition in 2020 to build a proactive, nationwide culture of wellness. Today that vision is reality. The coalition's work has evolved from isolated initiatives to a coordinated, scalable model that delivers measurable impact.

Recent highlights

- Expanded national deployment of wellness programs across disciplines
- Increased participation in financial, behavioral, and peer-support initiatives
- Ongoing engagement with leading associations and industry events
- Continued investment in research and evidence-based practices

Program scale (2025–2026):

- 16,000+ individuals trained through partner programs
- 600+ programs delivered nationwide
- 30+ states reached
- Measurable improvements in resilience and PTG



Measuring progress and making an impact

From keynote stages to on-the-ground deployments, the coalition's work produces tangible results. Participant satisfaction remains exceptionally high, and agencies report improved readiness, retention, and culture.



98%
training
satisfaction

4.9/5
average
rating



48%
average PTG
increase (2025)

43%
average PTGI
increase (Q1 2026)



**Improved operational
readiness**



**Higher staff retention and
stronger agency culture**

The coalition delivers measurable results across public safety

PTG Post-traumatic growth | PTGI Post-traumatic growth inventory

Delivering impact

The FirstNet roadmap for public agencies

Released in October 2024, *First Responder Health and Wellness: An Agency Roadmap* is the coalition's flagship resource. We created it specifically for the public safety community. It equips any agency—regardless of size or current program maturity—with clear, customizable standards.

The roadmap organizes wellness across 5 dimensions: financial, psychological, physical, social, and spiritual. It translates coalition insights into practical programs that give every agency a clear path forward.

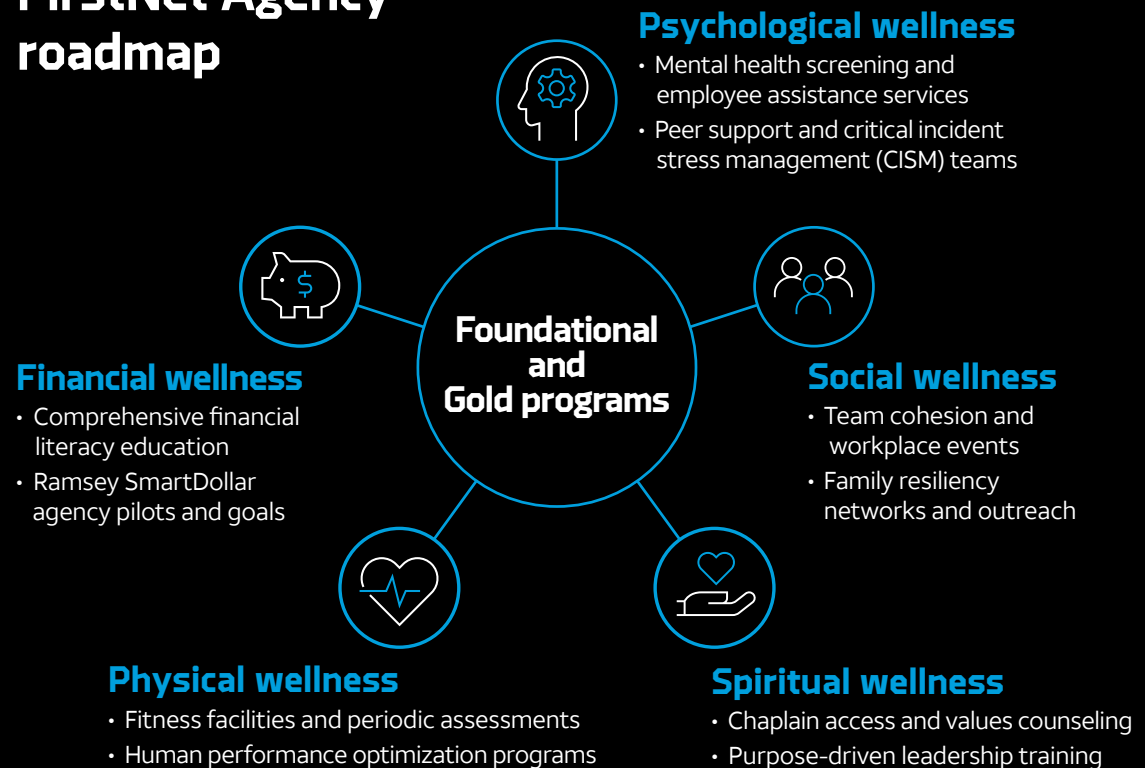
Foundational Programs help departments move quickly from “no program” to a solid, preventive foundation.

Gold Programs elevate good programs into great ones by integrating feedback, evaluation, and sustained culture change.

Built for you by FirstNet

Download [First Responder Health and Wellness: An Agency Roadmap](#) today and begin building or strengthening your responder program.

5 dimensions of wellness FirstNet Agency roadmap



Collaboration in action

Turning struggle into strength

We work with leading providers to deliver measurable support across 5 dimensions and help responders turn struggle into strength.

Psychological: Boulder Crest Foundation and Struggle Well

A global leader in post-traumatic growth-based (PTG) programs, including Struggle Well, a prevention-focused program based on the science of PTG

Social: ROG the Dog

Animal-assisted therapy named for FirstNet's Response Operations Group (ROG)

Financial: Ramsey SmartDollar pilot program

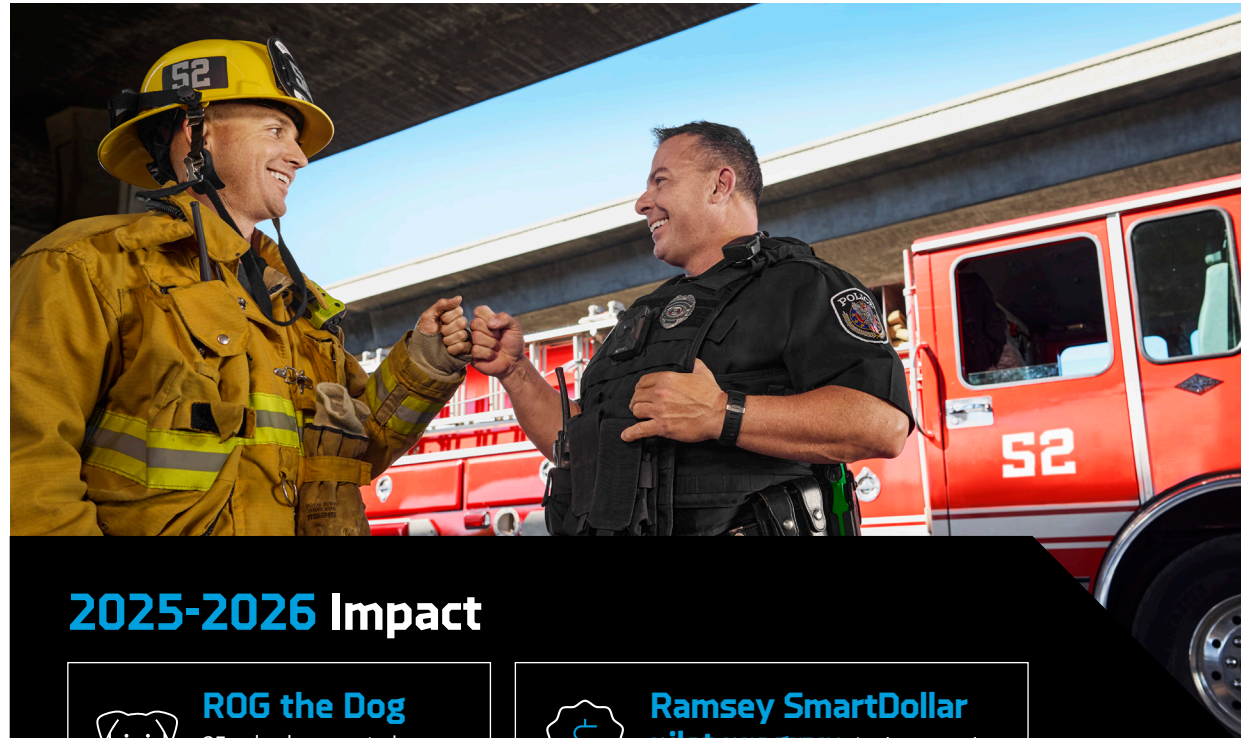
Foundational budgeting and debt education

Physical: Coalition resources

Support durability, endurance, and preventive care

Research and innovation: Science to the Station

Ensures Coalition programs evolve with science-based, outcome-driven research



2025-2026 Impact



ROG the Dog

25+ deployments |
Thousands touched



Ramsey SmartDollar pilot program

| Thousands
of public safety members



Keynotes

at FDIC, FOP, IACP OSW
conferences and more



Coalition quarterly

meetings and Science to
the Station research

**Boulder Crest Foundation / Struggle well collaboration –
16,024 trained in 2025**

Provider spotlight

Boulder Crest Foundation and the Struggle Well program

The FirstNet collaboration with Boulder Crest Foundation has helped grow Struggle Well from a pilot program to a national movement. It's peer-led, evidence-based, and grounded in post-traumatic growth (PTG) science.

Our participants say it best

One Tucson police officer shared: "There have been many days I was upset that I woke up. This class has changed me and has made me realize that I have a choice."

Another participant reflected: "This was the first time I shared my earthquake moment, and I have never felt so free."

EMT John D. said: "The program provided essential tools for handling stress I didn't even realize I was carrying."

And Police Sergeant Maria S. noted: "This training has fundamentally shifted how our team supports each other. It's a game changer."

Struggle Well participants consistently report gaining:

- Shared language around struggle
- Stronger peer connections
- Practical tools they apply on duty

Lasting impact

The program's mobile app (13,097 users) and PTG Weekly newsletter (16,671 subscribers, 20% to 25% open rate) help participants continue to grow long after training ends.



Our numbers tell the story Struggle Well impact

2025 Year in review

16,024
Total trained
(14,884 first responders,
1,140 military)

48%
PTG increase
across all
5 domains

633
programs
delivered across
30 states

500+
agencies/
military
units served

98%
training
satisfaction

Q1 2026 FirstNet impact

135
Programs
delivered

2867
First
responders
trained

365
agencies
trained

389
training
days

22
states
reached

43%
Average
PTGI
increase

57%
Deeper
relationships

46%
Spiritual
change

Looking ahead

Expanding Gold programs nationwide

As the FirstNet Health and Wellness Program Coalition moves forward, we invite every agency and leader to join in our focus on these priorities.

- Expand evidence-based Gold programs.
- Integrate the Roadmap into all public safety organizations so they can leverage this resource to build and grow their programs.
- Deepen **Science to the Station** research. Research supports funding, legislation, and improved metrics.
- Continue to grow and support public safety with the free ROG the Dog program.
- Expand Boulder Crest programs through train-the-trainer sessions that help agencies implement them.
- Secure sustainable funding and alliances.



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Continue to grow and support public safety with the free ROG the Dog program.



Expand Boulder Crest programs through train-the-trainer sessions that help agencies implement them.



Secure sustainable funding and alliances.

Your call to action

Join us on the journey to first responder wellness

Public safety is not just a job—it is a calling that asks everything of those who answer it. FirstNet remains committed to ensuring you have the support you need to answer that call for decades to come.

Together, we are turning vision into action—and struggle into strength.

Visit the [FirstNet Responder Health and Wellness](#) website or [contact us](#) to learn more about our programs.

Download [First Responder Health and Wellness: An Agency Roadmap](#) and act today to make a difference for the first responders in your agency.



FirstNet® is the only nationwide, high-speed broadband communications platform dedicated to and purpose-built for America's first responders and the extended public safety community. Shaped by the vision of Congress and the first responder community following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, FirstNet stands above commercial offerings. It is built with [AT&T](#) in public-private partnership with the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority) – an independent agency within the federal government. The FirstNet network provides first responders with truly dedicated coverage and capacity when they need it, unique benefits always-on priority and preemption across 5G and LTE, and high-quality Band 14 spectrum. These advanced capabilities help fire, law enforcement, and EMS protect their communities. Learn more at [FirstNet.com](#).

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About the author

Ryan Fields-Spack has served in fire and EMS for over 25 years. He has responded to countless emergencies, including the 2012 mass shooting at the Aurora theater in Colorado. He drafted the Aurora After-Action Report for that tragic event and later served as Emergency Management Coordinator for the City of Aurora.

He earned a master's degree in Homeland Security and Defense from the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security and later rose to Captain and Staffing Officer for Aurora Fire.

For the past 9 years, Ryan has proudly guided FirstNet's health and wellness efforts with one focus: you, the men and women of public safety.



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