

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# **SDPD Wellness Unit Provided Officers, Families Assistance During Pandemic**

## **PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS RESOURCES AVAILABLE 24/7 TO SDPD PERSONNEL**

**San Diego** – Highlighting the continued efforts to invest in officer wellness, the San Diego Police Department’s Wellness Unit presented an informational item Wednesday to the San Diego City Council’s Public Safety and Livable Neighborhoods Committee on the services, resources and adaptations made to programming available in 2020.

**“2020 amplified the significance of having wellness programs within police departments,” Police Chief Nisleit said. “The toll this profession can take on an officer and their family’s well-being in a normal year can be difficult, but this year was unlike anything we’ve ever experienced. We are fortunate our department has a [nationally recognized Wellness Unit](#) to reduce the impacts of stress caused by police work and address the physical, mental, financial and overall health needs of our employees.”**

During the pandemic, the more than 2,500 SDPD personnel, both sworn and civilian, fell into the essential worker category. These city employees responded to thousands of calls for service, assisted with COVID-19 education and enforcement and maintained operations for the public safety of San Diego every day.

**“It is critical that the San Diego Police Department provide outlets and opportunities to its officers to access vital resources and services to cope with the stress of the job,” said Raul Campillo, District 7 Councilmember and Vice Chair of the Public Safety and Livable Neighborhoods Committee. “SDPD deserves credit for establishing and continuing to operate the Wellness Unit, giving its officers critical support.”**

2020 was a particularly challenging year for all San Diegans with many individuals out of work, working from home, providing childcare and homeschooling or caring for loved ones. SDPD officers and their families shared in those challenges and were confronted with similar impacts, as well as, the additional stresses of long periods at work, away from their families and loved ones while they managed demonstrations and protests throughout the region.

Several of the outlets that typically help employees cope with the added stressors of their job were not available during the pandemic, such as, use of gyms, attending events or gathering with friends and family. The Wellness Unit provided numerous resources and programs to help officers and professional staff cope with the stressors of 2020 and were among many city departments forced to transition to virtual services when possible.

Top resources and additional programs used in 2020 included:

- **General wellness programs** – Various programs and partnerships that can help provide immediate assistance for financial advice, alcohol use disorders, peer support or family resources.
- **FOCUS-led Zoom Therapy** – FOCUS, the psychological services provider, held free, virtual appointments and therapy sessions for officers, civilian staff and their families.
- **Created a Wellness Unit 24-hour hotline** – The Wellness Unit started a 24-hour hotline to connect an employee to a trained Wellness Unit member round the clock for assistance.
- **Hotline and suicide awareness promotion** – Distributed information individually to employees' lockers and posted throughout police facilities to promote the 24-hour wellness hotline and suicide prevention resources.
- **Increased the use and awareness of Police Chaplaincy** – Utilized the police chaplains to provide mentorship and counseling.

SDPD is currently working to acquire the use of a first responder wellness mobile app known as Cordico, which would be a one-stop-shop giving officers and their families direct access to all wellness information, articles, programs and contact to peer support officers, chaplains, Wellness Unit members, FOCUS services and more via their smartphones. The department is currently working to identify the funding for the application and hopes to release more information soon.

SDPD created a Wellness Unit in 2011 following years in which the department lost five officers in short succession, was suffering budget cuts and lost 1,400 personnel in a 10-year period. The agency recognized that many of the employees who were engaged in misconduct or had committed suicide were in some form of crisis and there were few direct proactive resources available to assist them.

The Wellness Unit's responsibilities include identifying resources for employees, assisting employees in crisis, and provide training, educational seminars, and workshops. The unit also manages all department "help services," including the Peer Support Program, Police Chaplain Program, Alcohol/Substance Abuse Program, and psychological services. These programs and services are available to all sworn and civilian employees, as well as their family members.

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