

# Newsletter

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Volume 6, Edition 1



## First responders discuss how they handle stressors of the job

First responders talk about why mental health and wellness in the first responder community is so important. Hear how they deal with post-traumatic stress and some of their coping skills – including exercise, peer-to-peer and family support and leadership support.

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## Lessons learned from the FirstNet Health and Wellness Coalition

For public safety, few things are more important than the lives of first responders and the people they serve day in, and day out. That's why FirstNet established a Health and Wellness program in 2020 to address the wellness problems facing public safety.

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## Joining FirstNet a “no-brainer” for electric co-op

Oklahoma Electric Cooperative employees serve their community and support public safety in the course of their jobs. See how FirstNet is helping them stay connected in their disaster response. [WATCH VIDEO](#).

## “So many of our safety issues rely on...communication”

**By David Goodspeed**

VP for Information Technology  
Oklahoma Electric Cooperative



For Oklahoma Electric Cooperative, staying connected is critical. No matter which part of the company you're in. You have to be connected. You have to understand what's happening because so many of our safety issues rely on that communication – whether you're working with highway patrol, county sheriffs or local police departments.

If the highway patrol has a question, they need to get to us immediately. So we

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# RESPONDER HEALTH AND WELLNESS

## Lessons learned from the FirstNet® Health and Wellness Coalition

**By Anna Fitch Courie**

Director, Responder Wellness  
FirstNet Program at AT&T

There is a mental health crisis facing our nation's first responder community. The rates of PTSD, depression and anxiety among public safety personnel far exceed the rates of the general population. By its very nature, emergency response is stressful. This is the norm. And there are very real mental health impacts to those who serve our communities.

For public safety, few things are more important than the lives of first responders and the people they serve day in, and day out. These are the men and women who run toward emergencies. And we understand the service first responders provide our communities comes with personal sacrifice. That's why FirstNet established a Health and Wellness program in May 2020 to address the wellness problems facing public safety.

A key component of this commitment is establishing the [FirstNet Health & Wellness Coalition](#). The Coalition is integrating responder, community, industry and academic capabilities to support the holistic health, wellness and readiness of America's first responders. The Coalition serves as the backbone to everything we do to support the health and well-being of first responders. And along the way, we've learned a thing or two together.

### Working together

Chief Norvin Collins, board member with the International Association of Fire Chiefs, eloquently stated, "to make change, public safety needs to come together at the kitchen table. Great things happen at the kitchen table, and together, we can be a powerful force for wellness among first responders."

And that's what the FirstNet Health and Wellness Coalition does. We come together to assess the data on first responder health and wellness; identify priorities through a comprehensive needs assessment and focus those priorities into strategic lines of effort and share best practices and lessons learned.

Along the way, I've learned that leadership at all levels of public safety organizations share *my* passion for health and wellness. It's not just me. Chiefs and leaders across law enforcement, fire, EMS, dispatch, corrections, emergency management, and healthcare are passionate about taking action and creating systems for change.



*The Coalition is integrating responder, community, industry and academic capabilities to support the holistic health, wellness and readiness of America's first responders.*

Together, we've identified that leadership matters. Responders have stated they want to see leadership engaged in wellness efforts, not just talk about it.<sup>1</sup>

We've heard from family members and we know they want to be involved in the discussion too. Often, family members are the first to see signs of deterioration in their responder. And they aren't sure where to turn or whether the department will support them.

Robyn Mikel lost her husband to suicide. She challenged the coalition to take action by asking, "What are you afraid of?"

We've learned that stigma is a real thing. And we've started having those hard conversations about suicide, depression, post-traumatic stress, access to health care, and others, because we learned that to make change, we have to be the first ones to talk about the problems facing public safety.

### Celebrating the wins

And we've learned to celebrate the wins. Responders want to be involved in their health and wellness. They want to have these conversations too. They care about their physical health as much as their mental health. And they like to see opportunities for wellness in their local departments, as well as in their surrounding communities and digital worlds. I believe the culture is changing. We

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# RESPONDER HEALTH AND WELLNESS

## Lessons learned from the FirstNet® Health and Wellness Coalition

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have a lot of work to do. But we're headed in the right direction. In health promotion, the first step towards change is acknowledging the problems that are there.

Finally, we've learned there are some AWESOME organizations out there doing real work in supporting responders. And FirstNet has committed to supporting their efforts. Here's a quick snapshot of some of those actions we're taking to effect change:

- In June 2021, we launched the [FirstNet ROG the Dog](#) program through a partnership with Global Medical Response. The animal-assisted therapy program consists of a group of trained Labradoodles that specialize in helping first responders on the front lines. The program is affectionately named after the FirstNet Response Operations Group (ROG) – a team led by former first responders that guides deployment of the FirstNet fleet of dedicated network assets.
- In September 2021, we collaborated with [The Quell Foundation](#), which provides resources to help first responders struggling with mental health, to help produce their documentary on mental health in public safety: "[Lift the Mask: First Responders Sound the Alarm](#)."
- We collaborated with [Boulder Crest Institute](#) and its first responder initiative in Miami, Florida, and Tucson, Arizona, to develop and deliver transformative post-traumatic growth-based training programs to enhance the well-being of first responders.
- FirstNet supports [O2X Human Performance](#) to bring health, wellness and resilience training workshops to first responders in 5 cities across Florida, Colorado, Minnesota, Arizona and Ohio.
- We're supporting [Blue H.E.L.P. and First H.E.L.P.](#), an organization committed to addressing suicide prevention in public safety and supporting the families of first responders who lost their lives to suicide.
- The [National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians](#) has been a key member of the FirstNet Health and Wellness Coalition as an advocate for mental health and wellness in emergency response professionals. We've supported the development of the association's Emotional Resiliency Officer training program and collaborated with them to produce a video on Mental Resiliency in EMS: [Responding With Resilience: Mental Wellness in EMS](#)



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- In the fall of 2020, we launched a [collaboration with All Clear Foundation](#) to help increase access to education, resources and support for first responders struggling with health and wellness issues. With the ResponderRel8 application and the foundation's "[Responder Strong](#)" training, we're providing resources to public safety in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Iowa, Illinois, and Washington.

### Being there

We've learned through our efforts together that "Being There" matters. And we've learned that the public safety community has grown together through a sense of caring about the lives of first responders.

When I think back on where we were when we established the FirstNet Health and Wellness Coalition and where we are now, I have a deep sense of gratitude for the leadership at the table. Their dedication, transparency, and commitment to responder wellness is helping us achieve our goal to make a difference in the lives of public safety professionals. I cannot wait to see what the next year brings.

*Dr. Anna Fitch Courie, Director of Responder Wellness, FirstNet Program at AT&T, is a nurse, Army wife, former university faculty, and author. Dr. Courie has worked for over 20 years in the health care profession including bone marrow transplant, intensive care, public health, and health promotion practice. Dr. Courie holds a Bachelor's in Nursing from Clemson University; a Master's in Nursing Education from the University of Wyoming; and a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree from Ohio State University. Dr. Courie's area of expertise is integration of public health strategy across disparate organizations to achieve health improvement goals.*

<sup>1</sup>Courie, A. (2021). FirstNet First Responder Needs Assessment Report. Dallas, TX.

## For Electric Co-Op, communication is key

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can get out of their way – or they can get out of our way – in the event of an emergency.

That's why we're on FirstNet.

OEC is centrally based in Oklahoma. We serve seven counties – just over 47,000 members, and 60,000 meters. When we talk about members, we're talking about actual people. One member could have five meters.

Our membership is extremely diverse. Being in a college town, you get a little bit of everything. You get college students who move in and out pretty fast. You get members who have been with Oklahoma Electric Cooperative for 50 years. And you get people who are moving in from out of state.

### Communication demands

The day-in and day-out communication needs for a utility like Oklahoma Electric Cooperative are very demanding – from our linemen in the field using the hardware devices to our meter techs out in the field.

As time has evolved, we've come to think like first responders. So, when things happen – storms, downed poles, hit poles, downed lines – we are one of the first calls made. They're calling us and asking, "Before we send our highway patrolman in there, are we safe?"

And the relationship we have with FirstNet is great. It helps us support highway patrol, county sheriffs, and local police departments. They have a direct communication with us as they are doing what they need to do to keep the public safe.

Sometimes you may not need to dispatch the fire department, but you need to dispatch your local utility. We work closely with all of them. Being able to be in the same conversations has really elevated our service to our members. And it's all about elevated service for public safety.

### Prioritized communication

Our linemen are out there working in the worst elements possible. They're doing what they need to do to ensure people are safe and that the connectivity is back – electricity to the home or the business.

So we've got to have that prioritized connectivity. And FirstNet allows us to communicate easily and seamlessly.



*"Before joining the FirstNet program, a lot of our linemen in the field were not able to call into our control center and talk to them about a substation, or ... about downed lines. What the FirstNet program has allowed us to do is take that next level up in priority."*

Before joining the FirstNet program, a lot of our linemen in the field were not able to call into our control center and talk to them about a substation, or talk to them about downed lines. What the FirstNet program has allowed us to do is take that next level up in priority. Your call goes through without a busy signal or a lost connection.

Having that at our disposal is keeping our team members safe in the field. It's also helped public safety, ensuring that if they need to reach out to us, they can get to us.

### Joining FirstNet

Oklahoma is known for just about any kind of natural disaster – tornadoes, ice storms, etc. And FirstNet has really allowed us to be able to communicate directly, quickly, effectively and efficiently with public safety. So, if we needed to keep an area blocked off while our linemen went in and did what they needed to do, which is a very dangerous situation, we could do that.

It's not just about keeping our linemen safe, it's also about keeping the public safe. It's keeping communications open to where there's no question of what's happening, so we can all go home at night.

When FirstNet was brought to my attention, there was no question. It probably took all of about 30 seconds for me to say, "Let's do it." It makes sense. It's the right thing to

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## OKLAHOMA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**“When FirstNet® was brought to my attention... It took about 30 seconds for me to say, ‘Let’s do it.’ ”**

David Goodspeed, VP of Technology, OEC

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do. To put it in easier terms, it was just a no-brainer.

There is no doubt in my mind that if you are in any kind of public serving utility – or you’re in the business of life safety –this is an easy decision.

### **Peace of mind**

FirstNet has allowed us to have that reliable connection, which is more important than most anything. Before anybody goes into a dangerous situation, they have to know what they’re walking into.

If you were to talk to a lineman who’s been here 10, 15, or 20 years, they were dealing with these connectivity issues. Now, before they get there, they’re already talking on the phone. They have the ease and ability to just make the call and not worry about the connection. If they’re out in the middle of the field with their gear on and they can’t get a bucket truck down, they’ve got their tablet and they’ve got their cell phone. They may be in the middle of an absolute nightmare and they have to be able to know what they’re walking into. The FirstNet program has allowed us to remove that barrier.

A lot of people may not see it on the surface. But they



*“FirstNet has allowed us to have that reliable connection, which is more important than most anything. Before anybody goes into a dangerous situation, they have to know what they’re walking into.”*

might see their lights come on faster. The roads open up quicker. And public safety can do their jobs easier. The one thing I don’t worry about anymore is the ability to communicate with my team members and with public safety.

*David Goodspeed is Vice President of Information Technology for Oklahoma Electric Cooperative and President of OEC Fiber, a subsidiary of Oklahoma Electric Cooperative. He is a pioneer in leading the efforts to bring fiber to the home and business, internet service and more to OEC members and non-members.*

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