



# Resetting and informing a new baseline for wellness in policing

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Since the emergence of organized policing, its success has relied on the work of the people wearing the uniforms, alongside other professionals also serving as dedicated public servants, in rural areas, towns, and cities across the world. At times admired, at other times justly criticized, policing remains an unquestionably noble profession because of those people who have dedicated their lives to the protection of others.

As modern policing continues to evolve, it must include, in every aspect, the well-being of its number one asset: the people. If those serving in the agencies are legitimately the priority, as so often casually stated, then their resilience, mental health, and well-being should always be leading the path forward. Unfortunately, we know that this is still too often not the case. Suicide rates in policing are alarmingly high, as are the rates of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, alcohol and substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder, with significant effects on police employees, their loved ones, and ultimately the communities they serve.

In order for the policing profession to address these concerns in a meaningful manner, an important first step is to acknowledge the mental health challenges that face its members. Mental health stigma in policing remains rampant. Although addressing stigma is ostensibly easy and a logical first step, in reality, doing so is much more complicated. Good intentions do not always result in meaningful and appropriate actions. Expectations to address mental health stigma are not always pursued with accuracy, and the temptation for a “quick fix” can lead to “check the box” training that can often do more harm. Remember too, our police officers are human beings first. They are also spouses, life partners, children, siblings, and friends and neighbours. Understanding that police officers are more than just their jobs underscores that the challenges that they themselves face in their own mental health and well-being will also affect many others in their circles of support.

Addressing police mental health is complicated. Similar to there being no single cause to suicide or declining mental health and well-being, protecting those who protect us does not have an instant or straightforward solution. The responsibility of protecting the protectors lies beyond individuals and their families, requiring the ongoing support of organizations, leaders, policy makers, health-care providers, and communities.

Something as important as the well-being of police employees needs to have leaders doing just that—leading—with innovation, courage, compassion, and a forward-thinking approach that might ultimately challenge much of the current and established norms, rules, policies, and structures in place.

These reasons have inspired both of us to join this special issue as guest editors. This timely issue is about leadership, first and foremost. The *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* invites, represents and gives voice to true leaders in many ways, and this is reflected in the support coming directly from Deloitte to ensure this special issue could become a reality. *JCSWB* is constantly and perhaps uniquely working towards bridging the gap between academia and practitioners so that rigorous police and related multi-sectoral research and commentary have a credible place to be published, while also ensuring the focus remains human-centered. The studies featured in this issue can impact how policing is conducted to support the police, both internally and in their interfaces with the public. Because of this Journal’s established tradition of translating research to audiences who strive for excellence in policing, neither of us hesitated when we were invited to team together to be part of this special issue.

As your guest editors, we come from two diverse backgrounds. One of us is a former New York City Police Department detective who was a hostage negotiator and the department’s first-ever mental health and wellness coordinator, and is currently a research scientist at Columbia University Medical Center. The other is an occupational therapist and researcher exploring the experiences of military, veteran, public safety personnel, and their families, as well as being a spouse of a Toronto Police officer in Canada. Although our career paths have been different, we share similarities in that our work, research, and importantly, our passion are supporting people who constantly look after the safety and well-being of others. This extends to these professionals in their personal lives and in their home and family environments.

Despite our varied professional and personal experiences, for this issue we have embraced our differences to form the lens through which we identified select articles for this special edition, with the express goal of exposing readers to a variety of perspectives. Our approach to diversity is demonstrated in many ways: our authors are from multiple countries, they

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include both academic researchers and professionals, and they have an array of titles ranging from a former police commissioner, to a professor, to a mental health clinician, and a family member.

In order to forge onward, researchers, police leaders, and those who are in positions of influencing police policy and procedures must all be aware of the importance of wellness in policing and must remain knowledgeable about what has been done, what is being done, and what still needs to happen. Importantly, these reflections, explorations, and analyses must be done in a rigorous and evidence-based manner in order for there to be meaningful conclusions and applicability to policing on a global scale.

The authors generously contributing to this special issue, while each offering individual value, are also serving collectively to help others achieve these goals. Through this special issue, and by giving our selected authors this platform to share their important research and perspectives, we hope to contribute to moving modern policing further

in a direction that genuinely is addressing individual and organizational resilience, mental health, and police workers' overall well-being.

If the people working in police agencies truly are the number one asset, we hope these articles will help to motivate, guide, and influence those responsible for demonstrating this every day through well-informed actions that prioritize the well-being of all police employees. Everyone deserves to have positive mental health, and that certainly includes our everyday heroes.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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