



New York State EMS Mental Health & Wellness Symposium

June 9, 2025 • 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Holiday Inn and Suites
Saratoga Springs, New York



Department of Health
Division of State EMS

Agenda

8 a.m.–9 a.m.

Registration and Check In

9 a.m.–9:15 a.m.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Ryan Greenberg

9:15 a.m.–10:15a.m.

Resilience, Resistance, and The Pizza Party

James Boomhower

Join James to explore the nuanced differences between resilience and resistance in high-stress careers such as EMS, healthcare, and public safety. We will reflect on the toll leadership – both good and bad – can have on wellness, and uncover how leaders can foster true, sustainable self-care and resilience in their teams. Combining real-world insights with humor and evidence-informed strategies, this session will highlight what it takes to lead by example and create cultures of psychological safety.

10:15 a.m.–10:30 a.m.

Break and Visit Exhibitors

10:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m.

Helping Every Responder Overcome (HERO) Program

Katie Oldakowski

The mental health and well-being of first responders are critical to maintaining a resilient and effective workforce. These professionals face unique stressors, including repeated trauma exposure, high-stakes decision-making, and long hours, often leading to significant mental health challenges. The presentation highlights the Helping Every Responder Overcome (HERO) Peer Resilience Training Program, an innovative, proactive initiative tailored to the needs of first responders. Unlike traditional reactive models such as Critical Incident Stress Management, HERO emphasizes building resilience, strengthening peer support networks, and equipping first responders with effective tools for managing stress and trauma.

11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Lunch Break

Agenda

12:30 p.m.–1:30 p.m.

Does Anyone Actually Get 8 Hours of Sleep?

James Boomhower

In this presentation we will discuss the myths of “resilience.” Why adherence to a platform that is too strict can be harmful to your mental and physical health, and how unrealistic some modern “wellness” goals are to the everyday provider. We'll discuss small, realistic steps you can take towards improving your mental, physical, and emotional health all while maintaining an “average” work life balance. All to reinforce that real world resilience is necessary and obtainable.

1:30 p.m.–1:40 p.m.

Break and Visit Exhibitors

1:40 p.m.–2:40 p.m.

What's Huck Got to Do with It? Facility Dogs in EMS

Michael Presta and K9 Huck

This session provides an in-depth exploration of Facility Dogs and their role within an EMS organization. Participants will gain a clear understanding of the key characteristics and purpose of Facility Dogs, including how they differ from other service and support animals based on their roles and training. The session will also cover the diverse ways Facility Dogs can support EMS organizations, offering real-world examples of their contributions. Additionally, attendees will learn about the significant roles that Canine Companions and Assistance Dogs International play in regulating and supporting a Facility Dog Program.

2:45 p.m.–3:45 p.m.

CARES UP Panel

*Garra Lloyd-Lester, Keith Collins, Erin Kelly,
Robbie MacCue, Tom Corcoran, Dave Stutz*

CARES UP is an initiative launched by the New York State Office of Mental Health's Suicide Prevention Center that focuses on improving the mental health and wellness of uniformed personnel and Veterans. This is accomplished by enhancing uniformed personnel organizations wellness and health models, programs, and policy through a foundational framework called CARES UP. This panel will discuss the CARES UP grant program, and support provided by the Office of Mental Health as well as experiences and programs from several CARES UP recipients.

3:45 p.m.–4 p.m.

Closing Remarks

Ryan Greenberg

Speakers



James Boomhower

Having over 20 years of experience working as a first responder, James has worked in the EMS profession in nearly every facet throughout NY and New England. Currently, James works as a Critical Care Transport Specialist-Paramedic with Boston MedFlight. Based out of Woonsocket, RI, James has been providing peer support for colleagues, managing crises and critical incidents for the past five years. James lectures around the country on caring for mental health in first responders and health care providers as well as providing training events on mental health, resilience, and critical incident stress management. James is an accomplished public speaker and podcast guest speaking internationally on the topics of stress management, resiliency, and mental health. James has also authored several texts relating to mental health and wellness of the health care provider.



Keith Collins

Keith began his career in public safety in 1991 as a volunteer EMT with Clifton Park & Halfmoon EMS. In 1996, he joined the Rotterdam. Police Department as a police officer/paramedic, enjoying a rewarding 24-year career and retiring in 2020 as a sergeant. Keith began instructing EMTs and paramedics in 2002 and joined the paramedic faculty of Hudson Valley Community College in 2011. After retiring from law enforcement, he returned to EMS and is currently serving as the Executive Director of Clifton Park & Halfmoon EMS, the agency he joined 33 years ago.



Tom Corcoran

Tom Corcoran has worked in EMS for over 25 years as a provider, educator, and EMS administrator. He currently serves as a firefighter/paramedic and EMS Coordinator for the City of Watervliet Fire Department. Tom also works as the coordinator for Watervliet's Brave Minds Firefighter Wellness program. He is a member of the department's peer support team, and is an advocate for first responder mental health.

Speakers

Erin Kelly

Erin Kelly has served as EMS Chief for Colonie EMS since January 2025 and has been involved in emergency medical services since 2004. With over 20 years of combined field and leadership experience, she is dedicated to prioritizing mental health, wellness, and operational resilience in EMS. Her work focuses on reducing stigma, strengthening peer support, and building sustainable, provider-centered wellness initiatives in alignment with CARES UP goals.



Garra Lloyd-Lester

Mr. Lloyd-Lester is the Coordinator of the New York State Suicide Prevention Community and Coalition Initiatives for the Suicide Prevention Center of New York State. As Coordinator, he works with State and County partners, local governmental units, local coalitions, and other systems to build capacity to help reduce suicides across the lifespan. This work is accomplished through systems level planning, coalition building, program development and training among other activities. He facilitates the Lethal Means Safety work group as part of the Governors Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families. He has previously facilitated a statewide steering committee to address suicide prevention among first responder disciplines and led the statewide task force to develop recommendations on addressing suicide prevention among rural communities in NYS. Garra is also a subject matter expert in postvention, having developed tools and resources to support communities and/or organizations to develop a strategy to build a comprehensive and coordinated postvention response. Garra is an instructor for several suicide prevention programs and has developed content to support local suicide prevention coalitions and partner agencies. He has 40+ years of experience in the field of social services including working with the developmentally disabled, working in the child welfare system and within the mental health system.



Robbie MacCue

Robbie MacCue, FP-C, MBA, is the co-founder of the EMS Leadership Academy, and co-host of the EMS Leadership Summit, an annual virtual conference attended by over 7,000 people in 28 countries around the globe. Robbie served as the president of a non-profit EMS organization for 14 years in Upstate New York. Currently, he is a paramedic assistant chief with the Town of Colonie EMS Department. Robbie graduated with a master's degree from Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management in its Cleveland Clinic healthcare leadership program.

Speakers

Katie Oldakowski

Katie Oldakowski began her career in health care in 2005, working in various roles before becoming a nurse in 2013. She then specialized in mental health and crisis intervention, serving as the director of a Mobile Crisis Assessment Team in rural communities for seven years, where she provided critical support to individuals in mental health crises.

Currently, Katie serves as the Director of Training for the Mental Health Association in New York State. In this role, she collaborates with various first responder organizations to develop and deliver training programs. Notably, she helped create the Helping Every Responder Overcome Peer Resilience Training Program, aimed at supporting first responders in building resilience and addressing mental health challenges.

Katie is also a seasoned trainer in mental health and substance use, and she serves as the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team Coordinator and an active team member on various CISM teams. Her career is driven by a passion for first responder mental health, and she continues to advocate for the well-being of first responders and communities.



Michael Presta

Michael Presta currently serves as the Deputy Chief of Port Jefferson EMS. His career in EMS began in 2003 as a volunteer, where he cultivated a strong commitment to public service.

In 2007, Michael joined Port Jefferson EMS as an Emergency Medical Technician. After completing a Paramedic program at St. John's University, he was promoted to Paramedic and continued to rise through the ranks to his current role as Deputy Chief. Throughout his time in leadership, Michael has contributed to several significant projects that have become integral to the organization's growth and success including the recently developed Facility Dog program.

In addition to his work with Port Jefferson EMS, Michael has served as a critical care paramedic at Stony Brook University Medical Center and gained valuable experience working as a paramedic in New York City for several years. In 2013, he was honored with the New York State Liberty Medal, sponsored by Senator Kenneth LaValle, in recognition of actions taken to save a child while off-duty.

Michael is currently pursuing a degree in Business Management and Economics at Empire State University. He is an active member of the National EMS Management Association and serves on several regional and statewide EMS committees.

Speakers

Dave Stutz

David Stutz has worked in EMS for 29 years as a provider and educator. Serves as a Firefighter/Paramedic and is the agency's CIC. He entered the military in 2000 as a Combat Medic, participating in multiple mobilizations and a deployment to Iraq. Currently assigned as a Brigade Command Sergeant Major in the U.S. Army Reserve. Works with the Watervliet Fire Department's Brave Minds Firefighter Wellness program and is a member of the department's Peer Support Team.



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