IAFF CENTER OF EXCELLENCE
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ADVANCED RECOVERY SYSTEMS

WHAT IS THE IAFF CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TREATMENT AND RECOVERY?

The IAFF Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery is a one-of-a-kind treatment facility for IAFF members who struggle with trauma, substance use, depression, anxiety, addiction, and other behavioral health challenges. It is a safe haven for IAFF members to receive the help they need in taking the first steps toward recovery and sharing experiences with others who have faced or overcome similar challenges. Located on a 15-acre campus in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, just outside of Washington, DC, the Center of Excellence provides specialized treatment and quality care exclusively for IAFF members and retirees.

WHAT MAKES THE IAFF CENTER OF EXCELLENCE UNIQUE?

The IAFF Center of Excellence is a nationally recognized leader in behavioral health care for first responders. It is the only treatment center in the world dedicated exclusively to fire service members.

Designed by leaders of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) for its members, the center combines evidence-based medical and clinical expertise with a deep understanding of fire service culture. Treatment addresses the occupational, medical, psychological, and social realities of the fire service - ensuring care that is both highly specialized and clinically rigorous. Treatment plans are designed to restore individuals to their families, career, and community with longevity and an enhanced quality of life.

WILL ANYONE ELSE KNOW ABOUT YOUR TREATMENT?

Treatment at the Center of Excellence is completely confidential and governed by strict federal privacy laws (i.e., HIPAA). It is the member's choice to disclose to their department or union that they are receiving treatment and where. Center of Excellence staff cannot acknowledge a member's presence in treatment without the member's expressed written consent in the form of a signed release of information (ROI).

This means that even if a spouse, union leader, or department personnel assisted in the initial referral of the member to the facility, once the member is admitted, Center of Excellence staff cannot discuss their care unless the member has signed an ROI for the specific individual.

This also applies to cases in which a fire department clinician requests a discharge summary as a condition of returning to employment. Such information cannot be released without the expressed written consent of the member. Members can sign and/or revoke an ROI at any time during the treatment process. Strict confidentiality rules state that the IAFF does not have access to any patient records.



WHAT TYPE OF TREAMENT IS AVAILABLE?

The Center of Excellence is dually licensed for both primary mental health and primary substance use treatment to address these issues as they may present separately or co-occurring.

The program offers multiple levels of evidence-based care to meet members' needs as they progress in their treatment, including detox (if applicable), residential, partial hospitalization (PHP), and intensive outpatient (IOP). Therapeutic modalities offered on-site include Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Accelerated Resolution Therapy (ART), Sex Recovery Therapy (SRT), and several other evidence-based approaches utilized to address the unique needs of each client.

Once all treatment goals have been met, members will be ready to discharge to an outpatient level of care in their community. Continued medical and clinical oversight will be coordinated in a member's aftercare plan and provided by outpatient providers in a patient's local area or through telehealth, if applicable. These outpatient clinicians are vetted by the IAFF Center of Excellence team for their expertise in fire fighter behavioral health and appointments are set prior to discharge. Members and case managers work collaboratively to develop one's aftercare plan, and may include individual therapy, family therapy, medication management, primary care, support groups, and additional resources offered through their union/department.

While a strong therapeutic program is the foundation of treatment, the Center of Excellence is designed to provide opportunities for connection and purposeful activities outside of the therapy room. Additional offerings may include: 12-step meetings, fitness training in a fully equipped gym, recreation, pastoral care, equine therapy (offsite), and biweekly meetings with IAFF union leadership. Members can use the swimming pool, walking trails, volleyball, and basketball courts, weather permitting. Members often report some of their greatest healing occurs through informal evening conversations with fellow fire fighters in their station houses and around the fire pit. There is also designated free time for reading, reflection, and journaling – all essential parts of the recovery process.

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WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE TREATMENT?

The Center of Excellence offers treatment for IAFF members throughout North America, including active duty and retired members, who struggle with symptoms of behavioral health disorders, including but not limited to: post-traumatic stress, depression, substance use disorders, anxiety, grief, and process addictions. Members are not required to have a formal diagnosis prior to entering into treatment.

HOW ARE MEMBERS REFERRED TO THE IAFF CENTER OF EXCELLENCE?

The Center of Excellence offers a 24/7 call center for members to begin the admissions process at any time. Members, peer supporters, union leadership, family members, and clinicians can call (855) 900-8437 to be connected to a dedicated member of our team. The admissions team will conduct a thorough clinical pre-assessment with the member for the center's medical and clinical team to review to approve program suitability. The admissions team will work with the member to schedule a day and time for admission and help facilitate transportation to the facility. The member will receive a packing list, guidelines on what to expect, and a financial outline detailing their insurance plan coverage.

WHAT IS THE LENGTH OF STAY?

While many members stay at the Center of Excellence for approximately six weeks, length of stay is individualized. Clinical and medical recommendations are based on a member's specific needs, progress in treatment, and other individual factors. Discharge planning is guided by clinical progress and symptom stabilization - not by a fixed timeline. Because recovery does not follow a set schedule, members are encouraged to remain flexible and avoid making plans that depend on a specific discharge date.

HOW IS TREATMENT PAID FOR?

The Center of Excellence is a medical treatment facility that utilizes a member's health insurance or a pre-approved workers' compensation claim to cover treatment costs. The Center of Excellence is in-network with most major insurance companies, and offers direct agreements with various municipalities, employers, and health trusts nationwide to keep costs as low as possible and to prevent barriers to accessing care. A member's out of pocket expenses will depend on insurance coverage, co-pay amount, and deductible. Prior to admission, our intake team will go over a member's financial outline, and while on campus, members can work with financial case managers to develop an interest-free payment plan to assist with cost, if needed.

Additionally, the Center of Excellence team can collaborate with outside funding sources if needed, such as union benevolent funds (if applicable) and/or nonprofit resources to assist with costs not covered by insurance - with the member's permission and signed Release of Information (ROI).

WHAT CAN IAFF AFFILIATES DO TO EDUCATE THEIR MEMBERS ON THE IAFF CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AND OTHER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCES?

The IAFF Center of Excellence Outreach Team is available to collaborate with affiliate leaders to ensure understanding of the IAFF Center of Excellence program and additional behavioral health resources available through the IAFF. The team can help to guide the admissions process for a member in need, provide informational presentations in person or virtually, answer questions about programming, and offer direct connection to alternative resources when needs arise.

Affiliate leaders can aid in lessening the stigma of mental health in the fire service by having proactive discussions about behavioral health, ensuring resources are visible and known to membership, and advocating to department leadership. Regularly checking in with members proactively, and not only after potentially traumatic events, can create lasting change in the culture of the fire house and help members to feel more comfortable reaching out when needed.

To engage the Center of Excellence Outreach team, please email **outreach@IAFFRecoveryCenter.com.**

WHAT IS THE IAFF'S ROLE IN RUNNING THE IAFF CENTER OF EXCELLENCE?

The IAFF does not own or have any financial interest in the Center of Excellence. The General President and his appointed Advisory Committee provide guidance to center leadership and make certain that the program, treatment, and services are meeting the unique needs of IAFF membership. Members also have the opportunity to engage in biweekly meetings with IAFF union leadership during their treatment stay.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE MEMBER RETURNS HOME AFTER TREATMENT?

What happens after treatment is just as important as a member's time at the IAFF Center of Excellence. The purpose of aftercare is to solidify what was learned and accomplished during one's treatment stay and to help members fully transition into a healthier life.

The Center of Excellence works with members collaboratively to develop an individualized plan for continued support once treatment goals have been met.

Members are encouraged to participate in outpatient therapy, ongoing medical care, and support groups, as well as stay engaged with fellow COE alumni. Family and spouses may also be integrated into aftercare through couples and family therapy, if desired.

Aftercare plans are designed to connect members to ongoing support and include outpatient appointments with therapy, primary care, psychiatry (if applicable), relapse prevention strategies, peer support, and return-to-work planning.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MEMBERS SEEK TREATMENT BECAUSE ITS MANDATED BY THE JOB?

Treatment at the IAFF Center of Excellence is completely confidential and governed by strict federal privacy laws (i.e., HIPAA). This means that even if department personnel assisted in the initial referral of the member to the facility, once the member is admitted, the Center of Excellence cannot discuss his/her care unless the member has signed a Release of Information (ROI) for the specific individual.

Once an ROI is signed, Center of Excellence staff can assist in coordination with departmental requirements during the member's stay, including but not limited to: signing Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) paperwork, short-term disability documentation, and providing insight into a member's successful completion of treatment and aftercare planning process.

WHAT CAN LOCALS DO TO ASSIST MEMBERS ONCE THEY RETURN HOME?

Aftercare support is critically important for the long-term recovery of members. Affiliates can educate the department about the need for a flexible work schedule during the transition period back to the job. Some understanding and short-term flexibility during this transition period can make a significant difference. Locals may also demonstrate their support and concern by respecting the member's privacy and avoiding talking to others about the member, even if their interest is well-intentioned.

Recovery is a continuing journey that may involve setbacks. If relapse occurs, friends and family may feel betrayed or angry. If this occurs, it's most helpful to think of a setback as similar to a recurrence of any other disease. Just as we have empathy for people when their cancer returns, members who are recovering from behavioral health issues need compassion and concern. Members prepare for this possibility in advance by developing a relapse plan that identifies steps for getting back on track.

Understanding a member's aftercare plan is also important, as continued treatment and follow-up care help maintain progress. Patience, open communication, and encouragement of healthy routines can help to support long-term recovery.

The Center of Excellence Outreach Team offers educational videos, trainings, and practical tools that help to explain behavioral health challenges and recovery. These community education resources can be essential in educating peers and affiliates on how to support members returning home from treatment and to enhance understanding and support. More information available at **iaffrecoverycenter.com/community-education.**

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iaffrecoverycenter.com

24/7 IAFF Dedicated Line: (855) 900-8437