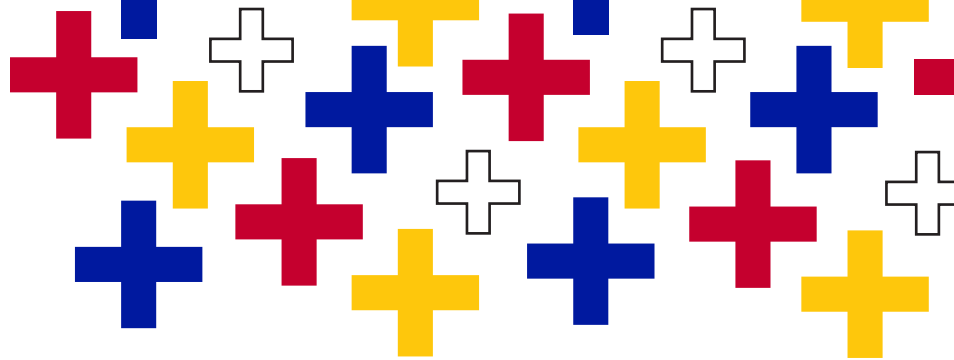




January 23-24, 2026
Grand Casino Mille Lacs



Schedule

THURSDAY, JAN. 22

2–7 PM **PEER SUPPORTER TRAINING**
MnFIRE Specialized Training

7–9 PM Welcome Reception

FRIDAY, JAN. 23

7:30–8 AM Registration

8–9 AM Breakfast & Welcome

9 AM–5 PM **PEER SUPPORTER TRAINING**
Breaks included CISM Training Part 1

9–10 AM **GENERAL SESSION**
Built to Serve, Allowed to Heal

10–11:30 AM **GENERAL SESSION**
CALM Conversations

11:30 AM–12:30 PM Lunch & National
Firefighter Registry for
Cancer Presentation

12:30–2:30 PM **GENERAL SESSION**
Prevention of Firefighter
Health Hazards – Heart
Health, Cancer & Sleep

2:30–2:45 PM Break

2:45–4:45 PM **GENERAL SESSION**
Healthy-ish Eating
for Firefighters
The Hydration Solution

4:45–5:15 PM **GENERAL SESSION**
Answering the Call for Each
Other: Peer Support in the
Fire Service

5:15–6:15 PM Dinner

SATURDAY, JAN. 24

8–9 AM Breakfast

9 AM–4 PM **PEER SUPPORTER TRAINING**
Breaks included CISM Training Part 2

9–11:30 AM **SPOUSE/PARTNER SESSION**
10 Things We'd Like our
Firefighters to Know
What's 'Normal' After
a Traumatic Call vs.
What May Be a Sign of
a Concern & How to
Support My Firefighter

9–11:30 AM **FIREFIGHTER SESSION**
Building a Healthy
and Fit Culture Within
Your Department

11:30 AM–12:30 PM Lunch

12:30–3 PM **GENERAL SESSION**
Building Resilience with
EMS and a Dose of Reality

3–3:15 PM Closing Remarks



REGISTER TODAY

mnfireinitiative.com/firefighter-health-forum

Session Descriptions

GENERAL SESSION | FRIDAY, JAN. 23, 9–10 AM

Built to Serve, Allowed to Heal

Margaret Gavian, PhD, LP

You can love the job and still feel fried. You can be the one everyone counts on and be quietly falling apart behind the scenes. It's not weakness; it's a nervous system in "go-mode" for way too long. In this general session on whole-person care for the fire service, Dr. Margaret Gavian draws on nearly a decade of work with Minnesota firefighters to reframe what real resilience looks like. Through story, science and field-tested tools, she connects the dots between chronic overload, long-term health outcomes and the nonstop culture of service.

GENERAL SESSION | FRIDAY, JAN. 23, 10–11 AM

CALM Conversations

Danielle Thornton, MPH

The CALM Conversations workshop, presented by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Minnesota, is designed to provide friends, family and others with information on how to recognize and respond to suicide risk with an additional focus on increasing lethal means safety – especially concerning firearms. Participants of this general session will learn how to talk with someone who might be having these thoughts in a collaborative, non-judgmental and supportive manner.

LUNCH PRESENTATION | FRIDAY, JAN. 23, 11:30–12:30 PM

National Firefighter Registry for Cancer

Pamela S. Graydon, MS, COHC

We know that firefighters have an increased risk of certain types of cancer compared to the general population. But we don't have nearly enough data on it. Managed by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the National Firefighter Registry for Cancer is working to better understand and reduce firefighters' risk of cancer. Learn how participating in the voluntary registry, which is open to all firefighters in the U.S., can support research efforts and the health of the fire service for years to come.

GENERAL SESSION | FRIDAY, JAN. 23, 12:30–2:30 PM

Prevention of Firefighter Health Hazards – Heart Health, Cancer & Sleep

Zeke J. McKinney, MD, MHI, MPH, FACOEM, DipABLM

This general session explores leading strategies to prevent the most significant health hazards facing firefighters today, including heart disease, cancer and sleep deprivation. MnFIRE Medical Director Dr. Zeke J. McKinney shares medical screening methods and lifestyle changes that can reduce health risks and foster a healthier fire service.

GENERAL SESSION | FRIDAY, JAN. 23, 2:45–4:45 PM

Healthy-ish Eating for Firefighters

Megan Lautz, MS, RD, CSCS, TSAC-F

Let's be real, there's no such thing as a "perfect firefighter diet." But there is a smarter way to fuel the job without living off of grilled chicken and broccoli. This training breaks down the biggest nutrition gaps seen after 8+ years of firehouse visits, hundreds of kitchen table chats and thousands of coaching sessions with first responders. Dietician Megan Lautz tackles how to eat better during 24+ shifts, what to grab when gas station cuisine is the only option, and how to avoid the energy crash that hits halfway through shift. You'll walk away with simple, real-life strategies that don't require meal-prepping your entire weekend away.

The Hydration Solution

Megan Lautz, MS, RD, CSCS, TSAC-F

Are hydration-related injuries the bane of your department or academy? Being a well-hydrated firefighter is no easy feat, especially with training, workouts and a lack of bathroom access. Dietician Megan Lautz will share how to optimize hydration on the fireground and on shift. Discover evidence-based, realistic tactics for hydrating recruits or incumbents while gaining valuable insights on the right electrolyte products to purchase for rehabilitation. Participants will learn how maximizing hydration can prevent sudden cardiac events and improve mental performance later in the shift.

GENERAL SESSION | FRIDAY, JAN. 23, 4:45–5:15 PM

Answering the Call for Each Other: Peer Support in the Fire Service

Jen Elleraas

In this session, discover how peer support strengthens mental health and resilience among firefighters. Hear firsthand from a MnFIRE peer supporter about the nature and workings of MnFIRE Peer Support, and why it is a vital resource for those who serve. Learn how firefighters can access this confidential, statewide network, receive support from trained peers outside of their own departments and build meaningful connections that promote wellness across the fire service. Gain valuable insight into what it means to serve as a peer supporter and the positive impact it can have on firefighter well-being.

SPOUSE/PARTNER SESSION | SATURDAY, JAN. 24, 9–11:30 AM

10 Things We'd Like our Firefighters to Know

Michelle D. Sherman, PhD, LP, ABPP

This session exclusively for firefighter spouses and partners is guided by the group's honest perspectives and personal experiences. We will collaborate and co-create a "Top 10 List" of what you'd like your firefighter to know about your experience as their spouse or partner. Come ready to share (if you want!) and learn as you give and receive support.

What's 'Normal' After a Traumatic Call vs. What May Be a Sign of a Concern & How to Support My Firefighter

Michelle D. Sherman, PhD, LP, ABPP

The stress of firefighting can impact our firefighters – and those who love them. This session for firefighter spouses and partners will explore typical versus concerning responses to trauma and provide you with specific tips on how to support your firefighter loved one while also taking care of yourself.

YOUR HEALTH. OUR PRIORITY.



Building a Healthy and Fit Culture Within Your Department

Aaron Zamzow

This session provides firefighters and fire service leaders with a concrete, actionable roadmap to transform their department's unhealthy culture – marked by poor habits in eating, sleeping and fitness – into a model of health and resilience. Participants will learn and gain the practical steps to implement key strategies, including fitness challenges, comprehensive assessments, effective training drills and yearly physical incentives, which can be integrated into an annual plan. The session concludes with a comprehensive Q&A that addresses current, real-world department examples of what is effectively working today.

GENERAL SESSION | SATURDAY, JAN. 24, 12:30–3 PM

Building Resilience with EMS and a Dose of Reality

Aaron Zamzow

This general session is for both firefighters and their families, as resilience is the shared, adaptive ability to bounce back from traumatic events and manage occupational stress in healthy ways. Firefighter fitness expert and influencer Aaron Zamzow will connect chronic stress and inflammation to the pervasive health issues facing firefighters, then dive into the research showing the strong correlation between proper EMS habits and improved resilience, performance, job satisfaction and career longevity. We'll discuss the added power of a positive gratitude and attitude mindset, learning how these mental strategies combine with EMS to fundamentally change outcomes. Participants will leave with applicable guidelines and resources that the entire family unit can implement immediately to bolster the firefighter's health and strengthen their overall resilience.

Speakers



Jen Elleraas

Jen has served as a MnFIRE peer supporter since March 2022. Active in the fire service since 2019, she has also been an EMT since March 2021, holding roles including firefighter, captain, training officer and assistant chief. Jen is also a senior director at a national human services organization.



Margaret Gavian, PhD, LP

Dr. Margaret Gavian is a licensed psychologist and founder of Blue Peak Consulting, where she leads PAR360, a resilience program for fire departments across Minnesota. She completed firefighter/EMT training and works closely with departments navigating stress, burnout and the long-term toll of service. Over the past 25 years, she's supported a wide range of high-stress populations including first responders, military veterans, communities affected by mass violence, and FDNY firefighters and families after 9/11.



Pamela S. Graydon, MS, COHC

Pam is an electronics engineer with over 35 years at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Currently, she works with the National Firefighter Registry (NFR) for Cancer. Pam is committed to innovation and service. She has managed complex research projects, developed educational tools and contributed to national policy. Pam has played critical roles in public health emergencies, including deployments during the COVID-19 pandemic, Zika epidemic and Deepwater Horizon oil spill, in multiple roles like deployment coordinator, liaison officer and emergency management specialist.



Rochelle Hawthorne, MA, MS, LPC, FF/EMT-P

Rochelle is a licensed mental health counselor and retired firefighter paramedic. She specializes in treating trauma and works primarily with first responders and their families. She is a LivingWorks ASIST Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention trainer, a LivingWorks safeTalk Suicide Alert trainer and an ICISF Group Crisis Intervention trainer. She currently serves as the MnFIRE Peer Support coordinator and is responsible for daily operations of the MnFIRE Peer Support hotline, Peer Support team data tracking and management, and Peer Support team member recruitment, retention and education.



Megan Lautz, MS, RD, CSCS, TSAC-F

Megan Lautz is an award-winning registered dietitian specializing in first responders. Megan creates realistic nutrition strategies that lead to improved energy levels, better body composition and reduced stress for first responders. Megan has worked full-time for departments of 1,600+ firefighters since 2017. Megan was the recipient of the ASPDA Trailblazer Award, recognizing her work advancing dietetics in public safety. Megan owns RescueRD LLC, which provides custom nutrition programs for departments nationwide.



Zeke J. McKinney, MD, MHI, MPH, FACOEM, DipABLM

Dr. Zeke McKinney is a faculty physician at HealthPartners Occupational and Environmental Medicine, having worked with firefighters for over a decade. As a researcher at HealthPartners Institute, he has studied occupational health risks like work-related cancers, obesity and heart risk, and the potential of saunas in reducing toxic firefighting exposures. As a MnFIRE medical director, Dr. McKinney has provided educational sessions for firefighters in Minnesota on many occasions. He is committed to ensuring Minnesota firefighters know there are medical professionals advocating for their health and well-being.



Sara Nelson, MPS, LADC

Sara has experience working in public and community health, as well as legislative experience working for the Department of Human Services in a governor-appointed role on the State Advisory Council on Mental Health and Subcommittee on Mental Health. Sara has taken on a consulting role with PRO Network to build and develop a substance use disorder intensive outpatient treatment program for police, paramedics and other helping professionals. She recently completed a Master of Professional Studies in addiction counseling with a pending license as a licensed alcohol and drug counselor.



Michelle D. Sherman, PhD, LP, ABPP

A clinical psychologist and author, Dr. Sherman has dedicated her 30-year career to supporting families managing mental illness and trauma. As a fellow of APA Society for Couple and Family Psychology, she was named Family Psychologist of the Year (2022). She edits the journal, Couple and Family Psychology, has worked for 17 years in the Veterans Affairs system and 25 years as professor at the University of Minnesota and Oklahoma medical schools.



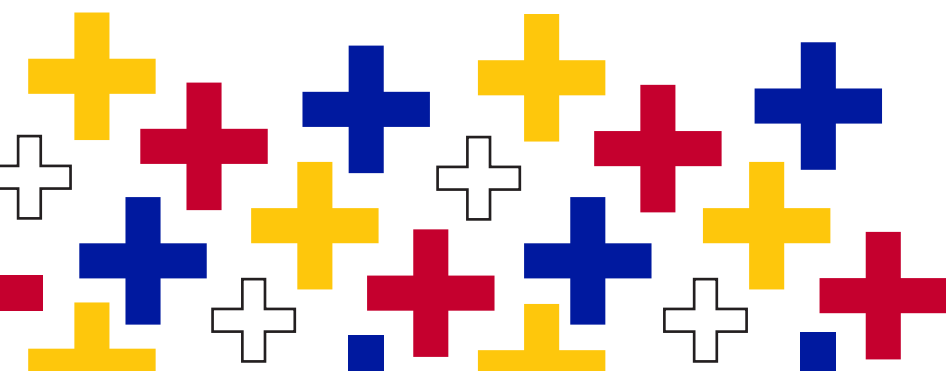
Danielle Thornton, MPH

Danielle is a dedicated community health education coordinator at National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Minnesota, where she advocates for more comprehensive mental health services and support. With a strong focus on community-driven work, Danielle leads education initiatives centered around tobacco treatment, wellness and suicide prevention. Danielle holds a B.S. in public health, community health education, and creative writing and an MPH in global public health.



Aaron Zamzow

Aaron Zamzow (ZAM) is a career Lieutenant/EMT and training officer with over 20 years of firefighting experience. He founded Fire Rescue Fitness, providing resources and workout programs to get first responders “fit for duty.” Aaron holds degrees in health/wellness and an MBA, and is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist and Precision Nutrition Practitioner. He is published in major first responder outlets, hosts the “Better Every Shift” podcast and consults on firefighter wellness and fitness best practices. Aaron’s expertise helps fire service members build health and resilience.



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