



MnFIRE

2024 Annual Report



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Rebecca Otto

Executive Director

DeeDee Jankovich

Director of Program Delivery



From the Executive Director



MnFIRE's work supporting Minnesota firefighter physical and emotional health is still going strong. We know that our efforts are making a difference for firefighters across the state. Many have said, "You will never know how much you all have helped me." Those messages inspire our work every day.

In terms of change, MnFIRE is entering 2025 after a year of growth. In late May 2024, I was asked to join MnFIRE as the Director of Business Affairs. I bring nonprofit, small business and government experience to the table, including 12 years as the State Auditor providing financial and legal compliance oversight for all local governments in Minnesota. During my time as State Auditor, I convened the Volunteer Fire Relief Association Working Group. There, we overhauled Minnesota statutes to make them work for all reliefs regardless of location in the state. The relief associations pay service pensions to our volunteer firefighters, and my office oversaw them. It was a thrill each year to work to improve outdated statutes collaboratively with fire service leaders across the state. Our bills always were passed by the legislature and signed by the sitting governor.

On August 1, Wayne Kewitsch retired and I took the helm as MnFIRE's Executive Director. Since joining MnFIRE, we have been able to undertake projects that are building our organizational capacity; we went from contract employees to in-house employees, we updated our policies and procedures, adopted employee position descriptions, an employee evaluation and payroll policy, and changed our procurement process to align with state grant requirements. All great developments – and we are not done!

MnFIRE administers the Hometown Heroes Assistance Program (HHAP), which is funded with an annual \$4 million appropriation from the state through the Department of Public Safety (DPS). We are thankful for our new DPS grants manager, who has made the grants process smooth and understandable. MnFIRE can stay focused on providing services through the HHAP that support firefighter physical and emotional health, including proactive health and wellness trainings to fire departments, a Critical Illness insurance policy, and the MnFIRE Assistance Program, which includes mental health visits and a peer support program.

It has become very clear that the HHAP is a critical resource for our fire service community. Over 90% of our fire service in Minnesota is volunteer, so the HHAP fills in the holes that existed before the law was passed. We are honored to provide this programming for our firefighters, who tend to have occupational health challenges due to the nature of their work.

We look forward to a new year filled with promise and opportunities to better support our fire service in Minnesota.

Thank you for your support of MnFIRE's work!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rebecca Otto". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Rebecca Otto
MnFIRE Executive Director

No-cost Benefits for Minnesota's Fire Service

Minnesota firefighters work tirelessly to keep our communities safe, but they're significantly affected by serious health conditions including cardiac disease, emotional trauma and cancer at rates higher than the general public. And because more than 90% of Minnesota's fire service is volunteer or non-career, many firefighters don't have access to health and wellness benefits through their department. But there is hope thanks to the Hometown Heroes Assistance Program.

This program ensures every Minnesota firefighter has access to the resources needed to better their health and wellness, and support for a cardiac, emotional trauma or cancer diagnosis. This program is administered by MnFIRE and funded through the \$4 million Hometown Heroes Assistance Program grant from the State of Minnesota.



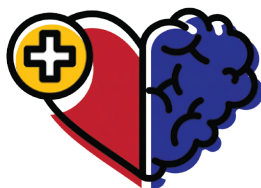
Scan the QR code
for the HHAP
Benefits Guide

Active volunteer, paid-on-call, part-time and full-time firefighters across Minnesota are utilizing the following no-cost benefits:



Critical Illness Program

A Critical Illness insurance policy which covers diagnoses of critical illnesses such as a heart attack, cancer or post-traumatic stress injury (PTSI), and provides a lump-sum cash payment up to \$20,000 per diagnosis to assist with expenses.



MnFIRE Assistance Program

Confidential help and mental health resources available 24/7. This program provides up to five free counseling visits per issue per year for firefighters and their families with mental health professionals who have been trained to address the unique experiences of the fire service, as well as peer support from trained and trusted peers.



MnFIRE Training

Annual health and wellness training provided at no cost to fire departments on cancer, cardiac health, emotional wellness, sleep, fitness, nutrition and more topics so firefighters can learn about increased occupational health risks and helpful strategies for staying healthy and safe.



Critical Illness Program

196

CLAIMS PAID
IN 2024

\$1,911,000

TOTAL PAID IN 2024

MOST FREQUENTLY COVERED CONDITIONS IN 2024:

- 1 Post-Traumatic Stress Injury
- 2 Full Benefit Cancer
- 3 Heart Attack

“When I was diagnosed with stage 3 prostate cancer nearly two years ago, I could not have imagined all the doctor’s appointments and tests I was going to have to go through. The help I received from MnFIRE’s Critical Illness Program was such a benefit and relief to have available. It made life a lot less stressful, knowing that I didn’t have to worry about some of the major expenses that arise when you can’t work, can’t take care of yourself ... And it was a very simple process to apply for the benefit.”

— MINNESOTA FIREFIGHTER



“There was a real **peace of mind** knowing that financially I didn’t have a concern. I could focus on my health. I could focus on my family.”

— CHIEF KIP SPRINGER
ROSEMOUNT FIRE DEPARTMENT



Scan the QR code to read more about Chief Springer’s unexpected diagnosis and what he wishes every firefighter knew.



MnFIRE Assistance Program

1,193
MENTAL HEALTH CARE
PROVIDERS IN 2024

↑ **17%**
FROM 2023

1,205
COUNSELING
VISITS IN 2024

↑ **5%**
FROM 2023

TOP PRESENTING ISSUES IN 2024:

- 1 Anxiety & Worry
- 2 Post-Traumatic Stress Injury
- 3 Workplace

Peer Support

Firefighters of all ranks and backgrounds and their family members regularly rely on MnFIRE's trained Peer Support network.

129
CALLS IN 2024

“I started immediately unpacking some of the trauma. It was explained to me that **it’s just like a physical injury** – how your brain takes days to even process what we see before we can even make sense of it. It really opened my eyes.”

— JEFF ROSENER
MINNEAPOLIS FIRE DEPARTMENT



Scan the QR code to read more about Jeff Rosener's life-changing experience with Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy.



MnFIRE Honored by NAMI Minnesota for “Transforming Attitudes”



MnFIRE was presented with the Transforming Attitudes Award by National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Minnesota at their 2024 annual conference. This award recognizes an individual or organization that has promoted justice, dignity and respect, and has worked to transform attitudes toward people with mental illnesses. MnFIRE is proud of the work we’ve done to fill a critical need in the Minnesota fire service for emotional wellness training, peer support and access to mental health providers – and to positively change attitudes of firefighters around seeking mental health help.

“Firefighters are there for traumatic events but have often suffered in silence, leading to higher rates of depression, substance use, PTSD and suicide. The Minnesota Firefighter Initiative works to change attitudes towards treatment among firefighters and provides resources, especially to the many volunteer firefighters across our state. And they are succeeding!”

— SUE ABDERHOLDEN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NAMI MINNESOTA



“While all struggles may not be the same, many of our fears, anxieties and stressors are. I think people often feel they are the only ones experiencing something, so they keep it to themselves out of fear of being judged. When in reality, **we all have more in common** than not.”

— ANDREA KERFELD
MnFIRE PEER SUPPORTER



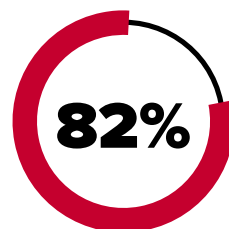
Scan the QR code to meet Andrea Kerfeld, a Sauk Centre firefighter and EMT and one of our trained MnFIRE peer supporters.

“I have attended multiple trainings and it has always been a **great learning experience**. It has made me realize it is OK to get help, and the importance of getting help when needed.”

— MnFIRE-TRAINED FIREFIGHTER



MnFIRE Training



OF MINNESOTA FIRE
DEPARTMENTS TRAINED
SINCE INCEPTION

208
TRAININGS
IN 2024

MnFIRE TRAININGS OFFERED:

- MnFIRE Awareness
- Emotional Wellness
- Cardiac
- Cancer
- Sleep
- Fitness & Nutrition

These two-hour trainings can be scheduled whenever it's convenient onsite at each individual fire department. Trainings are tailored to both department leadership and firefighters.





Future Growth and Development

Looking ahead, MnFIRE is:

- Embarking on a statewide grassroots communications campaign to reach more departments with training.
- Continuing to explore evidence-based approaches to improve health outcomes and longevity of firefighters in Minnesota outside of the Hometown Heroes Assistance Program.
- Deploying critical response teams upon request from fire chiefs.
- Strengthening the organizational capacity of MnFIRE by embarking on a 2-year \$500,000 campaign to support the organization's financial health.



“The work that MnFIRE does and the services that they provide to Minnesota firefighters is so important. We are so fortunate to have **advocates** like MnFIRE on our side.”

— MINNESOTA FIREFIGHTER

MnFIRE 

888-784-6634

MNFIREINITIATIVE.COM



The Minnesota Firefighter Initiative is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit recognized by the IRS. Tax/EIN number: 38-4049248.